



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Wednesday, 10 June 2026

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Questions without notice:

Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code	1
Budget—infrastructure projects	2
Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code	2
North Canberra Hospital—obstetrics and midwifery.....	3
Alexander Maconochie Centre—use of force	5
Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code—Future Form.....	6
Justice—ACT Law Courts	8
Budget—homelessness services.....	10
Alexander Maconochie Centre—racism	10
Domestic Violence Crisis Service—crisis line	11
Hybrid electric fire truck	13
ACT Ambulance Service—vehicle preparedness	13
Budget—appropriation rollovers.....	14
National Disability Insurance Scheme	15
Budget—health care	16
Libraries ACT—opening hours.....	18

Questions without notice
Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code

MR PARTON: My question is to the finance minister. Minister, Queensland has suspended its best practice industry conditions on new government funded construction projects and has now committed to permanently remove best practice industry conditions from procurement policy as a part of its construction productivity reforms, after analysis showed the massive cost of union influence to procurement and housing. Who would have thought!

Minister noting the recent announcements pushing back infrastructure projects, has your government done any investigation of unnecessary cost to projects imposed by your procurement policy?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. We have in fact been working closely with the construction industry and the relevant unions in relation to construction industry best practice, and that is part of our commitment to ensuring that the construction industry is a diverse workforce, including more women in construction, more tradies, more apprentices and trainees, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and diverse workers having opportunity in the construction sector.

There is no evidence that we are paying over the odds for our construction projects. We do demand value for money for our construction projects, but value for money for ACT taxpayers is not just about the lowest common denominator. It is not just about the lowest price. It is about the outcomes that a project delivers for the ACT community—the services it delivers, and the jobs that it creates.

MR PARTON: Minister, if Queensland can review and unwind procurement rules that were driving up costs and reducing productivity, why is the ACT government unwilling to even test whether its own rules are making housing and infrastructure more expensive in Canberra?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I did not say that. In fact, one of the things that Procurement ACT is doing is looking across the range of procurement requirements, recognising that Infrastructure Canberra actually manages infrastructure procurement quite specifically. Procurement ACT has been looking at all of the requirements under the Secure Local Jobs Code, the local industry participation plan and the procurement values, and making sure that we are streamlining for industry as much as possible when it comes to goods and services procurement.

MR COCKS: Minister, how many projects need to be deferred or delayed before your government accepts that your own procurement rules might be part of the cost problem?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Mr Cocks, for the question. But, Mr Speaker, I think Mr Cocks is drawing a long bow there.

The decisions that have been made and that the Chief Minister announced in relation to this budget are around looking at what has historically been able to be delivered within the ACT and what is fiscally responsible across the forward estimates for the

infrastructure program and bringing those two things together. They are about looking at the degree to which projects have been delayed in the past—that is everything from delay through processes of development application, delay through impacts of market conditions and supply chain interruptions—and at what we can realistically deliver, what the market can realistically deliver and what we can realistically afford. This process is unrelated to the processes we have in place to ensure that we are delivering value for money through our procurements for the ACT community, where we recognise that value for money is about more than just the lowest cost. It is about the quality of the project. It is about the project meeting the needs of the Canberra community. It is about providing jobs. It is about ensuring that workers are treated fairly and that we are promoting and securing diversity across all of our industries.

Budget—infrastructure projects

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. A number of people in my community voted Labor in 2024 because your government promised that much-needed local infrastructure would be delivered this term, including new sporting facilities, the Casey health centre and an ESA facility. It now appears that none of these will be delivered in this term. Chief Minister, do those voters have a right to feel let down by Labor?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Castley for the question. I do not think that the substance of the question reflects the government's announcements today. Of course, I will not pre-empt the Treasurer's budget speech at 5 o'clock.

What I have said on the public record in relation to those Casey projects is that they will proceed; the government will examine their delivery as part of next year's and the 2028 budget processes. We are just being clear that they will not be in the budget that the Treasurer delivers this afternoon. I have already said that, so I am not pre-empting debate. I just want to give that clarity to Ms Castley—that the government intends to deliver on its election commitments in this parliamentary term, but those projects are not going to be in this year's budget. We are focusing on delivering the projects in Ms Castley's electorate that are already under construction. We want to get them finished before we start new ones.

Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Finance. In late 2024, the Treasurer signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Competition Policy. That agreement says that governments should have transparent processes so decisions do not unnecessarily limit the number or range of market participants, and that governments are to maintain competition impact assessment processes for major decisions, including decisions to put in place or substantially update procurement frameworks. Minister, has the government undertaken analysis to determine whether the Secure Local Jobs Code has reduced the number or diversity of businesses tendering for ACT construction projects?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, but I have not seen any evidence that the Secure Local Jobs Code is having that impact. In fact, it was the Legislative Assembly that passed the secure local jobs legislation, and we have a

well-established framework now. Part of the impetus for delivering the secure local jobs policy and code was to ensure that those businesses that are doing the right thing by their workers, those businesses that are upholding ethical standards, and those businesses that have a good labour relations training and workplace equity plan are on a level playing field, and that those businesses that are ripping off workers and those businesses that are not conducting themselves ethically do not get an advantage in the procurement process by being able to underbid those that are doing the right thing by their workers.

