



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 6 May 2026

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Questions without notice

North Canberra Hospital—costs

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, it is reported that the total cost for the government's takeover of the Calvary Public Hospital campus in Bruce is just over \$150 million. The government is yet to provide detailed information on how much the delivery of the new North Canberra Hospital will cost the ACT taxpayer, notwithstanding that the project is already \$150 million in before a single shovel is picked up. Minister, did the Little Company of Mary ever establish interest to redevelop or build a new hospital on the site before the government cancelled the lease?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, they did. That is a matter of public record.

MR PARTON: Minister, will the new hospital continue to operate as a level 1 trauma centre?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The new hospital will continue to have the same clinical categorisation as the current North Canberra Hospital. The Canberra Hospital will continue to operate as the tertiary trauma centre for the ACT and surrounding New South Wales region.

MS BARRY: Minister, how many beds, in addition to the current 260, will the new redevelopment add into the system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We are working through the final provisions for the new Northside Hospital as part of the budget process. I think it is a matter of public record that we are considering the business case through this budget process. We have obviously been in very early contractor involvement with Multiplex to this point. The next stage is to go into an early contractor involvement stage. So basically we need to finalise the design and specifications for the new facility. To get to that point, we have been working with a range of stakeholders—including clinicians and consumers, as well as, of course, bringing in the design and constructability expertise of Multiplex—to work through exactly what that is going to look like, taking into account the demand projections for both 2031 and 2041 in terms of what is needed on that campus and also working through what can be sustained in terms of the existing buildings on that campus through the first stage of delivery of the new Northside Hospital.

ADHD—general practitioner diagnosis

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, in February you announced the ACT would adopt a raft of changes as to how Canberrans access and manage ADHD care. The first stage of the announced two-stage process allows for general practitioners who complete specific training to prescribe ADHD medications to patients with an existing diagnosis. Minister, how are Canberrans wanting to access these services supposed to do so when your directorate will not release a list of participating GPs in Canberra who have completed the training and are able to prescribe medication?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is in line with the way that general practice is managed

more broadly. GPs often specialise in particular areas. It is a matter for them as to whether they advertise that specialisation or not. It is not a matter for the Health and Community Services Directorate to advertise that on behalf of GPs. But certainly, if you search for a GP with a specialisation in mental health—or women’s health or men’s health—you will be able to find those GPs with specialisations in those areas.

MR PARTON: Minister, what good is this new service if the government does not help people to access it?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I said, this is about enabling general practitioners to expand their scope of practice. GPs expand their scope of practice in all kinds of different ways. Some GPs, for example, will have a capacity to support people on opioid maintenance therapies. Other GPs will not have that capacity. This is another expansion of scope of practice just like every other area of scope of practice of GPs. It will require specific training both for stage 1, in terms of prescribing, and stage 2 in terms of diagnosis and prescribing. But letting the community know what individual GPs are doing is a matter for those GPs. It also would be quite an administrative burden. GPs do move between practices and may change the focus of their practice over time. So, keeping that up to date would potentially be not only another administrative thing that the directorate had to manage, but also another administrative thing that GPs potentially would have to manage into the future.

MR CAIN: Minister, what is your advice to the large number of Canberrans who cannot access, or do have access to a regular GP?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Of course, there are many Canberrans who do not have access to a regular GP. I would point to the very significant investment that the commonwealth government has made in GP bulk billing: establishing three new GP bulk billing services in addition to the interchange through a specific funding round recently; and, of course, tripling the bulk billing incentive and applying that to all types of consumers, as opposed to the limited group of consumers that were eligible for that prior to the expansion. That has seen—I think at the last time I saw—another eleven general practices moving to being fully bulk-billed practices. So, if people do not have a regular GP because they are concerned about cost, I would certainly encourage people to look for one of those fully bulk-billed practices that the Albanese Labor government has been supporting. For others who do not have a regular GP, it may be because they do not have much of a need for health care and they can get their urgent and immediate needs met through a walk-in centre or, if it is more critical, through an emergency department or, of course, through the urgent care clinic that the commonwealth government has supported in Woden.

