



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

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 17 September 2025

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## **Questions without notice**

### **Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. The motion directing you to establish an inquiry into the health system, which was agreed on 24 June 2025, explicitly required it to be an independent inquiry. This was to ensure the inquiry would hear from health workers, who would otherwise feel uncomfortable speaking of their experiences, and to ensure the inquiry would serve the interests of the territory's residents and the health system's patients, rather than the government. Minister, how have you interpreted "independent"?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question and for the opportunity to talk about the inquiry, for which we have appointed Michael Walsh PSM to be the independent lead.

We are also, as I indicated in my media release, announcing this, and we have said previously in this place that the Health and Community Services Directorate is undertaking a procurement process to procure independent consultants to support Mr Walsh in undertaking this inquiry. The motion that was supported by all parties in this place required that the inquiry be led by an independent person who had not—I do not have the exact wording in front of me right now—been engaged by the ACT government recently at all. Mr Walsh fits that criteria.

Mr Walsh also has extensive experience in the governance of health systems, in the management of health systems, and in digital health as well—having set up New South Wales eHealth. I think he was the inaugural CEO of NSW eHealth before moving to Queensland. He has also undertaken work for national governance, including being one of the two leads on the mid-term review of the National Health Reform Agreement, prior to his return to the director-general job in Queensland. So, he is very familiar with funding arrangements. He is very familiar with the complexities of managing a jurisdictional health system, and he is very familiar with electronic health records as well.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, will you ensure there are appropriate protections for health workers who want to make a public submission or appear at the inquiry but fear reprisals or professional retribution?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Absolutely. That is what we have committed to. I have had a conversation with Mr Walsh about that. How, exactly, he conducts the inquiry is a matter for him. We have indicated to him that the Assembly has said that people should be able to provide information in confidence. The caveat that he has placed on that is that he will have to tell people that the information they provide to him could be subject to freedom of information requests, or, indeed, 213As.

It is this place that has set the example of requiring members of the ACT public service, who have provided information to cultural surveys that they believed would be held in confidence and be not identifiable, to provide that information to this Assembly. It is this place, and it is that opposition, that has actually breached that undertaking that we used to be able to give to public servants: that information that they believed was being provided in confidence would be held in confidence.

Now, every person who provides information to an ACT government process—despite it being done independently—needs to be provided with the information that what they are providing could be subject to FOI or could be subject to a request from the Legislative Assembly that would override this request for confidentiality, because we have had this opposition require that to be overridden—now, on multiple occasions. I would love to be able to guarantee to people that they could provide information and their experiences to Mr Walsh completely confidentially. I would absolutely love to be able to guarantee that. The reason I cannot is that that has been overridden repeatedly by those opposite.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, will you be actively encouraging Health Directorate and other health staff to come forward and tell their stories to the inquiry, to ensure that the inquiry is effective in improving our health system?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Yes, absolutely. And I think in my media release I did so. I will continue to do so.

I will also note for the Assembly, that Mr Walsh has indicated that he would write to both Ms Castley and Mr Rattenbury and, I understand, potentially, Independent members of the Legislative Assembly as well, and offer to meet with them to talk about his processes and their expectations for this inquiry. He certainly recognises that this is an inquiry that was initiated by the Legislative Assembly, and people have expectations about how it will operate. So I would strongly encourage Ms Castley, if she has not already, to take advantage of that invitation and to express any concerns she may have to Mr Walsh.

In the meantime, I absolutely encourage anyone who has anything to tell Mr Walsh about their experiences as workers in the ACT health system—if they have expertise to share about digital health or the operations of Canberra Health Services—to absolutely take the opportunity to get in touch with Mr Walsh. They can do that by email to an email address that will be managed by the consultants that are being procured to support Mr Walsh to ensure that that this a completely independent process from any ACT government official.

### **Health care—access to specialists—independent inquiry**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, what processes did you and the directorate put in place to ensure that the chair of the independent health inquiry was truly independent and free of any political affiliations?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am not aware of whether Mr Walsh has any particular political affiliation. That did not factor into consideration. He has been a public servant for a very long time. As far as I am aware, he has never stood for political office, he has never indicated a political affiliation, and he has successfully supported governments of all stripes—Liberal-National governments, Labor governments—in his various roles.

With respect to the process for appointing Mr Walsh, which I think we have shared with Ms Castley before, or publicly, to set up the inquiry in the timeframe that was required,

the Health Directorate did a bit of a scan of who had the types of expertise that would be required to undertake this type of role, and had not previously been contracted by the ACT government or worked for the ACT government in recent years. That ruled out some individuals, identified several individuals who met those criteria, went out to those individuals to have a conversation with them about their potential availability, got some further information from them about that, assessed the qualifications, experience and availability of those individuals, and made a recommendation to me that Mr Walsh was both available and highly qualified for the role. I then accepted that recommendation and wrote to the Chief Minister to seek his agreement to the appointment, which was made prior to cabinet consideration for timeliness reasons, and subsequently notified cabinet.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, are you aware that the chair of the independent health inquiry has actually been appointed to five senior roles by Western Australia, Queensland and the federal Labor government?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I have not counted the senior roles that Mr Walsh has been appointed to by various governments. My understanding is that he has undertaken work and inquiries for LNP governments as well. Of course, Mr Walsh is a long-term public servant. The Assembly put some clear criteria in place that the person appointed to undertake this inquiry was not to have worked for the ACT government or been contracted by the ACT government in recent years, and we looked for someone who had the expertise and was available. It is not on me that most of the state and territory governments over the last many, many years have been Labor governments. People who have undertaken senior roles across state and territory governments over many years are very likely to have been working for Labor governments because Labor has been more successful at state and territory level. And maybe Ms Castley is demonstrating why.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, how many other candidates were considered at each stage of the selection process that you have described?