We will stand up for workers. We are the Labor Party; we will stand up for workers. We will stand up for workers in the construction industry while those opposite denigrate the right of construction industry workers to fair work conditions and rights.

MR PARTON: Minister, why did your government sign up to a competition impact assessment requirement and then fail to apply it to one of Australia's most interventionist procurement frameworks?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Given that I took the last question on notice about whether that analysis has been done, I think Mr Parton is drawing conclusions in saying that it has not been.

MR CAIN: Minister, why does your government continue with the so-called Secure Local Jobs Code when it is reducing competition and driving up costs of infrastructure and housing?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of Mr Cain's question. There is no evidence that it is driving up costs across either civil infrastructure or, indeed, housing. I note that most housing is not procured by the ACT government and it is a competitive market. For the rest of Mr Cain's question, I refer him to my first answer.

North Canberra Hospital—obstetrics and midwifery

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Health. I am aware that there was consultation with consumers on the business day before the government announced the \$1.5 billion to be spent on the new north-side hospital. People who attended tell me there is no longer going to be a birth centre fully separate to the hospital, despite the fact that: over 3,000 Canberrans petitioned for one, the Assembly passed a motion calling for a feasibility study into one, that feasibility study recommended a separate birth centre, and the supply and confidence agreement with the Greens agreed to one. C-section rates have shot up to almost 50 per cent, but now the new \$1.5 billion hospital will replicate the system that has led to that.

Under your plans, Minister, will the birth suite and birth centre inside the hospital have the same number of birth centre and birth suite beds as are inside the hospital now?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Ms Clay is aware, the current planning does have six birth suites and two birth centre rooms, which is the same as the current number of rooms and suites in the North Canberra Hospital. However, as I have repeatedly told Ms Clay, no final decision has been made on this matter.

She is correct that there has been extensive consultation with consumers as well as with midwives, obstetricians and other staff and experts about this particular project and this particular element of the project. This includes a four-hour workshop with clinicians, midwives, consumers, birth centre advocates, health consumer advocates and others on 29 May. A four-hour workshop was held to do the co-design work for the birth centre. As Ms Clay is aware—but for the information of other members—there are some constraints in building on a brownfield site. Two options have been considered and discussed with the working group, which included midwives and consumers, and then with the broader forum round table on 29 May.

We remain committed to a co-designed birth centre at the north-side hospital. Ms Clay misrepresents what is currently what is currently proposed when she says it simply replicates what is in the current hospital. What is currently proposed—and it is not a final decision—is a birth centre with a completely separate entrance; a completely separate outdoor space on the ground floor, so you do not need to go through any clinical areas to get to it; and a backdoor that lets you into the hospital and then up to level 5 if you need to escalate your care to a birth suite at that time. It is not as she has represented it in her question.

MS CLAY: Minister, how will the new hospital keep pace with population growth and increased continuity of care targets without expanding bed numbers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is a question that I, myself, have asked officials on numerous occasions. I have sought assurance on multiple occasions and asked them to redo the modelling and redo the modelling to ensure that six suites and two birth centre rooms would be sufficient. My expectation is that we will probably end up with more. But that work, as I have said, is not finalised; it is still underway. But if we do end up with more that would be in the birth centre and not in the suites.

The birth centre feasibility study, which is publicly available and has been for some time, shows the projections of births for the ACT to 2060. It shows an expectation that births will reduce on the south side and increase on the north side. Obviously, as Canberra's tertiary hospital, while residents might be resident in the north side, people will continue to birth in Canberra Hospital when they have higher-risk pregnancies—which is quite a significant proportion of the births in the ACT.

In addition, I would expect, through the expansion of the continuity program, that we may see more people accessing options like homebirth. I think 29 people last year had their baby through homebirth. This is an opportunity at some future point for the completely freestanding type of birth centre that Ms Clay has been talking about—essentially, a place where people who would otherwise choose a homebirth but do not have the right place to have a homebirth, as their home is not appropriate or they do not want to birth there, would be able to birth there. Effectively, that type of continuity model is a very similar model to a homebirth model. Then we have the standalone or alongside on the north-side hospital, which is the project that is currently underway.

MS VASSAROTTI: Does the government have any plans to build a freestanding birth centre separate to a hospital in Canberra?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I welcome Ms Vassarotti back to the Assembly, and I am

very pleased to have received her first question—albeit a supplementary—on this very important topic. Considerable work has been done on this project. We committed to a co-designed process. We committed to a feasibility study. We committed to working with midwives, with advocates and with consumers around this work. We undertook a feasibility study, and that is publicly available. It identified that a completely freestanding birth centre away from a hospital campus is not currently a viable or preferred option for the ACT.