Calvary hospital—theatre fire

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Finance. The reports provided yesterday on the Calvary hospital theatre fire identify serious issues relating to asset condition and preventative maintenance. What assurance can you give the Assembly that critical ACT government infrastructure is being maintained to an appropriate standard and that known maintenance risks are not being deferred?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take this question, Mr Speaker, as the Minister for

Health, because each portfolio has responsibility for a range of assets, and there is no single portfolio responsibility that sits with the Minister for Finance in relation to that.

Certainly, from a health perspective, we do have strategic asset management planning, and that sits at a campus and hospital level but also at a more local level as well. In relation to the former Calvary hospital, there had been work done in partnership with Calvary to understand the condition of assets across the site. This is not a one and done; this is something that needs to be continually updated. But that is why we regularly make investments through the budget—to address urgent maintenance and renewal issues.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, did the government have a comprehensive understanding of the condition of the assets, and any backlog in preventative maintenance, prior to the Calvary acquisition, and were those risks reflected in the acquisition process?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The team had a reasonably good understanding of the condition of the asset, but, of course, it was owned by Calvary, so there were some constraints in terms of the ACT government going in and doing a deep dive in relation to that. But asset management plans and asset assessments—I cannot remember the technical term—had been done in relation to Calvary Public Hospital over a number of years and that had enabled investments to be made through the budget on a number of occasions to ensure that the urgent issues, in terms of risk and maintenance and repair, could be addressed.

In addition, we do have an ongoing asset repair and replacement program through each directorate that they can use to fund infrastructure according to the highest need that they have assessed through their general repairs and maintenance programs.

MR PARTON: Minister, on a broader level, will you provide the Assembly with a statement outlining the extent of any maintenance backlogs across ACT government assets and how those risks are being prioritised and funded?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I go to the point that in my portfolio of finance there is not a responsibility that covers all infrastructure and assets. There are a number of documents that would be available both through the budget process and through individual directorates in relation to these matters, so I will take the question on notice and see what we can jointly come back to the Assembly with.

Law and justice—bail

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Chief Minister, and it relates to the introduction of electronic monitoring, which presents an opportunity to: improve justice outcomes for offenders, increase compliance with community-based orders and promote community safety. Chief Minister, immediately after a national cabinet meeting on gender-based violence in May 2024, you made a surprising but welcome announcement that the ACT would immediately move to implement electronic monitoring “certainly within the space of months, not years”. It is now two years since you made that announcement. Can you please update the Assembly on when we might see this capability delivered in the ACT?

MR BARR: I am not in a position to do that now. As Mr Rattenbury would be aware, there is a degree of complexity associated with such a program, and cost as well. Obviously, a number of things have transpired between the time that I made that announcement and the situation in which we find ourselves now, including other events and priorities that the government must address.

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, can you outline what those complexities or barriers are to introducing electronic monitoring, and why the government has not been able to address them?

MR BARR: They principally go to cost, scope, legislative requirements and other priorities that the government needs to address. Clearly, there is a particular priority responding on gun control at the moment. The government must, of course, consider multiple issues that we need to respond to, and circumstances have changed.

MS CLAY: Chief Minister, why did you make the announcement two years ago without considering those complexities and barriers?

MR BARR: There are a range of issues that have arisen in the implementation strategies that have been pursued that mean that that commitment will take longer.

Gambling—mandatory shutdowns

MR EMERSON My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform.

New South Wales and Victoria have introduced mandatory gaming room shutdowns between 4 am and 10 am, to ensure there is a break in play and to minimise gambling harm. I understand that a draft regulation to introduce similar mandatory closures here in the ACT was prepared some time ago. Minister, why haven't you enacted this reform yet?

DR PATERSON: As the Assembly would be well aware, there is a lot going on in this space. We have been very proactively working with the club sector as well as the community sector around the prioritisation of measures. We have the opening hours discussion; we also have the account-based gaming conversations, which are continuing, and we have the clubs inquiry discussion, with the interim report released a few weeks ago. We have, as well, the discussions around self-exclusion, not to mention the online measures that are coming through from the federal government. There is a lot going on in that space at the moment. So it is just a matter of prioritisation and timing.

MR EMERSON: Minister, are you still committed to introducing mandatory gaming room closures from 2 am to 10 am, seven days a week?

