



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Tuesday, 31 October 2023

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged with the Hansard office as soon as possible.

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Questions without notice Government—taxation

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, today the *Australian* presented detailed analysis on the ACT's budget and tax failures by several experts in economics. In particular, Dr Khalid Ahmed and Dr Stephen Anthony say that per capita tax on Canberrans has been the highest in the country since 2014-15 and climbed to \$5,347 in 2022. That is \$5,347 per person and almost \$500 more than the next highest-taxing jurisdiction, New South Wales. Treasurer, why do Canberrans pay the highest tax per capita?

MR BARR: They do not. The most recent data from the ABS indicates that New South Wales and Victorian residents, when you include local government, pay higher tax than those in the ACT.

MS LEE: Treasurer, are the experts, especially Dr Khalid Ahmed and Dr Stephen Anthony, wrong when they say the ACT government is charging the most per capita?

MR BARR: They may not have seen the most recent data from the ABS on taxation revenue per capita by level of government and jurisdiction. In the most recent data, from fiscal year 2021-22, the ACT is taxed \$5,346, as you quoted, Ms Lee. In New South Wales it is \$5,537 and in Victoria it is \$5,638, which are higher than in the ACT.

MR HANSON: Treasurer, did you purposefully decide to tax Canberrans at the highest rate per capita in the country or is that a mistake?

MR BARR: As I have clearly pointed out, and as the ABS data shows, the first part of Mr Hanson's question is wrong. We are not the highest taxed per capita. Victoria and New South Wales tax higher and the ACT is only about \$170 above the national average, so we are broadly in line with the rest of the nation and taxed lower than in New South Wales and Victoria.

Government—taxation

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, reporting in the *Australian* newspaper today quotes former senior Treasury official Dr Khalid Ahmed on your tax reform policy. He says:

... duty on conveyances would be less than a quarter of what the government is collecting now, and tax on rental properties would have been abolished ...

Treasurer, why isn't your tax reform program doing what it was originally planned to do?

MR BARR: It is. I do not know where Dr Ahmed has got his figures from. I have looked again at the stamp duty share of total state and local government tax revenue, and, at the commencement of tax reform, the ACT had the highest share. Stamp duty was the highest proportion of own-source revenue of any state or territory, and it is

now the lowest as a result of cutting stamp duty. It is a 20-year program, and we are 10 years into it.

MS LEE: Treasurer, has your tax reform program resulted in you double dipping on tax revenue?

MR BARR: No. The reason that revenue has increased is that the size of the territory economy has increased: the size of the population has increased and the number of properties in the ACT has massively increased, by nearly 40 per cent. The economy, the city—everything is larger. Stamp duty as a proportion of all tax has fallen, and it certainly has fallen to the lowest of all the states and territories as a proportion of own-source revenue.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, why did you mislead Canberrans about how much tax they would be paying, when you originally announced your tax reform policy?

MR BARR: I did not. We have been very clear. It has been a 20-year tax reform process. During that time, the economy and the city have grown. If you look at the counterfactual—what the relative tax lines would be if no reform had occurred—stamp duty would be the highest revenue source, and it would be approaching \$1 billion, based on what we are seeing in other jurisdictions. Rates would have also increased, and so would other tax lines, because every year the tax lines increase because the economy grows, and because of inflation and because of population growth. All of those factors lead, in absolute terms, to there being more tax collected each year. Just as expenses rise each year—as a result of an increased population, pay rises and inflation—the revenue side grows as well.

Analysis that simply looks at raw figures is pretty low rent. You need to look at tax as a proportion of the economy, tax as a proportion of gross state product and individual tax lines as a proportion of own-source revenue. What is clear is that the ACT's reliance on stamp duty is much lower than it was a decade ago.

Government—taxation

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, in 2012-13 you announced a tax reform policy that would abolish stamp duty by 2032. The 2023-24 budget reveals that in 2026-27 revenue from stamp duty will be almost \$300 million—substantially higher than stamp duty revenue received in 2011-12. Treasurer, how will you abolish stamp duty by 2032?

MR BARR: By cutting it each and every budget, as I have done over the last 11 budgets.

Ms Lee: Is that what you've done? How much have you collected?

MR BARR: Ms Lee, what you need to understand is that the number of taxpaying households and the number of property transactions has increased because the population has increased. When tax reform started there were about 140,000 dwellings in the ACT.