That does not mean that it is ruled out forever, but we are focused on the project that we have committed to deliver as a result of that feasibility study and as a result of the co-designed process. As I said to Ms Clay earlier in our email correspondence, “co-design” is exactly that: it is about collaboration, cooperation and working together. It is not about a small group of advocates or a small number of members of this Legislative Assembly dictating the outcome for other people on where they are going to work and where they are going to give birth.

A lot of work has been done to understand the feasibility of the range of options. It has been broadly agreed that a standalone birth centre on the new north-side hospital campus will be the best solution. But there are site constraints on a brownfield site. So the option that we are currently consulting on is on the ground floor of the stage 1 build. But I have said to advocates and I have said to Ms Clay that that is the stage 1 build. We could also look at “this is a temporary solution for stage 1” and then we build a standalone when we have had the opportunity to demolish some of the other buildings in stage 2 of the project. All options remain on the table at this point, and saying that we have locked in what is currently there is completely and utterly untrue.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—use of force

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. The latest Inspector of Custodial Services report details a confronting case of use of force in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. An Aboriginal woman experiencing significant mental health issues, including engaging in self-harm, was not allowed to attend NAIDOC celebrations at the prison. She protested this refusal by entering into a prohibited area and was punished with 28 days of separate confinement, in the middle of a mental health crisis.

During her time in confinement, she requested to join another Aboriginal program but was declined. Shortly after she engaged in serious self-harm by strangulation. Corrections officers responded by calling a code black personal threat, rather than a code blue medical emergency, meaning Justice Health staff were not notified. In order to stop the woman self-harming, the officers used pepper spray and forcefully transferred her to the Crisis Support Unit without any health assessment. She was not seen by a medical officer until the following day.

Minister, is it the government’s position that this is an appropriate response to a detainee experiencing a mental health crisis?

DR PATERSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the question, and I would like to thank the Inspector of Corrective Services for her report into this critical incident. This report is very thorough and is quite an upsetting read. It presents a number of recommendations,

which the government will work through, and work with ACT Corrective Services, to respond to those recommendations more formally.

Mr Emerson: Point of order on responsiveness to the question under standing order 118AA. The question was whether it is a government position that this is an appropriate response to a detainee experiencing a mental health crisis. We heard that there will be a forthcoming response to the recommendations and a welcoming of the report, but no response to that question.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order—

DR PATERSON: Yes, I can further answer the question. Would that help?

MR SPEAKER: Okay, crack on.

DR PATERSON: So yes, we will continue to work with ACT Corrective Services. This is obviously a recommendation in the report that was presented to government so we will work to respond to that report more formally. We are absolutely focused on trauma-informed best practice care for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis in our prison. This is an ongoing issue which multiple detainees experience during their time in detention, and we are working with Justice Health.

We had a joint briefing, the Minister for Health and I, the other day, looking at how we can better support detainees within the AMC who are experiencing a mental health crisis. We were looking at how we can have better trauma-informed approaches. It is a very, very challenging workplace in which corrective services work. There are a lot of competing demands and a lot of very significant threats to their safety that they are presented with on a daily basis as—*(Time expired.)*

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government now reconsider its position on providing corrections officers with body-worn cameras, given this was a key recommendation of the 2025 Healthy Prison Review and is now a finding of this review as well?

DR PATERSON: Look, we will consider it. The government is not opposed to this. I guess it is just an extra expense, and we have a whole range of cost pressures and competing expenses as well as significant population stresses within the AMC at the moment. The premise of Mr Emerson's original question is really around the significant issues and mental health crisis issues that Corrective Services are presented with every single day, so we will continue to explore and look at the idea of body-worn cameras within the prison, but at the moment it is not a priority.

MS CARRICK: Minister, is it common for code blacks instead of code blues to be called in response to a mental health crisis at the AMC?

DR PATERSON: I will have to take that on notice.

Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code—Future Form

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial

Relations.

Minister, last week you were unable to identify how many additional ACT residents, apprentices or local subcontractors had gained work because of the so-called Secure Local Jobs Code, and you were not aware of any independent review showing that the regime delivers better outcomes for local workers and businesses.

The CFMEU administrator has described the Secure Local Jobs Code-certified Future Form as “one of the worst employers in the industry” and said legal action is being finalised over alleged sham contracting. Minister, is the Secure Local Jobs Code actually harming some ACT workers? And is it delivering value for taxpayers?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Cocks and the Canberra Liberals for their newfound interest in the wellbeing of working people in this city. It is reassuring to see their continued interest.

Mr Cain interjecting—

Mr Cocks: Point of order: the Minister has opened his response by debating the question, by suggesting the Canberra Liberals’ interest in the question is new.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think he was debating it. It is arguable that he was being ironic, but I think it is clear he was not debating it, so there is no point of order.

Mr Cain: He was clearly insulting us. Not appreciated, Minister. Not appreciated.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I apologise to the Canberra Liberals; I did not realise that was such a sore point for them.