DR PATERSON: I am committed to implementing closures, but we are still working through what they look like.

MS CARRICK: Minister, when will the ACT government introduce mandatory gaming room shutdowns?

DR PATERSON: As I said in the answer to the first question, there are a lot of things going on in this portfolio space and a lot of work that we are doing with key stakeholders. We will continue to work through these issues. I cannot give a timeframe at this point.

Fuel supply

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you please provide an update on today's national cabinet meeting?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. National cabinet met this morning and we have reviewed the national fuel outlook and what it means for communities, particularly here in the ACT. The latest advice confirms that fuel supplies are being carefully managed across the country, with around six weeks of petrol available, just over a month of diesel and around four weeks of jet fuel. This is supported by regular shipments to the country which are already on route.

For the ACT, our priority is ensuring reliable fuel for essential services, including emergency responders, public transport, freight and at Canberra Airport. We are working closely with the commonwealth and industry to make sure local distribution continues smoothly. Diesel remains the area needing the most attention nationally. That is why governments are coordinating early to support our transport operators, construction activity and the regional supply chains that flow through Canberra.

National cabinet agreed to remain at level 2 of the National Fuel Security Plan, which allows governments to share information, plan ahead and act early if needed, without unnecessary disruption for the community. The message out of today is that fuel remains available, planning is well advanced and governments are working together to keep the economy moving.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what is the outlook for fuel supply?

MR BARR: Fuel supply over the next four to six weeks is secure and well understood. Deliveries are scheduled, shipments are already on the water and distribution arrangements are in place across the country, including for the ACT. This gives us a solid degree of certainty through the immediate period ahead, particularly for petrol and for the fuel needed to support essential services and daily activity.

At the same time, though, governments are not standing still. The focus is now shifting further ahead than this four- to six-week period, with planning in detail for July and August. Global conditions remain uncertain and risks need to be managed, and managed early. This forward planning includes securing additional cargoes, coordinating nationally on the distribution of fuel and making sure that priority sectors remain well supported. The near-term outlook is stable, but there is risk ahead, and governments are planning to ensure that supply remains reliable into the new financial year.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, when is the decision expected on fuel excise rates for 2026-27?

MR BARR: We expect national cabinet to consider that matter next month.

Macquarie—swimming pool

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Last week, Access Canberra provided the community with a lot of information about their efforts to stamp out illegal tobacco in the ACT, but we have had much less information from Access Canberra about compliance action with Big Splash. Has Access Canberra or your office provided a written or verbal briefing to Minister Berry or Minister Cheyne about the work that Access Canberra was undertaking with respect to the application for a controlled activity or the reasons for it reaching its decision?

MR STEEL: Yes, cabinet has been briefed on the outcomes of the investigation that Access Canberra has undertaken. I expect that Access Canberra will continue to update cabinet ministers, as appropriate, as they continue to monitor the situation at Big Splash. The government has not ruled out any other options that are available to us in relation to this matter.

Obviously, we would like to see the aquatic facility open as soon as possible. Noting their decision, this is, we believe, the quickest way to open the pool—by November—and I expect that Access Canberra will be not only updating ministers but also working with the lessee to make sure that the community is updated about their progress against their commitment to open the pool from November. The lessee has broken trust with the community. They need to repair that trust and one way that they can do that is show demonstrable progress against their commitment to open the pool in November, and that is something I understand Access Canberra is working with them on.

MS CLAY: Has Access Canberra imposed any fines on the owners or leaseholders of Big Splash for not complying with their provisions in the Crown lease at any point, and if not, why not?

MR STEEL: I do not believe they have but I will take that on notice and see whether they can provide some further information in relation to that.

I have also announced that the government will be reviewing the suite of powers available to Access Canberra, acting on behalf of the Chief Planner and the Territory Planning Authority under the Planning Act. My personal view is that the penalties in the Planning Act are not high enough and that there could be the potential for the establishment of an escalating range of penalties that might be more flexibly applied to the range of different situations that Access Canberra may consider on different sites across Canberra. So that will be part of a review of powers that will be undertaken and, of course, at what points those penalties apply will also be considered.

Ms Clay: I am hoping the Minister has also taken on notice the reasons Access Canberra have not issued fines yet.