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

### **Default insurance fund—horseracing industry**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the minister for workplace health and safety.

Minister, you have proposed legislation for a government insurance scheme to underwrite all claims for deaths and accidents at Thoroughbred Park. I imagine there was rigorous policy work involved in the preparation of this legislation. Can you tell the Assembly what criteria or principles you applied when deciding to select the horseracing industry for a special government insurance offer?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. The ACT government has proposed a bill that, if supported by the Assembly, would enable the executive to deem certain classes of worker eligible to have their workers compensation coverage provided by the default insurance fund and for a fee to be charged for that access. We have identified that horse training here in the ACT is the industry that is experiencing the highest workers compensation premiums in the territory, currently sitting at about

20 per cent of payroll and expected to rise to 30 per cent in their next insurance year. This has placed tremendous pressure on this industry, and the result of that is that that work is progressively occurring across the border in Queanbeyan whilst they still race and live here within the ACT.

We acknowledge that this is the most dangerous industry in the ACT. These workers deserve to have the appropriate protections that all workers here in the ACT enjoy, to make sure that that work, which is predominantly for the ACT industry, is done under the conditions and standards that we rightly expect of all work taken for the benefit of ACT.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, will you apply these same principles to other businesses struggling with their premiums, like the arts sector, live music, hospitality, small business and anyone uninsurable due to climate risk?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question.

I am not sure that all of those sectors would necessarily be best supported by the mechanism that is proposed in this bill. The government is looking forward to the report from the Assembly's inquiry into insurance costs, and we look forward to being able to respond fulsomely. We acknowledge that insurance costs are an issue across the ACT across a range of insurance products. We will look to sensible solutions, where we can, to support industries to make sure that the ACT remains a wonderful place to do business.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what is the projected total financial liability for government if the legislation you have proposed passes the Assembly?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I will have to take the detail of the question on notice. The cost to the ACT government is not necessarily a straightforward figure. There are a range of competing elements which might offset each other. So I have taken it on notice, and I will try to get a comprehensive answer for the member as soon as I possibly can, in advance of debate on the legislation.

### **Health—treatment by pharmacists**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. In February, you announced the expansion of pharmacy services to include treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections and the resupply of oral contraceptives, describing it as merely the first step toward full scope of practice for pharmacists. Given ACT Labor's clear commitment to implementing full scope before the 2024 election, why has your government failed to fully deliver on this promise?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Mr Speaker, can I ask that Ms Castley repeat the question?

**MR SPEAKER:** Let's take it from the top, Ms Castley.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, in February, you announced the expansion of pharmacy services to include treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections and the resupply of oral contraceptives, describing it as merely the "first step" toward full scope of

practice for pharmacists. Given ACT Labor's clear commitment to implementing full scope before the 2024 election, why has your government failed to fully deliver on this promise?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I can advise Ms Castley that, yes, we did make that announcement in February and, as of May 2025, 27 community pharmacies have been granted extended scope of practice authority to supply antibiotics to women to treat uncomplicated UTIs and to resupply oral contraceptive pills to women who have been previously prescribed oral contraceptives by their doctor.

As part of ACT Labor's commitment, this trial will be extended to all community pharmacies in the ACT over the course of 2025, and we will continue to work to expand scope of practice for pharmacies. But, as the Treasurer and the Chief Minister have had to explain to the opposition on multiple occasions as well as to the Greens, in some instances, and the crossbench, not all government election commitments are delivered within the first year of a new government. Election commitments are for the next term of government. We will continue to work with pharmacies, pharmacists and other jurisdictions to continue to expand scope of practice, particularly New South Wales, maintaining as much as possible consistency across border.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why is your government continuing to restrict pharmacists from prescribing medications that could safely and efficiently alleviate pressure on the broader health system?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am not sure which medications Ms Castley is referring to. But there is work nationally being undertaken and there is work being undertaken by the Health and Community Services Directorate in partnership with the NSW Health to look at where we go next in terms of expanded scope of practice. But there are legitimate concerns around some of these scope of practice proposals, and there is work that needs to be done to ensure that these can be implemented safely, including identifying appropriate training programs, amendments to regulations and ensuring that there is consistency.