The Secure Local Jobs Code seeks to ensure standards in relation to industrial relations and work health and safety are complied with, for territory-funded work. Secure local jobs refers to the application of code requirements based on where the job is undertaken, not where the personal entity is based, or comes from to complete a job. In other words, the Secure Local Jobs Code applies to where the job is being undertaken. The Local Industry Participation Policy, or LIPP, aims to promote the development and growth of the broader Canberra region economy. Local industry participation under the LIPP is about supporting and growing local businesses—particularly small to medium enterprises—through economic contribution or engaging local businesses to perform ACT government work.

In essence, the Secure Local Jobs Code is about ensuring the people who undertake work here in the ACT meet their legal requirements, to make sure that they do not undercut otherwise upstanding businesses that are trying to do the right thing.

If the Canberra Liberals are interested in how we go about promoting employment here in the ACT, it is through the LIPP.

MR COCKS: Minister, why should Canberrans have any confidence that the so-called Secure Local Jobs Code has any benefits for secure local jobs?

MR PETTERSSON: I have to refer Mr Cocks to my previous answer, which I do not think he listened to. The Secure Local Jobs Code is about ensuring that people that undertake territory-funded work are complying with the law.

Mr Cocks: I listened. So, it has nothing to do with secure local jobs?

MR PETTERSSON: Mr Cocks, I quite literally just read to you the difference between the two schemes.

The line of questioning that they are insistent upon goes to local industry participation. The Secure Local Jobs Code is an entirely separate policy that is trying to respond to noncompliance with industrial laws.

MR PARTON: Minister, what action have you taken since the allegations made against Future Form were brought to your attention, to ensure that the Secure Local Jobs Code is actually working?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question and his interest in ensuring that territory-funded work is undertaken by those who meet the highest ethical standards. That is a question for the registrar. I will take on notice any actions they are undertaking.

Justice—ACT Law Courts

MS BARRY: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Attorney-General. The Productivity Commissioner's latest courts data highlights the deeply disturbing condition of ACT courts, particularly in comparison to other jurisdictions. Minister, why does the ACT have fewer full-time equivalent judicial officers per capita than any jurisdiction in the country?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Barry for the question.

There are several reasons for this, Mr Speaker, as you yourself would know as a former shadow in this portfolio as well. One is that we do not have a district court level. So at the ACT level we have just two levels of courts with the Magistrates Court and the Supreme Court. That necessarily means we are going to have fewer judicial officers.

Secondly, we are a small jurisdiction. The court system was a product of decisions made before and then soon after self-government. Of course, we are constantly looking at the judicial resourcing of our courts. I would point Ms Barry to the budget initiative of last year, where we increased the number of magistrates, and all of the associated funding that came with that. It is something that we are constantly looking at. But the number of judicial officers is not necessarily the measure that we would be hanging everything on when it comes to the efficiency and the standards of our courts.

MS BARRY: Minister, why is real net recurrent expenditure on criminal and civil finalisations in the ACT the most expensive in the country, while our clearance rate remains one of the worst?

MS CHEYNE: I will see if there is any more detail that I can provide, but the short

answer is that we have seen a significant increase in the number of trial matters, particularly relating to sexual assault matters. That means, necessarily, that they are complex. I think members would know, if they have paid attention to the media in recent times, that some of those juries have not been able to come to a conclusion and have been discharged. That usually means that there needs to be another trial. So all of those complications can add to longer times and can mean that the conclusion of matters takes longer.

MS LEE: Attorney-General, why are Canberra taxpayers paying excessively more than taxpayers in other jurisdictions and still getting a less efficient justice system?

MS CHEYNE: They are not getting less efficient justice system. Mr Speaker, I think I have been clear that the way that the ACT has been set up and how it currently works—

Members interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, I cannot even hear myself think.

Mr Parton: She's not that loud. She's pretty low with the interjections.

MR SPEAKER: Members, comments through me.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If they are not interested in the answer, I will not give it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker, under 118AA: I don't believe the minister has answered the question.

MR SPEAKER: The problem is that there were interjections which were basically preventing the answer. I will have a look at the *Hansard* and review it, but I remind members that, if they are going to interject while the minister is trying to answer the question so that she feels incapable of answering the question, it is going to be difficult for her to do so. I will have a look at the *Hansard* and get back to you.

Mr Cain interjecting—

Mr Parton: On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I would suggest that the level of interjections was not really at a high level. It's not a church or a library.

MR SPEAKER: I will take that point, Mr Parton. I have given you the approach I am going to take. I am going to review the *Hansard*, and I will consider that matter and get back to you.

Ms Cheyne interjecting—

Mr Cain interjecting—

Budget—homelessness services

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, a recent pre-budget announcement identified funding to support a range of homelessness services. What investments is the ACT government making in this budget to help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the question. As members may be aware, last month the ACT government announced that it would provide \$15.4 million in new and expanded funding to support more homelessness services in the ACT. This includes \$2.3 million for Samaritan House, a 13-bed crisis accommodation facility for men experiencing homelessness, \$1.4 million for Blue Door, a drop-in centre that provides free midday meals, hygiene supplies, clothing and furniture vouchers, as well as life skills information, advice, advocacy and referrals, \$2.1 million for Roadhouse, which offers free evening meals, material aid supports and referrals, \$2.417 million to continue the Oaks Estate Community Inclusion Program, and \$1.077 million to support ACT Shelter.