MR STEEL: Yes.

Ms Clay: Thank you.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, can you provide details of the review you have announced into lease compliance actions by Access Canberra, perhaps what the terms

of reference are or the scope of the review?

MR STEEL: The terms of reference for that review are still being worked through and that is subject to future cabinet decisions, but the government has already—through a commitment that we made at the election and through my Statement of Planning Priorities—outlined that we wanted to review the powers under the Planning Act as far as they relate to lessees not using their leases for the purposes for which leases were granted or the lease purpose clause within the leases. I have also very clearly outlined in my Statement of Planning Priorities that I want Access Canberra to enforce leases that are not being used, particularly as they relate to vacant shops and also recreational facilities, which would include Big Splash.

The government has already taken steps to provide direction to both Access Canberra and the Territory Planning Authority, but will be undertaking further work on a review of the powers under the Planning Act. I expect that will take place over the next year and will be subject to some early decisions that will need to be made by cabinet about the scope of the inquiry, which will be undertaken internally by the City and Environment Directorate.

Government procurement

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the minister for business. The Secure Local Jobs Code advisory council publicly lists employee representatives on that council, including the assistant branch secretary of the ACT CFMEU. Minister, is it appropriate for a union that is currently under administration across the country to have a formal role in shaping a procurement regime that determines who can access ACT government work?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mrs Morris for the question. I reject the premise contained within it. That is an appropriate appointment.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what safeguards are in place to ensure that the CFMEU's influence on the council does not shut out businesses that have not signed up to the CFMEU's EBA?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mrs Morris for the question. I can not accept the imputations or the premises contained within that question. I reject the question.

Mr Cocks: Point of order. Under 118AA I do not believe the minister has answered the question and, indeed, there are no imputations or inferences in the question that was just asked.

MR SPEAKER: I think that I will uphold the point of order, Mr Cocks.

At the end of the day, I think it was a reasonable question that you have not been responsive to. I would ask that you do go away and have a look at that one and respond to the Assembly in accordance with 118AA.

Mr Pettersson: As a point of order, Mr Speaker, are you saying there were no imputations in that question?

MR SPEAKER: I think that it is a reasonable question. I do not think that I am ruling it out of order in terms of imputations, and I have not been asked to. The question is have you been responsive. My view is that you have not. That is the ruling.

MR COCKS: Minister, have you ever declared a conflict of interest regarding your own CFMEU background and membership?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. That has been declared on all relevant forms and is widely known by members of the opposition.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Documents released to me under Freedom of Information show the ACT Ambulance Service has attempted to recall staff from annual leave as a measure to prevent station closures. Minister, why has your government allowed the system to deteriorate to the point where paramedics are being asked to come back from leave?

DR PATERSON: I reject the premise of the question that the system has deteriorated. We have one of the highest functioning ambulance services in the country, as outlined through the performance data and response times. We have also seen patients continue to record high levels of satisfaction. And in the roster review it also articulated feedback from staff, with very high levels of satisfaction with their workplace, but recognising there is work to do there, as—

Mrs Morris: A point of order on relevance: my question goes to paramedics being recalled from leave, which the minister has not touched on.

MR SPEAKER: The minister has got a while to go yet, and she may get to it.

DR PATERSON: I will take the substantive part of Mrs Morris's question on notice, but I would like to assure the chamber and the Assembly that we have a very high-functioning ambulance service in the ACT.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, is it a routine measure to recall paramedics from leave?

DR PATERSON: No, I do not believe so.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what do you have to say to paramedics and their families who cannot even take leave without being asked to come back because of the government's recruitment failures?

DR PATERSON: What I would say to paramedics and their families is thank you. Thank you very much for everything that you do for our community. Our community appreciates the work that you do day in, day out, every day of the year in supporting our community. And I would really like to extend the thanks to the family members who go without their loved ones on Christmas Day—waking up on Christmas morning and not having a parent there. These types of stories are testament to the dedication of our Ambulance Service.