Ms Lawder: That's a bit of mansplaining—

MR BARR: I am just explaining the facts.

Mr Parton: I think this is mansplaining, isn't it? Is that what it is?

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, members!

MR BARR: I am explaining the facts to the shadow treasurer, who you would hope would understand that the economy grows. So there were 140,000 properties; there is now 190,000, and we are on our way to 240,000 properties. That means more transactions. That means that tax revenue does increase. But each year the rate of stamp duty has been cut. So the path from here to 2032-33 is to cut stamp duty in every budget.

What have we done over the last ten years? Cut stamp duty in every budget.

MS LEE: Treasurer, how much will you have to increase household rates between now and 2032 to cover the revenue lost by abolishing stamp duty?

MR BARR: At around the rate of the wage price index plus the transition between the two. That has been about a 1 per cent addition on top of the WPI. At the moment rates are going up by 3.75 per cent.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, will you explain to Canberra taxpayers why your government has collected substantially more in stamp duty since you announced the tax would be abolished?

MR BARR: Mr Cain has not been listening to the last seven answers. Because the economy is growing—

Mr Cain: I'm trying to find sense in your answer.

MR BARR: because there are more houses, Mr Cain. There is a 40 per cent increase in the number of dwellings. Therefore—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, you have asked a question.

MR BARR: Therefore, Madam Speaker, there are more properties that transact each year. According to the economic theory, which is right, as you lower taxation you will see more allocative efficiency in the housing market. In other words: more properties transact; the tax rate is lower, but more properties are transacting. That will be the case in to the future as the population grows. It is quite a simple equation. The tax rate multiplied by the number of houses that transact in a year. Pretty straight forward.

Arts—Canberra Museum and Gallery

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for the Arts. Minister, can you

provide an update on the work that the Cultural Facilities Corporation is doing to promote and elevate the offerings of the Canberra Museum and Gallery?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Dr Paterson for the question. The Canberra Museum and Gallery, or CMAG for short, has been attracting new and returning locals and visitors through programming efforts that reflect the diversity of Canberra's identity and community. Offering free museum entry, right here in the heart of the city, CMAG's program of events, exhibitions, education and public programs is going from strength to strength.

To name just a few: the importance of CMAG in promoting Canberra's social and cultural history was recently reflected in the Telopea Park School 100 year anniversary exhibition; the *Nara—Canberra: 30 Years of Friendship* exhibition, currently showing, celebrates the 30th anniversary of that relationship; and, later this summer, CMAG is celebrating the career of pop icon Madonna through an extensive private collection of memorabilia by Canberran Jerry Kirbell, with plenty of opportunities for gallery visitors to strike a pose, including at the Into the Groove Madonna Dance Party, Clearing the Gallery art workshop and *Madonna40 Exhibition* talk, which are all linked to the SpringOut Festival.

Last month I was delighted to announce the winners of the Secondary School Art Prize, with selected works displayed as part of the current *Capturing Canberra* exhibition—an incredible opportunity for our local school students. These efforts are also supported by collaborative work to activate Civic Square as we work towards the transformative Canberra Theatre Centre development and opening of the new gallery space, with a focus on interactive multimedia, in the former restaurant, Mr Wei's. CMAG has continued to exceed its visitor targets, this past financial year by 138 per cent and over 57,000 people through its doors.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what work has CMAG undertaken to support the activation of Civic Square?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary question. The Cultural Facilities Corporation and CMAG have taken a collaborative approach to working with other parts of government, cultural organisations and the community to enliven and activate Civic Square. While CFC's Civic Square hub has been awaiting an interior refit for future use, the frontages on Civic Square have been part of the CRA's Floriade walking trail, with fun selfie stations linked to the *Capturing Canberra* exhibition and a miniature outdoor Nolan gallery at dog height to encourage some fun social media engagement with the CMAG collection.

Prior to this, the Civic Square hub was brought to life through the fantastic Craft + Design Canberra shop and workshop space and more recent collaborations with the City Renewal Authority on placemaking initiatives. Just two weeks ago, the CFC supported the 45th anniversary celebrations of Canberra Dance Theatre in activating Civic Square with dance workshops and a huge flashmob accompanied by African drumming and birthday cake. As we look towards 2024, CMAG is already working closely with the National Multicultural Festival team to make Civic Square a must-visit destination during the event.