MS TOUGH: Minister, why are these investments important?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Everyone deserves a safe and stable place to call home. This investment strengthens the government's response to the growing pressure that we are seeing across the homelessness service system here in the ACT. By expanding housing options and backing frontline services, the ACT government is making sure that more Canberrans can get the support that they need, not just to find housing, but to keep it and rebuild their lives. These investments also help to ensure that the long-term viability of community service organisations who deliver these critical services continues.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, is the government focusing on any particular groups of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. As well as chronic homelessness and crisis accommodation for people escaping domestic and family violence, youth homelessness has been a high priority for this government. I am pleased to say that this budget also includes \$872,000 in new funding over four years to support Our Place in Braddon. Our Place has 25 places for young people at risk of homelessness and it is an important complement to the new 20-place Youth Foyer facility which has recently opened in Woden.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—racism

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to Minister Paterson, the Minister for Corrections. It goes to the critical incident that Mr Emerson spoke about earlier in his question. I will not go through the details of the incident, given the significant distress even in reading it.

Given the government claimed in 2025 that it was expanding meaningful activities, health care and cultural supports, particularly for First Nations women in the AMC,

does the government see that this incident shows that standards are slipping backwards in relation to support, particularly for First Nations women in the facility?

DR PATERSON: I thank Ms Vassarotti for the question and welcome her back to the Assembly. I thank her for her interest in how we better support First Nations women within the AMC.

I reject that things are slipping. The critical incident report is a very distressing report and presents a lot of recommendations that need to be addressed, including recommendations for improvements in trauma-informed care of detainees. There has been significant work over the past few years to see improvements in activities—both educational opportunities and programs—that are offered to detainees, particularly women. It is an ongoing critical area that requires attention in terms of the challenges that women within the AMC face. A lot of them are in there for a very short time on remand, so having programs and educational opportunities provided to them in such a short period of time presents a lot of challenges.

ACT Corrective Services are continuously looking at ways they can improve the culturally appropriate care of detainees. This critical incident report highlights a few issues in relation to this, but the commissioner is very cognisant of how we will work with AMC detainees who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. This also speaks to the recommendations in the Jumbunna review. There is a whole raft of recommendations around how we better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the prison system, and there is the ongoing board of inquiry, which there will be further discussion around.

MS VASSAROTTI: Will the government mandate any new direct measures targeting systemic racism in the AMC, given the report explicitly identified racism as a key factor in play?

DR PATERSON: We will respond to the recommendations of the report in due course, but this was also addressed and highlighted in the Jumbunna review. This is also an issue that we are working on through the terms of reference for the board of inquiry. I do not think that anyone believes that we will solve this issue overnight. This requires systemic change, and it is broader than just the corrections system. This is exactly what the Jumbunna report highlights: this is a whole-of-government issue that we need to address.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, will there be disciplinary action against the officers involved? If not, why not?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. As I said, the report was released just a couple of days ago, so we will look at responding to that report directly in due course.

Domestic Violence Crisis Service—crisis line

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service last year reported that only half of all calls to its crisis line were answered, with some victims waiting days to hear

back. Minister, what is the current rate of calls to the DVCS crisis line left unanswered?

DR PATERSON: The member will have to speak directly to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service for the exact number. But what we have heard about over the last couple of years is the significant pressure on our domestic, family and sexual violence services within the ACT. That is why we have progressed subsequent year-on-year increases to funding to these services. Last year there was a significant uplift in funding for, particularly, the call services of DVCS and CRCC. We extended and expanded that funding this year in the budget and provided ongoing funding for their core funding. We have also uplifted their funding this year as well.

We will continue to work with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, who do an incredible job in our community. We have definitely heard their calls, and we have responded in this budget.

MS BARRY: Minister, have you investigated a correlation between the rate of unanswered calls and the 170 per cent increase in sexual violence offences in Canberra over the past four years?

DR PATERSON: I think Ms Barry is conflating different things. I am not entirely sure what the question is. The rates of calls to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service are specific to domestic violence crises that people might be experiencing in the community. The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre is our sexual violence service here in the ACT. That is a service that has also been under a lot of pressure with year-on-year increases in demand for their service and for counselling. We are working with both those services and the multiple other services in our community that work with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, and we will continue to do that.

MS LEE: Minister, why do you not know the number of unanswered calls from a body that is receiving government funding? And what is the acceptable rate of unanswered calls?

DR PATERSON: This is really a question for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in terms of the work—

Ms Lee: You are the minister. They get government funding. Do you not know? Do you not ask?

DR PATERSON: The ACT government funds the Domestic Violence Crisis Service through their core contract for a range of functions—and one of them is a 24-hour crisis service. We have seen a year-on-year increase to funding to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, recognising the significant impost and demand on their service for people in our community. This demand for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service is also represented in ACT Policing and the year-on-year increase in the reporting of domestic, family and sexual violence.