Bus services—South Canberra

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, when discussing the light rail alignment with Ross Solly on ABC Radio on Monday, you said: “We will still have buses that run from the south side directly into the city from many destinations.” Minister, which destinations were you referring to, and what corridor will these services take into the city?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I have had this conversation many times before, and I am happy to have it again. We will be having it with the community, when we release the draft southern gateway planning and design framework in a short period of time. That also follows on from the resolution of the Assembly where we also discussed the future planning for points of integration into the future light rail network and the extension of stage 2.

The government has been very clear with the community for a long period of time that there will still be direct bus services from the south side into the city. The final decision on those will not be made, well and truly, until just before operations commence, but we will be starting the consultation on the integration of both buses and light rail, as part of the southern gateway planning and design framework. It will outline where those routes are going and where those points of integration with light rail will be.

There will be great opportunities for people to connect with light rail to take journeys that simply were not possible before, without that light rail stop infrastructure. We expect to be able to have that conversation with the community and get community feedback, and that will inform future learnings, transport planning and future network planning that will be undertaken ahead of light rail becoming operational in the mid-2030s.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will there be dedicated bus lanes from the south side into the city to support these services?

MR STEEL: That is what we will be consulting the community on—the design of the corridor on Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen Drive. We want the feedback of the community, and we are very interested in Ms Carrick’s feedback on the design of that. Yes, there will still be bus lanes, we expect, as part of the corridor planning. The intention here is to look at making Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen Drive much more of a multimodal corridor than its current design.

MR PARTON: Minister, what will the travel time be for the tram between Woden and Civic, and will travel times for southside public transport users increase as a consequence of this \$5 billion development?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, we will be undertaking further design on the light rail stage 2B project to confirm, for example, the travel time. It is a 12-kilometre extension, the same as stage 1, so it will have a similar travel time, noting that there are differences in terms of the stops and, of course, the route as well. It will be a similar travel time. It is currently 26 minutes on light rail stage 1, but it really depends on your trip—where you are coming from, where you are going to, if you are using a bus, if you are connecting from another mode of transport, and what

time of day you are travelling.

What we can say is that, in relation to the design that we have been consulting on, there will be access to public transport, mass transit light rail, and rapid transit, in a way that there has never been before for the residents of Curtin, Hughes, Yarralumla, Deakin and Forrest. These people, apart from south Curtin and Albert Hall, have not had access to rapid transit, because there has not been that stop infrastructure. That is what we are investing in with the light rail stage 2B project, to be able to provide that infrastructure for the first time. If there is not a bus stop and there is not a light rail stop, you cannot catch public transport. That is what we are investing in.

The alternative plan from the Canberra Liberals was to remove lanes from Capital Circle. It would have created congestion chaos, and would have removed lanes from Commonwealth Avenue Bridge as well.

Mr Cocks: A point of order. The minister is debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: I think he has finished, though, hasn't he?

MR STEEL: Mr Speaker, I think the alternative policies are relevant.

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR STEEL: I am happy to hear otherwise—

Mr Cocks: I do not think that any other historical alternatives would be a relevant matter to the question which the minister has been asked.

MR STEEL: We agree. The Canberra Liberals' policy is irrelevant, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: The question is finished, so thankfully I do not have to rule one way or the other.

Schools—dissemination of electoral matter

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, I refer you to correspondence you received from Miss Nuttall concerning the distribution in ACT public schools of the *Stuff You Should Know* pamphlet. This is a publication containing tips on how to navigate government services, but heavily branded with the local federal MP and their electorate and authorised as electoral matter under the Commonwealth Electoral Act. Minister, on what or whose authority is electoral matter able to be distributed within ACT public schools?

MS BERRY: Thank you. I will take that question on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how does this distribution accord with the Education Directorate policy that prohibits political materials that promote a particular politician from being distributed, promoted or displayed in public schools?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, were you aware of this electoral matter authorised by the member for Canberra? If so, what actions have you taken since it was brought to your attention?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

Buses—bike racks

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I have been receiving complaints from constituents in Tuggeranong that they feel disincentivised from taking the bus, because a bus on the R4 or R5 will not reliably have a bike rack and taking their bike is an essential part of their journey. I understand that the problem arises because the government has made a choice to allocate the longer, non-articulated buses which do not have bike racks to the routes traversing Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

Minister, are you aware of this problem and can you elaborate on how it arises?