MS ORR: Minister, how has the public responded to the opening of a new CMAG gallery space in the former restaurant, Mr Wei's?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. As I briefly touched on earlier this year, the Circuit Gallery, in the former Mr Wei's restaurant space, opened with a special focus on interactive multimedia, and it has already hosted two popular exhibitions. The recent children and family focused exhibition *How Cities Work* attracted over 10,000 visitors, with over 66 per cent of people surveyed being first-time visitors to CMAG, and 49 per cent of these were children.

A new, similarly interactive, exhibition has just opened, called *On the Move*, which will run until late January. Designed, again, especially for children and families, *On the Move* is a highly engaging exhibition that offers hands-on discovery of incredible journeys, unique inventions, amazing vehicles and intrepid explorers across the country. Touring from Museums of History NSW, visitors will be able to discover how transportation works in busy cities, how fuel choices can have a positive impact on the environment and how transport modes have evolved over time. Children will be able to develop their fantasy trip, fuel up at the servo, craft their dream machine and build a vehicle for the future from LEGO and test it on a futuristic city track.

Government—taxation

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, reporting in the *Australian* today quotes ANU Professor Bob Breunig, who was on the committee tasked to assess your tax reforms. Professor Breunig said that he was not hopeful that stamp duty would be abolished by the early 2030s as planned. This follows analysis that your government is set to collect \$159 million dollars more in stamp duties, this financial year alone, than a decade earlier, when you announced your tax reform.

Treasurer, given that your government is collecting more revenue from stamp duty than when you announced your reform, why are you still increasing rates?

MR BARR: As I indicated in my answer to the nine questions that the Liberals have asked on this already, the economy is growing. Our total tax collections will grow every year because our economy is growing and our population is growing, and we have more ratepaying households. Rate increases at the moment are 3.75 per cent per annum. That is necessary to meet the increased costs of service delivery. The line the questioning from the opposition is heading down is the magic pudding phase; they have started making it already. They tried it in 2020—the old “less taxes, more services” mantra. You cannot do that. Services must be paid for.

Ms Lee: I have a point of order. The new standing orders talk about the answers having the same rules as questions about ironical expressions. I ask that you ask the Treasurer to be relevant to the specific question I asked, which is: why is he still increasing rates if he is collecting more in stamp duty?

MADAM SPEAKER: With some level of sympathy to Ms Lee's point, to the question.

MR BARR: Rates need to increase to fund services—to fund the wage increases and

salary increases that we have had motions calling for, from this side of the chamber.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: That does not give you leeway for interjections, Mr Hanson.

MR BARR: Rates need to be increased to fund health, education, police, emergency services, community services, housing services, homelessness services—all of the things that this place spends most of its time debating and calling for need to be funded. Rates is one of those funding sources.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I remind people that interjections are out of order, and also to be very mindful of the scuttlebutt and the words that you use in interjections, because if they were said in debate that may be asked to be withdrawn. I just ask people to be a little bit conscious of that.

MS LEE: Treasurer, will you speed up the stamp duty reduction, given that you are still collecting more stamp revenue than when you commenced your tax reforms.

MR BARR: That is asking for an announcement of government policy in questions—

Ms Lee: No, it's not; it's already policy.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, you have asked the question.

MR BARR: You are asking whether I will speed it up. I have already announced a significant stamp duty cut in this parliamentary sitting. I will announce more in the weeks and months ahead.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, do you agree with Professor Breunig that it is unlikely that your government will abolish stamp duty by 2032?

MR BARR: No, I do not.

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, I refer to data reported under the headline “ACT school violence and safety incidents reach record high”. That report showed that ACT public school staff reported 38 incidents of occupational violence per school day and that the number of safety improvement notices tripled in the last financial year. Staff submitted 7,448 incidents of occupational violence reports through the RiskMan reporting system in 2022-23. Minister, why have occupational violence incidents in ACT schools increased by so much in the last financial year?

MS BERRY: I thank the member for his question. It definitely shows that there has been an increase in violence in our schools. There has also been an increase in violence in our community, and our schools are representative of what occurs in our

communities. Our schools do the very best they can to address what they can inside the school gates, as far as school violence is concerned. It is a complex issue, and it is influenced by a number of factors, including what happens in our community.