We will continue to work with the service. I have met with the board of DVCS, and I will go back and meet with the board again. I continue to receive updates and work very closely with the CEOs of these services. They do an absolutely fantastic job. We were very proud to announce the funding uplift and to announce the ongoing funding

for their core contracts, which they are currently in negotiation on with the government.

Hybrid electric fire truck

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, a fuel consumption report recently released under FOI shows that the ACT's \$1.6 million hybrid electric fire truck was expected to have significantly lower fuel consumption than has occurred. The same report indicates that the diesel backup unit may have been manually engaged unnecessarily and that broader deployment across the ACT may have contributed to higher fuel use. Minister, is the government's \$1.6 million electric fire truck still using more diesel than expected?

DR PATERSON: I thank Mr Milligan for his interest in the electric fire truck. The chamber will be very excited to hear the electric fire truck is out and about in our community. So the diesel reporting at that time came through the training and commissioning process of that vehicle. This was when the vehicle was under significant use and pressure while all our Fire and Rescue employees were being trained on the vehicle. It is intended that the vehicle is running on its electric battery when it is out and about in the community. So I think Mr Milligan has sort of misrepresented the data in that report.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, was the truck's deployment pattern, as shown in the fuel consumption report, usual practice for a pumper based at Acton?

DR PATERSON: No, no it was not. This is why that period of time, when the truck was under intensive training with Fire and Rescue staff, was not a usual pattern of behaviour for the vehicle.

MR CAIN: Minister, was the truck deployed to incidents well outside of the Acton area in order to increase its recorded operational use?

DR PATERSON: No, not at all. It should be in operation all the time, 24/7, 365 days of the year. So it is, it is there. We want it out on the road and travelling all around the ACT all the time. That is what its intended purpose is and we are very glad and happy to see it back on the road.

ACT Ambulance Service—vehicle preparedness

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, I have received some troubling allegations from an ACTAS staff member that medication management on vehicles and in stations is inconsistent; that drug checks are being missed or falsified; and that equipment checks and restocking after jobs are inconsistent, meaning that crews may arrive at life-threatening emergencies without the equipment or drugs they need. Minister, what assurance can you give Canberrans that every ACTAS vehicle is properly checked, stocked and clinically safe before it is deployed?

DR PATERSON: They are some pretty damning allegations that Mr Parton is making. He has not approached my office with any of those concerns. So, if he does have information regarding any of those claims, I would greatly appreciate if he could email

my office this afternoon so we can follow up on these issues.

To my understanding and to my experience with our ACT Ambulance Service, they are absolutely best-practice and they absolutely take their handling of medications and their patients' safety incredibly seriously. We have some of the best patient satisfaction levels in the country.

I really encourage Mr Parton to email my office directly about the allegations because they are very serious.

MR PARTON: Minister, have any medication, drug-check or related discrepancies been formally recorded by ACTAS in the past 12 months?

DR PATERSON: I will have to take that on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what process is in place to identify, escalate and rectify missed or falsified drug or equipment checks if they occur?

DR PATERSON: I believe I can speak strongly that there are very rigorous processes in place, in terms of management of medications within the ACT Ambulance Service. I am quite distressed about these questions. Again, if the Canberra Liberals have some allegations, or evidence of allegations, that they would like to present to me, I would be very grateful to hear them so we can follow up.

Budget—appropriation rollovers

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, over the last three years, total additional appropriations have been very significant: between \$489 million and \$691 million annually. A major component has been the section 16B rollovers—\$171 million and \$280 million over the last couple of years. There are also bring-forwards leading net 16B rollovers to be over \$100 million a year, but these are typically being disclosed months after the February budget review. The 2024-25 rollovers were approved in April 2025 but not presented to the Assembly until September 2025, well after the time the funds were used, leading to a lack of transparency.

Treasurer, why has the government only reported \$150,000 in section 16B rollovers to date for this year, and have you approved more rollovers from 2024-25 to 2025-26?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We report on the rollovers made under section 16B of the Financial Management Act when decisions are made. And there has been a long conversation that we have had, through various different inquiries that are underway, with Treasury officials and with Ms Carrick about the work that Treasury does with agencies to make sure that the section 16B rollover is required of undisbursed funds that were appropriated in the previous financial year and to make sure that they are still needed in the new financial year. Once the decision is made by me as Treasurer based on the Treasury advice, then we report in the usual way, transparently, with the next quarterly financial report. So, we have been doing that, and we welcome questions about that, and I will be reporting in the usual way on the decisions made about section 16B rollovers.

MS CARRICK: Treasurer, why were large rollovers needed in previous years but not this year?

MR STEEL: The year has not ended, Mr Speaker, so I will not pre-empt what decisions are made before the end of the financial year, but if they are made, then they will be reported accordingly.

MR EMERSON: Treasurer, can you provide more timely information about future rollovers so they are known ahead of the February budget review?