Ms Castley seems to think that pharmacists are trained to prescribe any medication that they feel like. That is not the case. There is specific training associated with a number of these matters. So we are working very closely with the Pharmacy Guild, with whom we have a good relationship in this government, with pharmacists, with our Chief Pharmacist in the Health and Community Services Directorate and with our Chief Health Officer to work through what that expanded scope of practice looks like. We have already expanded scope of practice in relation to vaccinations. We have expanded the age range and the number of vaccines that pharmacists can deliver. That has been very, very welcomed by pharmacists and the community.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, why is safe, affordable access to contraception and abortion services so important to Labor governments?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Ms Tough. As I said earlier, access to resupply of oral contraception is really important for many women who require this service. We know that the ACT has a relatively low rate of bulk-billing and a low proportion of GPs per head of population. So this expanded scope of practice has been really welcomed.

Of course, when it comes to supplying antibiotics to treat uncomplicated urinary tract infections, that can also occur at our fantastic nurse-led walk-in centres, and we continue to expand their scope of practice as well. A number of other sexual health presentations can also be managed through our fabulous nurse-led walk-in centres. Then, of course, we have our program to support free access to abortion and to long-acting reversible contraceptives. We are now working to look at what that looks like, given the Albanese Labor government's significant investment in women's health, including substantial increases in the MBS, the Medicare Benefits Schedule, rebates for long-acting reversible contraception.

So, between the Albanese Labor government and the ACT Barr Labor government, we are taking woman's health very seriously, and we will continue to expand across 2025 the availability of expanded scope of practice to pharmacists from the current 27 community pharmacies.

### **Horseracing industry—work health and safety**

**MS CLAY:** My question is for the minister for workplace health and safety. This question talks about deaths and accidents that happened at Thoroughbred Park, and it might be upsetting for anyone involved to hear. I am really sorry about that. It is important that we discuss this issue to try to make the industry safer for others.

Minister, Thoroughbred Park's annual reports show the death of a track-work rider in 2017 and the death of a jockey in 2024. They also report a casual worker injured in 2019, two track work riders injured in 2020 and two more workers injured in 2021, and you have described this as "the most dangerous industry in the ACT".

Most unions would have shut this down by now to lobby for a safer workplace. Instead of taking regulatory action, you have proposed a government insurance scheme to underwrite claims for deaths and accidents. That really worries me, because one of the roles of civil law claims and insurance premiums is to make industries safer by giving them a financial incentive to avoid accidents.

What regulatory action is the government taking to try to make this industry safer?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I would like to thank Ms Clay for the question, and I appreciate her reading, for the benefit of the Assembly, about the dangers of this industry. People that work in horse training are exposed to a very dangerous workplace. Whether you are a track rider or a strapper, the prevalence of injuries is incredibly high. I understand that for a sustained period of time WorkSafe ACT has had a particular focus on the activities of the horse training industry in the ACT, particularly in light of some of those events.

The principle in which the government brings forward the bill and, as we have indicated, in which we would seek to utilise that power, is in recognition of those dangers. Those working people, we believe, should have access to the appropriate protections that ACT workers compensation provides. The insurance protection that is in place across the border in New South Wales is not as good as what exists here in the ACT: with higher thresholds to claim and lower benefits.



Working people that live in our community are seeing their work move across the border from the ACT into Queanbeyan. They are still part of the ACT racing industry. They are still conducting their races here in the ACT. But the work underpinning that industry, the training, is occurring in New South Wales, where those injuries are occurring. I appreciate this is an uncomfortable conversation to have, but these are the realities of this industry, and I believe the people that work in this industry deserve the protections that should come with working in an ACT industry.

**MS CLAY:** Are you concerned that by creating an insurance slush fund for the horseracing industry, the ACT government is inherently making Thoroughbred Park a more dangerous workplace?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I would like to thank Ms Clay for the question. No, I do not agree with that assessment. I understand that WorkSafe has, and I suspect will continue to have, a strong focus on the horseracing industry in the ACT. We are stuck in an awkward position. If we do not act, these workers will undertake their work across the border in Queanbeyan, and they will be exposed to these risks but not have the same protections that we are seeking to have legislated by introducing this bill.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how does this legislation align with the right to work?

**MR PETTERSSON:** The right to work? You have somewhat stumped me on that one. Mr Speaker, the ACT government is proud to support jobs in the ACT across all industries. We have a goal to have 300,000 workers here in the ACT by 2030. We appreciate that horse training is part of the ACT community. It is a dangerous industry, but that is not the purpose of this conversation. The purpose of this conversation is to make sure that, for the work that occurs, those working people have access to workers compensation that is fit for purpose, not the inferior offering across the border in NSW.

### **Planning and Development—CSIRO Ginninderra**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. In a briefing with Senator Pocock's office in 2023, CSIRO and the Suburban Land Agency provided three possible scenarios for anticipated housing yield when the CSIRO Ginninderra site is developed. The low-density option—similar to old Canberra, with mostly single houses and blocks of close to a quarter of an acre—had a forecast yield of 4,522 dwellings. A business-as-usual approach—medium- to high-density housing, with a mix of lower density—would yield 6,176 dwellings. The stretch scenario—with lots of medium-density housing—is forecast to yield 8,185 dwellings for around 20,000 residents.

Minister, why then has the SLA, in their response to an estimates question on notice, anticipated that the site will yield only 2,984 dwellings? That is significantly less than even the lowest density scenario of 4,522 dwellings previously proposed.