The growth in violence, as I said, can be attributed to what is happening in the community. We have also seen a more significant increase in the reporting of violent incidents in our schools, which we absolutely encourage; because, if we do not know what is happening in our schools, we cannot address it. Some of the issues that are being reported include things like offensive language and physical violence. That violence can occur across the board—from students, members of the community and parents as well. It also occurs across social media, emails and those kinds of events. That is one of the reasons why the ACT government is committed to a campaign to reduce violence in our schools, to ensure that members of the community understand that nobody should have to accept violence in their workplace. That is a campaign and an issue that we are absolutely concerned about and will continue to address as we move along.

There is a lot of work happening in this space; but, clearly, things are getting worse, and we need to do more. The Education Directorate and the Education Union, along with our community, will work towards making sure that our schools are safe for our teachers and school staff.

MR HANSON: Minister, how are 38 incidents of violence a day acceptable in any workplace, let alone our schools?

MS BERRY: They are not acceptable at all. That is why the ACT government has embarked on this campaign, to ensure that the community understands our expectations of our workplaces, including ACT schools. We also have an increasing number of students who have complex issues that need to be addressed; that has caused an increase in some of the incidents that have arisen and have been reported by school staff. We are all working together to try and understand and overcome these complex issues. It involves two conflicting areas—the right to a safe workplace and the right for every child, regardless of their background, to attend school. However, I am committed to ensuring that we find a way and a consensus between those two rights, so that we can meet at a place that is safe for everybody.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what investigations have you done to assess the impact of exposure to this level of violence on the children who witness literally thousands of incidents per year?

MS BERRY: I do not accept the premise of Ms Lawder's question around students witnessing this level of violence. Certainly, it is the case that it is teachers that are being exposed to this level of violence. The work that is occurring in our schools includes the implementation of the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework, which is about having a positive relationship across the board in our school communities. It works on a positive model of recognition of when things go right and addressing issues when they are not going as well as they should be. It is a complex issue, as I said, but it does not mean that we will not work as hard as we can to overcome these issues.

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, I refer to the thousands of reported incidents of occupational violence in ACT schools. As has been stated, there is a range of behaviours included in this reporting, from verbal abuse to actual physical assaults on teachers and students. Minister, of the 7,448 incidents reported, how many involved actual violence or assaults and how many of them were perpetrated on staff?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice. I do not have that level of detail with me to respond to that question today.

MR HANSON: Minister, what actions are you taking immediately and specifically to address verbal and physical assaults against teachers?

MS BERRY: I have just referred to the ACT government's campaign to call for respect of our workforce within our ACT schools and that they have as much right as anybody else to a safe and healthy work environment. I am ensuring that the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework is being rolled out across all our schools, with the majority of our public schools already implementing the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework. We are also ensuring that there are trauma-informed practices, team teaching, social and emotional learning, and restorative practices as well within our schools and, most importantly, we are ensuring that the wellbeing of our staff is assured when incidents do occur and that support from the directorate is assured should those incidents occur, as unfortunate as they are and as concerning as they are. Staff are supported. Importantly, we are working with the Education Union about what we can do better and what we can do more of to support staff within our schools.

MR PARTON: Minister, what are you doing to eliminate the harm to students who are victims of or witness to verbal and physical abuse on this level?

MS BERRY: As I have just referred to, other initiatives which I listed earlier—trauma-informed practices, team teaching, social and emotional learning, and restorative practices—are being used by our teachers and experts within our school systems, as well as within the Education Directorate, to support anybody who is impacted by violence within our schools.

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister one of the most insidious aspects of abuse and violence is the impact on those who witness it. This is particularly so when there are little or no consequences for the perpetrators of those attacks.

Minister, what is the current policy for dealing with students or parents who are responsible for these assaults, and what consequences do they face?

MS BERRY: It depends on the circumstances of those issues when they arise and how they are responded to. As I said, it is a complex issue, so each incident often stands on its own and needs a separate response. Through the process, if it involves a

student, those behaviours are reviewed and assessments occur; but, again, I would have to say that it would have to be taken on each individual occurrence, when that violence or unacceptable behaviour occurs, as to how the school would respond.