MR STEEL: I am aware of this issue. A certain model of bus, the steer-tag, is a very long bus and, unfortunately, is unable to be equipped with the bike infrastructure. That means that the bikes cannot be carried on those buses. That information is made available through the data feed that goes through to the various different third-party apps and the MyWay+ app for people to see and then, of course, plan their journeys.

I understand that it can be frustrating for Canberrans who are looking to use their bike to connect with public transport or vice-versa that that may not be available on every single service, particularly at this time, because Transport Canberra has made some operational decisions to prioritise the use of the larger capacity buses, like the steer tags, on those routes where we are seeing significant capacity and more people using public transport as a result of the fuel shock that has, of course, seen more people using public transport as a way of avoiding increased fuel costs for their private motor vehicles.

This is something that we will continue to monitor. We are expecting there to be an updated network and timetable for term 3, and part of the priority for that, which we have committed to the Assembly, is to look at increased capacity on the R4 and R5. We hope that that will add some more buses onto those routes, which will then, hopefully, enable more of the buses to be equipped with that bike-carrying infrastructure.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what targeted work will the government do to increase the capacity for bikes specifically on services coming in and out of Tuggeranong?

MR STEEL: I will take that feedback on board and let Transport Canberra know that we need to specifically look at the Rapid routes coming from Tuggeranong into the rest of the city and look at how we can space them appropriately so that, if one bus does not have that bike rack infrastructure, the next one that comes does. I will see whether we can get improved sequencing there.

The government has a broader long-term plan around fleet replacement, which is part of the transition of Transport Canberra to zero emissions by 2040. We are currently in

procurement for 30 battery-electric buses. So there will be the opportunity in the future to use future investment in buses to replace the aging fleet, and that would include that cohort of buses which currently cannot be equipped with those bike racks.

MR BRADDOCK: Does the ACT government plan for all future electric bus acquisitions to be fitted with bike racks?

MR STEEL: Yes, certainly we want to fit all of our buses out with these bike racks. Transport Canberra has been lauded in the past for equipping our buses with bike racks, in a way that many cities around the world are still yet to do. So our intention is to fit those bike racks to future investments in new fleet to provide people with those opportunities to connect with public transport. Light rail, of course, is another investment that we are making. There is ample provision within the design of our light rail vehicles for Canberrans to wheel along their bikes and have them securely stored during transit.

Budget—debt

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, yesterday the RBA raised the cash rate for the 15th time since your federal Labor colleagues came into office. Not only will this hit Canberrans who have a mortgage, but it will hurt every person and organisation with debt, including the ACT government's multi-billion dollar debt. Treasurer, what ACT government debt instruments are due to mature or be refinanced in 2026-27 and what is their total face value?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice, Mr Speaker, but what I would say, and again, we have had this conversation many times before, is that the cash rate is only one factor that goes into the cost for the territory in borrowing. There are a range of other factors that go into that cost. It is certainly acknowledged as being one of the influencing factors on the cost of borrowing, but it is not the only one. It is one of a range of different factors, but I will come back in relation to the specific question.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, what interest rates applied to debt taken on by the government in the current financial year and will next year's be any lower?

MR STEEL: We will be updating those figures in the budget and I will be handing that down on 10 June. We will provide the full set of financial statements that we usually make as part of the budget process, including statements in relation to our expected borrowing costs.

Mr Cocks: Point of order. The question I asked was very specifically what interest rates applied to debt taken out by the government in the current financial year. The budget papers do not answer that.

MR STEEL: We do report on the current financial year in the budget.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. There is no point of order Mr Cocks.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, how much more will Canberrans be paying to service your

debt as a consequence of yesterday?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the answer that I gave in the answer to the first question, which is that there are a range of different factors that go into the cost of borrowing. It may depend on the volumes in the market, what other sub-national governments are also in the market at the same time. There are a whole range of different things that go into the borrowing costs. We will continue to report transparently on those when we go out to market and in the financial statements that we table in the Legislative Assembly on a regular basis.

Hospitals—discharge of older patients

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, how is Canberra Health Services supporting older Canberrans leaving hospital, so they can access the care they need at home or in aged care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the question. We, of course, recognise—and have been talking about for some time—that delayed discharge from hospital is a major issue facing our health care system, and causes distress for affected patients and their families. Being in hospital when you do not need to be there is not the best outcome for anyone.