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Emerson for his question and his interest in CSIRO Ginninderra east. That site, of course, is not owned by the ACT government. We are continuing our negotiations with the commonwealth in that space. This has brought

some complex issues that both the ACT and commonwealth governments need to consider, which I cannot talk about until the contract is finalised. I am happy to inform the Canberra community about that in due course.

I think what Mr Emerson is referring to is both east and west portions of land in CSIRO. The portion of land that is around 2,900 dwellings, up to 3,000 dwellings, is in the part of the CSIRO portions of land that the ACT government is in discussions with the commonwealth about.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, has cabinet received a business case from the SLA for the proposed sale? If not, when is it expected—given testimony during estimates indicated that was the final hurdle to signing the deal with the commonwealth?

**MS BERRY:** I might take that question on notice, but it is well known publicly that the ACT government is in negotiations with the commonwealth. I cannot discuss any detail on that at the moment. But, as I said, as soon as we can and as soon as those negotiations are completed, I am very happy to inform the community of the outcome of those negotiations.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what proportion of the CSIRO Ginninderra dwellings will be public and community housing?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. Those are considerations that will be taken into account after the ownership of the land—should we be successful in our negotiations. It is our intention to have community, public and affordable housing in line with the government's current policy of 15 per cent, but the actual numbers will be considered, should the ACT government be successful.

### **Woden Early Childhood Centre—lease**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the minister responsible for Infrastructure Canberra and ACT Property Group, Minister Stephen-Smith. Minister, Woden Early Childhood Centre is a longstanding, community-managed early learning provider, with an NQS overall rating of “exceeding” since 2013. Its current enrolment is around 80 children, and it employs 20 staff. Their site is leased from ACT Property Group, and I understand the lease has expired and is currently on a month-by-month arrangement. Minister, is it the government's intention to issue a new lease to the Woden Early Childhood Centre, and, if so, for what term?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Carrick for the question. I will just clarify that I am not the minister responsible entirely for Infrastructure Canberra. The overall responsibility for Infrastructure Canberra largely sits with the Chief Minister, but I am responsible for what is now called Places and Spaces.

There are a number of organisations that are currently on a month-by-month lease. I will take on notice to ensure that I can get the detail for Woden Early Childhood Centre, but for Ms Carrick's information, I think this will be relevant. Infrastructure Canberra currently manages 84 peppercorn arrangements of properties across the community facilities portfolio. Almost all of those are legacy arrangements that have been administered by different entities over time. That means that there are more than 68

variations of the peppercorn lease.

Infrastructure Canberra is currently working towards renewing and standardising the peppercorn arrangements. Last year the then Special Minister of State agreed to Infrastructure Canberra issuing community tenants with a letter of comfort regarding the renewal of peppercorn arrangements. Letters were issued to tenants in August and September 2024. ACTCOSS also shared this information widely across its membership. The letter noted that the then Property Group was undertaking a process to renew peppercorn lease arrangements with an intention of renewing all leases—but that this may take some time to complete. It sought to assure lessees that their arrangement would remain in holdover until the new lease was agreed, and that all the terms and conditions of the lease would continue to apply.

The letter further stated, and I quote: “I would like to provide assurance that your organisation can remain in occupancy of the property while the renewal process is undertaken.” (*Time expired.*)

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, is the Woden Early Childhood Centre site included in the early site investigation of the Callum offices and surrounding sites being undertaken by Infrastructure Canberra and the Suburban Land Agency, which you refer to in your answer to question on notice 394 for the estimates committee?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No, Ms Carrick. I do not believe it is. If I am incorrect on that I will come back to you, but I am pretty sure it is no. I am getting a nod from Mr Steele as well.

Just to provide some further information in relation to your previous question, I can advise that Infrastructure Canberra will offer the existing 71 not-for-profit tenants on peppercorn arrangements new five-year leases. There are 13 arrangements which relate to community arts facilities, which will be transitioned to new arrangements as well—but in a slightly different timing alignment. But, for the purposes that you are referring to, that should be the relevant information.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, with those new five-year leases also all be peppercorn leases?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Yes, that is right. I thank Mr Emerson for the question. The work that Infrastructure Canberra is currently doing is to try to make those peppercorn leases a uniform peppercorn lease, rather than having 68 variations of the peppercorn lease arrangement.

### **Aviation industry—QANTAS**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I note media reports today that Qantas is planning to close its bases in Mildura, Hobart and Canberra, consolidating the home base of pilots and cabin crew in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Chief Minister, since the announcement this morning, what action have you taken to protect the estimated 30 staff and their families affected by this decision, and what plans do you have to ensure Qantas services in and out of Canberra are protected?

**MR BARR:** We have engaged with senior Qantas officials on a number of occasions already, since we were first alerted to this consultation process that the company was undertaking. I think there has been some confusion in the media reporting. It is not an end to QantasLink services. It is about the crew base, the home base for 30 staff. QantasLink would continue to fly to and from Canberra. Engineering services would continue to be provided at Canberra airport. The issue at question for Hobart, Mildura and Canberra is: will Qantas home-base those staff in those respective cities? We do not believe that there is a case, given Canberra airport is the ninth busiest airport in Australia, for Qantas to not have any Canberra-based crew and pilots. That is the position that we have put to Qantas.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, with your intimate knowledge of the aviation history, what is your government doing to protect flights and services for Canberrans, and with respect to the impact, if there is a reduction in staff?