MR HANSON: Minister, is it true that in ACT public schools a teacher must get the parents' permission before a student can be suspended?

MS BERRY: Again, it would depend on the circumstance. If Mr Hanson has a particular issue that he wants to raise with my office, I would encourage him to do so. I could not give an outright answer of "yes" or "no". There would definitely need to be consultation between the school and the student's family.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how long do suspensions last? What happens when the child returns to school?

MS BERRY: Again, it is not an answer that can be provided in a simple way. These are often complex issues, and there needs to be full consultation and engagement between the family and the school to address these issues.

Transport—electric buses

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, the ACT government has signed contracts to buy 90 zero emissions buses to be housed in Woden and Tuggeranong, as well as for the construction of Woden Bus depot and the provision of high voltage electrical connections to both Woden and Tuggeranong depots. But there is not currently any contract or tender open for the procurement of the required chargers to charge these 90 electric buses. I am delighted to hear that the 90 electric buses will be delivered progressively between now and 2025. Can you tell me when the additional battery electric bus chargers are planned to be installed at Tuggeranong and Woden?

MR STEEL: The answer is before the first electric buses arrive, as part of the contract we have to purchase a further 90 electric buses, in addition to the existing 16 lease buses, which are charged through the chargers that are available at both the Belconnen depot, currently being installed, and the existing six chargers which are available at the Tuggeranong depot.

Transport Canberra is progressing with two separate procurement processes to achieve that outcome for the bus charging equipment related to Woden and Tuggeranong bus depots. Chargers being installed at the Woden depot will provide those facilities as part of a variation to the contract with the current partner for the construction of the Woden depot. Then there will also be a procurement for the chargers at Tuggeranong as well, ready for the first tranche of those buses to arrive.

MS CLAY: Minister, will any of the additional 90 electric buses be on the road before the Woden depot opens in December 2024?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Yes, it is possible that is the case. It is one of the reasons why we made a decision to retrofit Tuggeranong; so that we could, as soon as possible, have extra charging capacity at a number of depots, not

just relying on the Woden depot, which is still expected to be completed around the end of 2024.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will the new electrical connections to the Tuggeranong depot be completed?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We intend to have those complete ready for the first tranche of buses to arrive. The exact timing will be determined through the procurement process. We will go out to market and determine what the outcome is that suppliers can provide. Then we will contract that and will have the timeframe in the contract, which is similar to every other infrastructure project. The intent is to have them available to support the grid infrastructure that is being installed by Evoenergy so we can charge up to 200 electric buses at Tuggeranong and up to 100 at Woden in future.

Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, police have been quoted as being deeply concerned about the knock-on effects that the change to drugs laws may have on drug-affected driving. They further stated:

... one of the concerns I do have: is people thinking that because it is legal or decriminalised, they can get behind the wheel of a car ...

Minister, given this has resulted in tragedies in the past and police remain concerned, why has your government proceeded with these dangerous changes to drug laws?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Hanson for his question. The changes to laws governing the consumption of drugs that came into play last weekend relate to looking at the use of these particular substances from a health perspective rather than a criminal justice perspective and making sure that we can provide wraparound services for those people who need that assistance rather than finding themselves in the criminal justice system—a system which has not worked across the world. For 52 years we have had a war on drugs, and it has not worked. We have seen these particular people fall into the criminal jurisdiction when they needed the support of the health services. That is the change that we are making here—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, a point of order on relevance. The issue was the concerns raised by the Chief Police Officer about drug-driving, not the issue of removing individuals from the criminal justice system. I would ask the minister to be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: He is definitely responding to the policy content.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, we will keep an eye on any instances that occur in relation to these sorts of occurrences. The police are very active, as you would have seen on the weekend, Madam Speaker. There were a number of instances where people were charged with criminal amounts of drugs. The police do a very active job across the ACT in keeping the community safe.

MR HANSON: Minister, beyond just keeping an eye on things, what investigation or analysis has been conducted into the knock-on effects of drug-driving? Will you table any research or advice that you have received on this topic?

MR GENTLEMAN: I will ask ACT Policing and see if I can provide any more detail for the chamber.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, who will be responsible if there is any increase in drug-driving offences and tragedies following your decision to go soft on hard drugs?