Canberra Health Services is doing its part in supporting people when discharging from hospital through: timely assessments, coordinated planning, and links to appropriate services to ensure safe and supported transitions back into the community. CHS has taken proactive steps to ensure aged care assessments that enable older people to access care are delivered in a timely manner, in alignment with the commonwealth key performance indicators. According to the commonwealth health data portal, for April 2026 the average time between a referral to the CHS aged care assessment team and completion of the assessment by the delegate was 1.7 days, including weekends.

The CHS team undertakes comprehensive inpatient clinical assessments to identify and implement any supports and ongoing care required to facilitate a safe, effective and timely transition back to the community. This might include, for example: referral to community assistance and the temporary supports program; referral to the equipment loan service, to access assistive technology; referral for ongoing health professional follow-up, and interventions through the CHS community care program; ambulatory rehabilitation services; the transitional therapy and care program; or home based palliative care services.

Completion of NDIS access requests are also made—or changes-to-circumstances processes—to provide appropriate community based supports for people who are eligible for the NDIS.

Medication reconciliation is undertaken at the time of discharge and, of course, communication with the patient's nominated GP.

The automatic upload of discharge summaries to MyDHR and My Health Record is also supporting smoother transition to care outside the hospital.

MS TOUGH: Minister, noting aged care is a commonwealth responsibility, how are health ministers working together to find solutions to the challenge of delayed discharge of older patients?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Like my state colleagues, I continue to advocate strongly to the Australian government to ensure older Australians have equitable access to quality aged care. Together, we issued a national report card to highlight the issue earlier this year.

Through the health ministers' meeting, the commonwealth, states and territories have been developing a national strategy to address delayed discharge—such as mapping patient flows, hospital-to-home pilots, and bed management. But more needs to be done, Mr Speaker.

That is why, last week, health ministers agreed to establish a national hospital discharge joint taskforce co-led by the commonwealth and New South Wales governments. This will help deliver policy changes and improve outcomes for patients. The taskforce will report in six months on short, medium and long-term ways of reducing discharge delays, improving access to care, and relieving pressure on our hospitals.

The national strategy also calls for bilateral plans between the commonwealth and jurisdictions to address local needs with initiatives that may be scaled nationally. The ACT bilateral plan is currently under development. This will build on initiatives such as the Hospital to Aged Care Dementia Support Program with Dementia Support Australia, which is already assisting older adults living with dementia who are at risk of delayed discharge.

There is also the \$8.9 million the ACT is currently receiving under the commonwealth's Strengthening Medicare initiative to address local drivers of delayed discharge. This is being invested in SPICE, which is an allied health-led rehabilitation program delivered with the University of Canberra to improve wellbeing and reduce avoidable hospital presentations for older people living with dementia, and their carers.

There is also a program called GEM at Home, which is delivered by a multidisciplinary team in residential aged care and community settings to improve function, and reduce avoidable hospital admissions—enhancing existing services provided by Canberra Health Services.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will new investments—nationally and in the ACT—support the expansion of residential aged care and help ensure older Canberrans can be discharged into a more appropriate care environment when they no longer need hospital care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. It may have been lost in the other major announcements that were made in the federal health minister's address at the National Press Club two weeks ago, but this address also included the announcement of a \$3 billion investment to be included in the 26-27 federal budget, to support construction of more residential aged care beds, and provide greater certainty for providers to maintain quality accommodation.

This is a direct response to the advocacy of states and territories. It will include an additional 5000 residential aged care beds annually—supported by capital subsidies, increases to the accommodation supplement, and new payment tiers for facilities with high proportions of supported residents.

That is very important, Mr Speaker, because the advocacy we have been doing with the commonwealth has highlighted that it is individuals who have lower capacity to pay, or more complexity, who are having the most difficulty in getting places in residential aged care.

The investment also makes support at home fairer, and more affordable by making personal care services such as showering, dressing and continence management free, alongside clinical care. Again, this is taking pressure off ACT government services where there were concerns about that support not being available at home, and therefore placing more pressure on ACT services.