**MR BARR:** There is not a reduction in staff. What Qantas are consulting with their staff and the unions on is the home base for the staff. Their proposal is that in Canberra, Mildura and Hobart those staff will be relocated to other places.

**Ms Castley:** So we're happy to lose them from Canberra?

**MR BARR:** No, we are not happy to lose them. We have made that very clear.

**Ms Castley:** And what have you done to protect flights?

**MR BARR:** I have already been in contact with senior Qantas executives in relation to the matter. We are working with our federal colleagues on the matter. It is not just Canberra. Ultimately, Qantas is a business, and it will make its decisions independent of government. It is not a government-owned entity, and it is certainly not an ACT government-owned entity. I think the distinction needs to be drawn regarding services, which was the question that Ms Castley asked. This is not about how many flights there are to and from Canberra; it is about what will be the home base of Qantas crew and pilots.

We believe there is a strong case, as Canberra airport is the ninth busiest airport in Australia, that Qantas should have home-based crew here in Canberra. That is what we are arguing back to them, and that is what the union representing those staff is also doing, together with federal MPs and federal ministers, including our own federal finance minister, Senator Katy Gallagher.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Chief Minister, did any of your federal Labor colleagues inform you of this decision before it was made public, and what have you done to protect airline services in the ACT?

**MR BARR:** Qantas advised my office and federal MPs' offices in Hobart, Canberra and Mildura, ahead of the commencement of their two-week consultation period with their own staff on this matter. We have responded to Qantas on numerous occasions, to senior executives within the business, to express our displeasure at this matter. Ultimately, though, it is a consultation process and a decision that Qantas will take as a private business. But we do not support it. We believe, as the ninth busiest airport in

Australia, that Canberra airport should have a Qantas staff base. Again, because Mr Milligan may not have been listening to the answers to the previous two questions, this is not about the number of flights to and from Canberra; it is about where the crew and pilots would be home based.

### **Law and justice—affirmative consent**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

Minister, many Canberrans will have seen posters in bathrooms and videos on social media from the government's affirmative consent campaign. Can you tell the Assembly a bit more about that campaign and the research behind it?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank Ms Tough for the question.

Mr Speaker, I am just going to put it straight on the table: great sex starts with consent, and that is the key message of the ACT government's affirmative consent education campaign. This campaign will be in market from 16 July to 15 October. The campaign is targeted at Canberrans aged 18 to 40, and it incorporates paid advertising as well as promotion through key locations and events in the community, supported by detailed information available online. This campaign seeks to build awareness of the 2022 affirmative consent legislation and forms part of the overall strategy to reduce sexual violence in the ACT.

The independent research project to inform this key campaign was conducted in May 2024. Key findings were that many Australians have ingrained unconscious biases and beliefs around the topic of consent, which is also often gendered. All genders feel an elevated sense of risk due to the changed definition of consent, with concern as to whether the new law will be effective in protecting men from false accusations and women from harm. When faced with practising affirmative consent, people felt that it was awkward, transactional, over complicated and confusing. So those are the reasons why this campaign has been targeted in the way it has—to start to shift some of those ideas that are often entrenched in our community.

The campaign is running on social media, Tiktok, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit; on dating apps like Tinder; on Google search ads; on broadcast and video on demand, Netflix, 7 Plus, 10Play, Binge, YouTube, BeBo, SBS, 9, Kayo and ESPN; and on posters in public locations and in licenced venues around the ACT. I also thank Clubs ACT for their support of this campaign and for promoting it throughout their venues.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, what impact has the affirmative consent legislation had so far?

**DR PATERSON:** This legislation was the first legislation that I introduced into the Assembly. It was introduced in February 2022 and passed in the Assembly in May 2022. This bill made it law that consent has to be given freely and voluntarily and communicated by saying or doing something. It also explicitly states that consent can be withdrawn at any time.

I want to thank the Attorney-General for her thorough review into the laws. The review found that consent laws may be one of several factors contributing to increased confidence in reporting sexual offences. Reporting and charging rates have both increased since the commencement of the laws, and the number of people reporting a sexual offence to police and then withdrawing the report prior to a charge being laid has also fallen.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, what supports are available to victim-survivors of sexual violence in the ACT?

**DR PATERSON:** Sexual violence affects people at all ages and all walks of life. We know that victim-survivors of sexual violence have differing needs, aims and understandings of justice. That is why in the ACT there are different support opportunities available at different stages of the process and depending on an individual's priorities.

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre offers counselling and practical support to all victim-survivors, regardless of if they have ever made a report to police. This year, we boosted CRCC's capacity to support victim-survivors, through the establishment of the independent sexual violence advisers, the Sexual Violence Legal Service. The service, a partnership between Victim Support ACT and the Women's Legal Centre, offers advice to female and gender diverse victim-survivors who want to better understand the legal processes which might apply to their situation, as well as tailored case coordination and connection with other services offered by Victim Support, like financial assistance and counselling.