MR STEEL: This is a matter that the Select Committee on Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance is inquiring into—the Financial Management Act. We have also committed to review the Financial Management Act. There is a range of different reporting timeframes that are now in the act as a result of changes brought forward to the Assembly by the opposition. I think, as part of the work that we will consider, coming out of that committee inquiry and the review, is making sure that there is alignment of those. But we report on the decisions that are made, under the Financial Management Act. I have not recalled one instance as Treasurer where the public accounts committee has done an inquiry into the quarterly financial reports, including the section 16B rollovers that are attached. They are attached. It is all transparently reported, but there seems to be no interest, as far as I am aware, unless it was done in a private hearing, in what is actually presented.

We welcome the scrutiny. We are transparently reporting on these decisions, and they are there for everyone to see.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, over the course of the week, the Australian Senate is running an inquiry into the NDIS Bill. When you look for the ACT government's submission or review the hearings schedule, the ACT government does not appear. Minister, have you made a submission on behalf of your government or people with a disability in the ACT? If not, why not?

MS ORR: I have been working with my state and territory counterparts. We have been in discussions about how best to represent our views and give our feedback on the bill, whether that is through a formal submission to the inquiry or through the Disability Reform Ministerial Council, which meets on a regular basis—more regularly than a lot of other ministerial councils—and it includes the federal government. We are working through that, and we are in conversation with the committee secretariat as well, to make sure that the options remain open, should we wish to make a submission, and if that is the course of action that we choose to take.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, the Australian Human Rights Commission's submission to this bill, included a comment that:

The process for developing the Bill raises serious concerns regarding compliance with Australia's obligation under Article 4(3) of the CRPD to closely consult and actively involve people with disability in decision-making processes that affect

them.

How would you respond to the Australian Human Rights Commission's submission?

MS ORR: At the risk of giving an opinion, I would point to the numerous pieces of feedback and input that have been received by the Senate inquiry around the two-week timeframe that has been provided to them to hold the inquiry and inform their report or recommendations on the bill to the federal parliament. I think it is fair to say that the number of people who have made a point about the two-week time period probably do have a point, in that it is quite short, given the extent of the bill and the quite large reforms that are coming forward.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how can you be sure that the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026 is compliant with the human rights of people with a disability?

MS ORR: Again, I am not lawyer, and I am not sure that I should be giving a legal opinion on the human rights element of its application. I would point out to the member that it is a federal parliament bill. As part of their processes, the federal government have to provide statements on how they believe it meets their legal obligations, including human rights. Should there be concerns about the bill as it passes through the federal parliament, certainly, that is a matter that should be dealt with through their processes. Certainly, as to giving legal opinions or interpretations of things, I will probably steer clear of that.

Budget—health care

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a recent pre-budget announcement identified funding to health services. How does the ACT budget deliver on the ACT government's election commitment to establish new health services to keep pace with our growing city?

Mr Parton: What a great question.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I agree with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker: that was indeed a great question from Mr Werner-Gibbings.

The 2026-27 ACT budget will deliver on a vital range of critical service needs, including palliative care, supporting people at a higher risk of breast cancer, lung cancer specialist services, and paediatric orthopaedic services. ACT Labor identified these areas as priorities at the last election after listening and hearing the needs of Canberrans.

These investments reflect the government's commitment to improving access to health care and driving better health outcomes for the territory to meet the needs of our growing city, and include \$23.4 million to operate the new Acute Palliative Care Unit at Canberra Hospital, with construction expected to be complete in December this year. The new unit will provide a dedicated space that is culturally safe and trauma informed to support patients and their families when they need it most. This investment will initially fund eight beds, with capacity to expand to 12 beds over time.

An investment of \$3.9 million will provide better access to specialised lifesaving screening, treatment and support services at North Canberra Hospital for people at high risk of breast cancer. An injection of \$8.2 million will expand the Canberra Hospital Paediatric Fracture Clinic and establish a dedicated paediatric orthopaedic service, improving care closer to home for children with bone and soft tissue conditions. This is another example of our ongoing commitment to expanding paediatric health services where it is safe and sustainable to do so. We will invest more than \$12 million to increase lung cancer services, including the rapid access lung cancer clinic, supporting the delivery of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program and enabling earlier detection. The government will also invest more than \$169 million to continue its response to growing demand for and the rising cost of public health services. This investment, combined with the other initiatives in this package, will provide an additional more than \$230 million for our public hospital and community based health services and workforce over the next four years.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how does the ACT budget support the delivery of the new north-side hospital?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his interest in the north-side hospital, despite representing the south part of Canberra. Canberrans use services right across our hospital system. The ACT 2026-27 budget delivers a carefully staged investment of \$1.34 billion over the next seven years for a new hospital on Canberra's north side, bringing the government's total commitment to the new north-side hospital to almost \$1.5 billion over a decade. With critical planning and early design work largely completed and early works underway, the construction of this vital infrastructure will support Canberrans into the future, with modern facilities and better patient access.

The new seven-storey clinical services building represents the first stage of redevelopment of the North Canberra Hospital campus and will include more than 300 treatment spaces, easy access to the emergency department for patients and ambulances, and modern spaces for patients and their families. Extensive consultation with clinicians, consumer advocates and community organisations has provided early and active involvement in shaping the design and planning to date, and that will continue.