The commonwealth has also committed more than \$200 million to deliver additional specialist dementia care units, and expand the Hospital to Aged Care Dementia Support Program that I mentioned earlier.

There are a number of recent and upcoming infrastructure investments in the ACT which will improve the limited capacity in residential aged care here. We have talked about some of these in our previous debates, Mr Speaker.

Hundreds of new aged care beds are coming, but the conversation will continue about how to ensure those beds support those most in need.

Sport and recreation—sportsground maintenance

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, recently, multiple sports teams across Canberra were forced to relocate games to New South Wales due to the condition of the fields and lack of available fields in the ACT. On 4 November 2025, the ACT government identified 14 dryland ovals for potential reactivation. Minister, what consultation has the ACT government undertaken with sporting groups about reactivating the dryland ovals for formal sporting use?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Milligan for his question and his interest in sport across the ACT, particularly with regard to access to sports fields in the ACT. Whilst I have not had any formal discussions with particular sports about any particular oval, these are discussions that I hold with a variety of different groups across the ACT. I understand their aspirations to have more playing surfaces in the ACT and that it is disruptive for them—both moving their players to New South Wales or other parts of the region to play, and it also impacts the fundraising efforts that they can make and those kinds of get-together moments at their home grounds.

I am working with a number of sports, and the sport and rec team are working with a number of sports, to understand better accessibility across a range of sports fields across the ACT. Mr Milligan might be aware that we have turned on some other ovals—some other sports fields in the ACT—that are suitable for training and junior sports to be played on—for example, Canberra High School’s sports fields in Jamison have been

turned on in the last 12 months. We have also worked with the Belconnen Sharks rugby league club to have a part of the Melba sports fields turned back on for the use of junior sports. So these are the kinds of things that they are working on with sports, around providing access to sports fields across those junior sports in particular, which takes pressure off the senior players playing in those higher levels,

I will continue to do that work going forward. I know that we have a very high-pressure system on our sports fields, and here in the ACT, with the highest participation rates, it is a great issue to have, but it also provides some challenges. I acknowledge that, and we will continue to work with sports to address them.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why have you chosen not to have formal discussions with sporting groups in relation to reactivating these dryland ovals, considering the current state of existing ovals and the lack of supply?

MS BERRY: I think I have described situations where I have had formal discussions and had outcomes on a couple of fields that I have identified. I will continue to have discussions with sports around access to sporting facilities, including the potential for reactivating some of our dryland ovals.

MR PARTON: Minister, has the ACT government considered any of the dryland ovals for commercial or residential development?

MS BERRY: No.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—literacy and numeracy supports

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, you recently admitted that detainees at the AMC were only assessed for language, literacy and numeracy needs between 2019 and 2021. Since then, access to literacy support has operated through self-referral. Minister, if you acknowledge “the critical importance of foundational literacy skills for individuals transitioning from custody into the community”, why has your government allowed routine literacy and numeracy assessment at the AMC to lapse for years?

DR PATERSON: Since this new term of government, I have been working very closely with the Attorney-General to see literacy and numeracy assessments and literacy and numeracy education reinstated within the AMC. Currently, there is a project going on, with literacy and numeracy testing for detainees. There is also finalisation of a procurement process to establish a foundation skills certificate I and II related to language, literacy and numeracy. As part of the Confiscated Assets Trust, there is also work and an MOU with CIT to be able to deliver the language, literacy and numeracy pilot program within the AMC.

Yes, this is a priority for us, and we consider that understanding the baseline levels of literacy and numeracy is really important, to be able to understand detainees’ overall educational needs.

MS BARRY: Minister, noting that the government has been in power for over 23 years, why are you still relying on detainees to self-refer rather than systematically identifying

needs on intake?

DR PATERSON: That is what we are doing now. We are working with detainees to assess their needs in terms of literacy and numeracy through this pilot project. Once we have an understanding of their literacy and numeracy needs, a selection of those detainees will move to the skills-based training delivered by CIT.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, how do you know if the literacy support offered is working if the AMC does not record how many detainees use the service?

DR PATERSON: The service is just starting. This is a pilot project that we are just implementing; it began at the beginning of this year. This is to develop the evidence base, to understand the needs of detainees and to be able to meet them through educational offerings going forward.

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