In their own right, Victim Support offer a range of supports to victims of sexual and other violence including counselling, advocacy, financial assistance as well as the provision of information through the victims register.

In this budget, we announce funding for a new role of sexual assault advocates who will be embedded within the ACT police to support victim-survivors who choose to make a report to police by ensuring ready access to information and connection to other supports. The DPP's witness assistance service also provides tailored support to victims through the criminal process as matters proceed to trial.

Structurally, the wrap-around program, which was re-established in January 2025, ensures a consistent, coordinated and multidisciplinary response for victim-survivors of sexual violence.

The services provide a choice and empowerment for people who have experienced sexual violence, helping them to navigate the path that is right for them to support recovery and healing.

### **Light rail stage 2B—Yarralumla substation**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. The environmental impact statement on stage 2B of the tram shows that Yarralumla residents should expect a 240 square metre substation that will be up to 10-metres tall to be built in front of their homes. Minister, why must this 10-metre tall, 240 square metre substation be built

in the middle of a residential street?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Of course, the whole purpose of an environmental impact statement in its draft form that has been out for consultation with the community is to find out what the community's views are on the impacts that this major project may have on them, the surrounding environment and the heritage of the city. Of course, there are requirements in terms of powering our light rail system. It requires high-voltage DC power. That means that traction power stations have to be built, as they were on stage 1 and, as they will be, as part of stage 2A.

We are listening to any concerns raised by the community as part of the process. Infrastructure Canberra will, of course, be assessing those now that the consultation is coming to a close, and then the government will be considering those matters and responding to those in the finalisation of the EIS. They will consider any alternative options that may be available in terms of location that might be able to mitigate those matters, and they will of course be assessed as part of the finalisation of the EIS.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what have you heard from the community about this proposed site?

**MR STEEL:** I have probably heard the same as the fellow member for Murrumbidgee, Mr Hanson, has in relation to a retraction power station. I know that Infrastructure Canberra has heard feedback on that from the community. I believe there is a petition before the Assembly in relation to that matter as well, which the government will provide a response to in due course. So we are aware of the range of concerns that have been raised from local members of the community, and they will be considered as part of the environmental impact statement finalisation.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, what other sites have been identified and are under consideration for this 240 square metre substation?

**MR STEEL:** I will take on notice the exact detail of that. But, obviously, as Infrastructure Canberra have worked on stage 2B's design, they have looked at the range of options. They presented one proposal that is feasible from a constructability point of view. Of course, now is the stage where we are considering feedback from the broader community and, indeed, other stakeholders, including government stakeholders and the commonwealth government, to understand any impacts that may not have been properly considered through the draft and whether those can be further mitigated in the finalisation of the EIS for the project.

### **Housing—Rent Relief Fund**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the minister for homelessness. Minister, the government's response to the estimates committee included in-principle support for restoring the Rent Relief Fund. This followed compelled evidence provided by Care and community sector organisations. Minister, what are your plans for the reinstatement of the fund?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take it as the responsible minister, Mr Speaker. I thank Ms Barry for the question and for the interest. I think there is very little more that I can say beyond

the government response. I would note that the information we have provided to the media is that we are awaiting some further advice from the directorate about the best way to put this together. Regrettably, I am not in a position to make any government announcements right now, nor during question time.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, why is the government's approach an approach which severs the nexus with Care Financial Counselling Services?

**MS CHEYNE:** Can you say that again please?

**MR SPEAKER:** Can you repeat the question please, Ms Barry?

**MS BARRY:** Minister, why is the government's approach an approach which severs the nexus with Care Financial Counselling Services?

**MS CHEYNE:** The arrangement with Care had reached the end of the contracted period, and the government's consideration has been, while certainly lobbied by Care and others right across the sector, that this is about establishing, effectively, a new fund, and we are seeking advice on the best way to go about that that is consistent with the legislation and, particularly, our procurement rules.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why don't you admit the mistake to cut the Rent Relief scheme, and why don't you reinstate the program?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Castley for the question, and I refer her, again, to the government response. We are at a point where we do need to look at what we are funding, and how, and through what, and of course, there have been a range of other cost-of-living supports that have been provided through this budget, including some new things. I appreciate Mr Rattenbury's comments on the radio, in the news that I heard this morning, that some of those things are not necessarily a like-for-like replacement, and I understand that. But what the government is looking at now—based on some further feedback and receipt of some final data from the sector and some further analysis that has appeared in recent weeks—is providing, effectively, a new fund that is more holistic. This is what we are working towards.

### **Planning—rural leaseholders**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. It relates to agriculture.

Minister, I have been meeting regularly with the Rural Landholders' Association and was fortunate enough to attend their meeting on Monday night in Tharwa. Officials who report to you were at the event, as was the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development.

A number of concerns were raised by farmers at the meeting, including the difficulty they have with succession planning and running their farms as a family business when they are unable to house their children and grandchildren on their properties, given the restrictions around second dwellings. They said our planning system does not work for rural communities and their livelihoods. Other things that were raised include the need



to reform our offsets policy. Some great work on local food was initiated last term, and many farmers are also wondering what the next steps are for that work.