MR GENTLEMAN: The perpetrators, of course, are the ones who are responsible for illegal activities, and they are the ones responsible for the accidents that we see on our roads. That is why the police take an active role in ensuring that they can keep Canberra's roads safe. They are out there every weekend and every evening ensuring that we can have safer roads across the ACT.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, in every question time I have to remind you multiple times. Can you give us a break!

Taxation—road user charges

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, the High Court's decision on a Victorian EV case was handed down the other week. In media reporting, you mentioned that the ACT government would need to examine the potential broader implications of the High Court's decision. Have any broader implications been identified by the ACT government?

MR BARR: That is bordering on asking for a legal opinion. I am not in a position to publicly advise. All I can say is that all state and territory governments are analysing any implications in relation to the decision. The one definitive statement that I can make is that it is a further blow to the states and territories in what is a very significant vertical fiscal imbalance within our Federation, and that the dissenting judges, of whom there were three—so it was a 4-3 decision—make some very compelling points.

MR BRADDOCK: The decision will likely prevent New South Wales from proceeding with its plans to introduce a road user charge in 2027—

Ms Lawder: Preamble!

MADAM SPEAKER: To the question, Mr Braddock.

MR BRADDOCK: Will this have any impacts on the ACT?

MR BARR: Again, you are asking me to speculate on government policy. I think the clearest interpretation now is that road user charging will be in the federal arena. So it will be a national scheme. There would appear to be great difficulty for the federal

government in implementing a national scheme without the support of the states and territories, because we retain most of the data and information.

I think that those who have been celebrating the High Court outcome with the view that it is going to prevent a tax on EVs will actually find that there will be a national tax quicker.

Women—ACT Women’s Plan 2016-2026

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Women. Minister, a few weeks ago you launched the women’s third action plan. Can you please update the Assembly on what is in the plan?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Orr for her question and her ongoing interest in improving the lives of women in Canberra. Some of the initiatives coming from this plan include working with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women to progress a health and wellbeing guide for women and girls in the ACT. We hear time and again that women’s experiences in health care are not good enough. Women still struggle to get accurate diagnoses, and conditions that affect women are often under-researched and not understood. Creating this health and wellbeing guide will allow women to more easily navigate the health system and lead to better outcomes for women and girls in the ACT.

The government is continuing to work on addressing the housing crisis, which also has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. The government will continue to provide support for affordable pathways to home ownership for at-risk women. We will also closely monitor the impacts of different housing initiatives on the wellbeing of women to inform future policy proposals.

These are just two examples of the great initiatives that the government will be focusing on over the next three years. I look forward to continuing my work to promote gender equality in Canberra.

MS ORR: Minister, since the first action plan in 2016, a lot has changed for women in the ACT. Why is it still important that we have a women’s plan?

MS BERRY: Ms Orr is right; a lot has changed since the commencement of the first action plan. We have reduced the gender pay gap in the ACT public service to less than one per cent. We have upgraded 39 ACT government sports pavilions to ensure that they include appropriate facilities for women and are more inclusive. We have piloted the award-winning Understanding Building and Construction Program to encourage girls to enter male-dominated industries.

Education is key in setting up our young people for success, and creating positive attitudes and understanding for gender equality, and respectful relationships at an early stage, are absolutely critical, which is why we have established a gender equality team in Education to create a future where equality is the norm.

Despite some great steps forward in the last seven years, women still feel the effects of COVID-19 more severely than men, through job losses and increased caring

responsibilities. Across our workforce, there are still significant gender disparities between industries, and gender-based violence remains a critical issue in our community. There is still more work to do, which is why the third action plan is as important now as ever.

DR PATERSON: Minister, why is it important that the government takes an intersectional approach to implementing the actions in the third action plan?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for her supplementary. Women from different backgrounds experience disadvantage differently. One of the guiding principles for the women's plan is intersectionality. First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, trans and queer women, women with disability, carers, and women from low socio-economic backgrounds all experience disadvantage in different ways.

For example, during community consultation on the fifth theme of the action plan, "Appropriate and accessible services", it became clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and women with disability still have trouble accessing services and supports.

The research also tells us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 3½ times more likely to be the victim of sexual assault than non-Indigenous women. We know that often these women do not feel safe accessing the services for sexual assault that we currently have available. As we implement the action plan, we will work closely with the community to ensure that our sexual assault services are culturally safe and trauma informed.

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