Key features of the new hospital include a state-of-the-art emergency department with a dedicated paediatric short-stay unit and better support for mental health presentations; a modern 14-bed intensive care unit; a co-designed birth centre with new birthing suites, a maternity inpatient unit and special care nursery; eight operating theatres with futureproofing for two more to be brought online when required; two endoscopy suites with space for a third; more than 200 new beds in inpatient wards; and expanded outpatient spaces to support pre-admission clinics, specialised outpatient clinics and allied health clinics. The project will also include upgrades to the Haydon Drive intersections, more than 700 additional car parking spaces, and a new 100-place childcare centre, which will replace and expand the existing facility. North Canberra Hospital will continue to operate while construction is underway, and we thank staff and consumers in advance for their patience as the early works are getting underway.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how does the ACT budget support our vital health workforce

that cares for our community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. In addition to delivering state-of-the-art facilities for our health workforce to do their excellent work in, the 2026-27 budget will provide initiatives that support, grow and retain the ACT's health workforce. This includes a \$14.1 million investment to continue junior medical officer wellbeing and workforce initiatives. This investment will improve support for junior doctors and promote Canberra Health Services as an employer of choice. It will also provide continued wellbeing, pastoral care and career development initiatives to ensure doctors are supported both personally and professionally, including enhanced peer support programs, a dedicated psychologist for junior doctors, and improved training opportunities and roles to support early career development.

We have already seen strong results since these initiatives were introduced, with the national Medical Training Survey showing an increase in the proportion of junior doctors who would recommend their workplace, from 60 per cent in 2022 to 81 per cent in 2025, and those who feel their workplace supports wellbeing increasing from 64 per cent to more than 82 per cent over the same period. Retention of early career doctors has also improved, with intern retention increasing from 76 per cent to 85 per cent.

The 2026-27 budget also includes \$1.9 million over four years to boost the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in the ACT, which is essential for improving the health and wellbeing of First Nations communities. This funding will support Indigenous Allied Health Australia, or IAHA, to continue its Health Academy program in the ACT, training 30 students annually. In addition to finding employment as allied health assistants, graduates of the program often go on to pursue further study, including nursing and physiotherapy. It is always fantastic to go to IAHA Health Academy graduations and see young people and their families so proud of them.

Libraries ACT—opening hours

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services and relates to the government's announcement last week of changes to library hours. While I thank the minister for the briefing provided by officials, I still have some outstanding questions. Minister, the announcement included the following statement: "With the late-night sessions having largely served people collecting reserved items, options are being explored to allow reserved items to be picked up any time at key branches." Minister, when will Canberrans have the option to pick up reserved items out of hours?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for his engagement on this issue over a considerable period of time, including since early last year, where we were in a position where our library branches were often subject to closing. I greatly appreciate how interested and engaged he has been, particularly for our staff. The short answer is that I expect that we will have 24/7 lockers in place across the network by the end of the year. We are in the final stages of procurement for a supplier for book lockers, which will provide a greater opportunity for Canberrans to collect their books at any time. Once they are in place, I think we will start with a few but we will make sure that they are spaced accordingly. Libraries ACT will track usage to help assess whether

investment in further book lockers would be appropriate.

The independent review—which I know Mr Braddock has great familiarity with—found that most people attending in the evening sessions, in particular, were there to just collect and return items. That is one of the reasons that we are investing in these lockers while also keeping our library branch footprint the same.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is the ACT government relying on the National Library to meet the national benchmark standard of 64 opening hours per week per 100,000 people?

MS CHEYNE: No. We are obviously very glad that we have the National Library, the CIT and university libraries, and obviously the courts library as well, but the hours that we are using to assess ourselves against the benchmark standard are based only on the nine Libraries ACT branches. The 64 opening hours per 100,000 people translates to 320 open hours for a population of 500,000, which we are. So, following the changes, ACT Libraries will be operating for 400 hours. That is across our nine Libraries ACT branches, and 400 is obviously well in excess of 320.

MS CLAY: Minister, residents of West Belconnen will no longer have an option to attend the Kippax library on the weekend. Why is that?

MS CHEYNE: These changes are the result of recommendations from the independent working group's report. One of the themes running through that report is that it strongly encourages government with staff to look at the service offerings to assess the appropriateness of when we have been delivering the service and also ensuring that that offering aligns with our community's usage.

It is important to note, I think, that Kippax is not open on a Sunday, as it is, and on Saturdays our town centre branches right across the Libraries ACT network see about the double the visitors per hour that our community ones do. These changes mean that every region of Canberra will keep the fully Saturday library, with extended hours in Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Gungahlin, Woden and Dickson as well as Kingston on Tuesday and Saturday. The accessibility of our town centre branches is obviously supported by our transport model, which in and of itself is hob and spoke. That enables people to use public transport to access those services. Ultimately, these changes have allowed us to extend the opening hours of Kippax through the week, and they support the continued delivery of services at all branches across the ACT, which I know was something that members were very interested in seeing.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper; thank you, Mr Speaker.