Minister, are any of these issues that I just talked about included in your priorities for the agricultural portfolio? If not, what are your priorities for the portfolio?

**MS ORR:** The short answer to Miss Nuttall's question is yes, and I continue to work with my colleagues, including the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, on the matters raised.

**Miss Nuttall:** I have a point of order on relevance. The question was: of the things I raised, which are your priorities, and, if none of them are priorities, what are the priorities for agriculture?

**MR SPEAKER:** There is still time on the clock if you want to resume, Ms Orr, but I cannot direct you on how to answer the question.

**MS ORR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. If I remember correctly, Ms Nuttall listed about three things. The answer is yes, those things are under my consideration, and we continue to work on them.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, have you raised farmers' concerns about succession planning and second dwellings with the planning minister?

**MS ORR:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, have you initiated any work on how our offsets policy applies to rural lands, given their critical stewardship of habitat conservation?

**MS ORR:** Again, the short answer is yes. We continue to look at offsets policy, and the directorate has been briefing me on potential options, but we are also waiting to see how federal reforms go. So I do not have any new policy announcement to make now, but I can assure the member who is asking the question that the government is not ignoring these matters.

### **Active travel—William Hovell Drive**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, the William Hovell Drive duplication promises to connect active travel options to the city and active travel provisions in both directions. However, there appear to be questions about the shared off-road path between Coulter Drive and Bindubi Street. Can you please confirm if this off-road path between these two streets is within the scope of works, or not?

**MS CHEYNE:** I appreciate Mr Braddock's question and his interest in this. I am going to take it on notice, due to some broader work that is underway on all of Bindubi Street and the connections into Whitlam and the Molonglo River bridge project. I do not have the answer in front of me, to be honest, but I expect I will be able to get an answer by tomorrow at the latest.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, is the government still committed to having active travel in both directions alongside the William Hovell Drive duplication project?

**MS CHEYNE:** I do not believe there has been any change to our commitment with that. Active travel has always been a key consideration as part of this project, as have many other considerations, including wildlife crossings—both through wildlife crossing bridges and underpasses. I think that, after many years and considerable environmental engagement especially, I can speak for every member for Ginninderra that we are excited to be getting on with it now that the contract is signed.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, can you confirm that Labor will deliver on the commitment made before the election to build seven kilometres of walking and cycling paths along William Hovell Drive?

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes.

### **Transport Canberra—bus driver safety**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, can you please provide an update to the Assembly on the delivery of measures aimed at addressing occupational violence on the Transport Canberra bus network?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. Addressing occupational violence and enhancing safety for our staff and the community remain a top priority for the ACT government. Our staff have the right to be safe at work, and our passengers have the right to be safe when using our bus services.

At the election, ACT Labor committed to reviewing our transport laws to provide additional powers for transport officers to manage and deter anti-social behaviour and promote safe journeys on public transport. This commitment has been complemented by a suite of actions aimed at addressing occupational violence in the Transport Canberra network, announced by the government in response to listening to the workforce and responding to reports of occupational violence, and supported through investment in the 2025-26 ACT budget.

We are delivering on our commitments. Consultation with the driver workforce and the Transport Canberra occupational violence steering committee has led to two styles of operator-driver cabin protection screens now being fitted across the bus fleet. These are now being fitted to all Yutong E12 battery electric buses, with fit-out underway on CB60 rigid and articulated buses, and CB80 vehicles scheduled for the next tranche of installations.

De-escalation training tailored for the Transport Canberra workforce is also being delivered. All transport officers, new starters and communications centre operators have completed the training, and so have 70 per cent of bus drivers, with the remaining drivers scheduled to have this training completed by the end of the next month.

Last sitting week, I introduced the Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Amendment Bill 2025—the bus safety bill—into the Assembly, which will provide additional powers for managing anti-social behaviour and occupational violence on

public buses, together with our field transport officers, ACT police and the new team of dedicated transit enforcement officers announced in the budget.

Violence or harassment towards bus drivers or fellow passengers is not acceptable or tolerated on our bus network, and the government is well placed to deliver on our commitment.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how will the recruitment of the new transit enforcement officers support the safety of the Transport Canberra workforce and public transport passengers?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. The new transit enforcement officers announced in the budget will provide a visible presence on our network to deter risk and respond to anti-social behaviour and occupational violence incidents. Our bus drivers and field transport officers already play an important role across our network, but our new teams of transit enforcement officers will allow them to focus on their work by providing them with the means to divert potentially dangerous situations to an appropriately trained person, to de-escalate the situation before it becomes serious.

As part of the 12-month initial deployment of these officers, the first few months of the trial will be focused on known hotspots, such as the city interchange on busy evenings over the weekend, and it will then increase their presence across the network based on feedback and known risk areas where incidents are more likely to occur.

Upon recruitment, these officers will undergo a training program, including de-escalation training, plus additional training to allow them to use the new powers that have been proposed in the bus safety bill. They will also be provided with specific high-visibility uniforms, to ensure that they are easily recognised and identifiable when out in the network, and they will be provided with two-way radios to support reliable communication between teams and the communications centre. They will also wear body-worn cameras to support transparency and accountability during interactions with the public.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, what other measures is the government taking to support a safe and secure transport workforce?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her supplementary. An enthusiastic, committed and supported workforce is important to the success of our bus network. Alongside our investment in improving safety on public transport, the budget also builds on the government's investment in improving public transport services through the delivery of workforce entitlements under the Transport Canberra operations agreement 2023-26. This investment supports Transport Canberra to maintain its workforce of 1,000 bus drivers, including full-time, permanent part-time and casual employees, who deliver our current bus network, including the improved Sunday bus timetable, which commenced on 31 August. All new starters are receiving training in relation to de-escalation, but they are also receiving training in relation to customer service, to support positive interactions in supporting people to use our bus system.

Ongoing bus driver recruitment will ensure that our driver workforce is maintained, to

ensure that we are able to continue to deliver reliable bus services to the community.

### **Stromlo district playing fields**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

According to the ACT Labor costings at the last election, design work for the Stromlo District Playing Fields had begun back in 2016. However, the development application for stage 1 of this project was only submitted in June this year. That is nine years of design work!

Minister, how much has the government spent so far on design work for the Stromlo District Playing Fields?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice on the detail, but it is a complex site. Most sites in Canberra now are becoming more complex to build on more generally, including for sports facilities. So it has taken some time. On the actual amount, I will take that on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, how long will it take for the government to make a decision on this development application?

**MR STEEL:** I will take that question, as the minister for planning. There are statutory timeframes that are outlined in the Planning Act and regulations. The Territory Planning Authority, the independent authority, will assess any development application that is being put forward and make a decision in accordance with the Planning Act and regulations.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, why is the government pursuing a playing field made of astro turf, which will leach microplastics into the water?

**MS BERRY:** I could guess that question was coming from Mr Braddock! He did not even need to ask it.

Because of consultation with our sports community in the ACT and the experiences that we have had across the ACT community, particularly with sporting ground use, in weather where it is inclement and there is a lot of wet weather, the different turfed grounds can be used without damage to the fields, as they would in with greenfields. So having a variety of different services means that sports can play even when the weather is wet. The technology with regard to turf, like the one proposed for Stromlo, is changing every time. It is becoming more sustainable and the recycling use of the turf after its lifespan has also become something that is being investigated, and that is evolving as well.

I know Mr Braddock does not like the different turf used on some of our fields. That is his prerogative. However, in our consultations with the sports community using something else or not having that opportunity to continue to play when there is wet weather would leave our competitions at a loose end, and that is the last thing we want. We often get complaints when we close the fields down when it is wet or when we close the fields down for maintenance. Having another opportunity to play on fields that are

not impacted by the weather in the same way that they that natural turf fields would be just gives sports more options. In the hockey space, as I spoke about before, it would create a very, very dangerous environment for hockey if they were to play on a surface that was something other than what they use currently, which is a turf that does use water as well as turf and is a level and flat surface. If it is played on a natural grass surface, it just creates a lot of danger of injuries to players.

### **Roads—Molonglo Valley**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, how are the existing roads in Molonglo supposed to cope with thousands more cars from increased population while we wait for completion of the east-west arterial, some time later than a decade away?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. Of course, the government's priority in Molonglo is to build the bridge over the Molonglo River, which, as Minister Cheyne highlighted in question time yesterday, is expected to be complete by the end of 2026 and will provide better options not only for broader users of the road network but also for public transport, with the future commitment that the government has made around providing an additional Rapid service, which can only be provided reliably once that infrastructure is built. So that is the priority at the moment.

We are also progressing work, in conjunction with the federal government, on the planning, design and, hopefully, future construction of stage 1 of the east-west arterial road, which will initially provide access into the new Molonglo town centre but in the future, with further stages, could provide access to the Tuggeranong Parkway as well. In addition to that, the government, through the Suburban Land Agency, is also progressing work on a new road, which would connect John Gorton Drive through the new suburbs of Sulman and Bandler to William Hovell Drive at the Bindubi Street intersection, which was also the subject of an earlier question. Minister Cheyne alluded to the potential future consideration of a new interchange at that intersection as well.

There is a lot of planning underway to make sure that people can move in that area, given the growing population that will be experienced over that time. The Cotter Road is experiencing a lot of that congestion in peak times at the moment. We expect that that will be relieved once the new bridge opens. But there will be further work that is required to plan for future road connections.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, is there some doubt over whether the later stages will actually connect to the parkway, given you have just chosen to say that it “could” connect to the parkway?

**MR STEEL:** No, but the commitment that we have made as a government is to progress stage 1 as a priority. Obviously, that links in with the broader Molonglo town centre. That is also a critical first stage for the project and then in future connecting to the Tuggeranong Parkway. We are continuing to look at the Cotter Road as well. It is not a set-and-forget there; we have active traffic modelling underway and are looking at options, particularly around bus priority but also general movement of traffic through that corridor and what improvements can be made to that road as well as the broader network, in conjunction with the federal government, which has provided us with

funding, looking at both Parkes Way and the south-west corridor, which of course link with all of these roads.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, when do you expect the east-west arterial will be complete, including its connection to the parkway?

**MR STEEL:** I will take that on notice. The project does sit with other ministers and involves both the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate.

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