

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Friday 24 November 2023

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

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Melanie Heenan, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety,
Annette Lancy, Deputy Secretary, Children and Families,
Simon Newport, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria,
Danny O’Kelly, Deputy Secretary, Community Operations and Practice Leadership,
Argiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary, Disability Community and Emergency Management,
Raylene Harradine, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes,
Camille Kingston, Deputy Secretary, System Reform and Workforce,
Nicola Quin, Deputy Secretary, Corporate, and
Louise Perry, Deputy Secretary, Fairer Victoria Engagement and Coordination,
Sherri Bruinhout, Executive Director, Homes Victoria, and
Dannii de Kretser, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones now be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to assess what the government achieved in both financial years compared to what the government planned to achieve.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards our witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee’s website.

I welcome the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Ms McCammon – welcome – and other officials who are joining us today. I am going to ask you to make an opening statement of no more than 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from committee members. Thank you.

Peta McCAMMON: Great. Thank you. Thank you, Chair and committee, for the opportunity to present on the financial and performance outcomes for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, and pay my respects to elders, past and present.

Our department was set up in 2021 to develop and deliver policies, programs and services that support, protect and enhance the lives of all Victorians. On any given day 116,000 Victorians rely on us for housing, over 9000 children rely on us for care and we provide services for anyone who has experienced family and sexual violence. Our focus is the people in our community who are most at risk of harm or who need our services to help them live a safe and fulfilling life.

Visual presentation.

Peta McCAMMON: On this slide you can see the people and communities we serve. We recognise, though, that no person fits neatly into one box. For us, a key opportunity during our first few years as a

department has been to recognise these points of connection and opportunity and ensure that we are integrating between portfolios wherever possible for maximum benefit and effect.

We have three main objectives: children, young people and families are safe, strong and supported; all Victorians have stable, affordable and appropriate housing; and Victorian communities are safe, fair, inclusive and resilient. These objectives are at the core of our policy and operational work. We do wideranging and diverse work to achieve these, and one of the key ways in which we do this effectively is by listening to and engaging with the communities we serve.

Our goal is for every family, child and young person to be safe and secure. We aim for children to be connected to their family, culture and community, and to have access to the services and experiences that enable them to develop and thrive. Through *Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children*, we are transforming the children and families system from earlier help and intervention through to continuing care and supporting young people transitioning from care. This has been supported by an investment of \$1.2 billion in 2021–22 and an additional \$271 million in 2022–23.

The department is responsible for the delivery of statutory child protection and care services. In 2022–23 there were 128,705 reports to child protection, which led to the commencement of 39,404 child protection investigations.

The department is committed to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and families in care across Victoria and prioritising Aboriginal-led, self-determined approaches as a significant lever to do this. Reforming the children and family system is a complex task. However, we know the best outcomes for Aboriginal children and families occur when Aboriginal people lead on the design and delivery of law, policies and programs for Aboriginal children and families. Family preservation and reunification services continue to deliver evidence-based supports and Aboriginal cultural practice elements to keep children safely with their families and enable those in care to return home safely. Additionally, for all children connected to family preservation and reunification services between September 2020 and September 2022, there were 229, or 18 per cent, fewer children than expected in care compared to previous placement prevention programs. We are employing multiple strategies to grow our child protection workforce, which I will talk about shortly. We also continue to work with the sector to identify what is needed to increase earlier intervention and make services more accessible, coordinated and effective.

In January this year the Victorian government announced the implementation of all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. In particular we heard through the royal commission that an open door for support was needed. This became the Orange Door. In October 2022 the final Orange Door was opened. The Orange Door network is now operational statewide, delivering critical services to Victorians who are impacted by family violence, as well as families needing support with the wellbeing and development of their children. There are 10 primary locations in regional Victoria and eight primary locations across metropolitan Melbourne. We are also delivering early intervention programs like Baby Makes 3, which trains childbirth and parenting educators to promote healthy relationships and challenge rigid gender roles for first-time parents; co-designing projects with young people to understand affirmative consent; continuing to deliver on our commitment to a community-led, self-determined response to end family violence against Aboriginal people by boosting the Aboriginal community's initiative fund to \$2.2 million; undertaking a refuge redevelopment program to promote safety and privacy; increasing accessibility and enabling community connections; and continuing our rollout of MARAM, the multi-agency risk assessment and management framework, by training 107,000 workers to date.

We are responsible for Victoria's social housing portfolio. This includes public housing, community housing, crisis accommodation and transitional accommodation. Our two main focus areas are growing and improving social housing and increasing access for people who need housing the most. In terms of growing and improving social housing, more than 4300 new homes have been completed in the last two years through the Big Housing Build as well as our other housing programs. The Big Housing Build was announced in November 2020, and as at June 2023 more than 2800 new homes have been completed, with another 4800 under construction. In relation to increasing access for people who need housing the most, 49 per cent more victim-survivors of family violence have received long-term housing in this period and 2000 households experiencing rough sleeping were housed. The private rental assistance program was expanded to nine locations, and we started the affordable rental housing program, which has provided 201 new homes as at June 2023. While we know that stable

housing is the foundation for each person's health, wellbeing and safety, we also know that many people have complex needs and housing on its own is sometimes not enough. We are addressing this through wraparound supports in many of our programs, including from Homelessness to a Home, and through dedicated supportive housing facilities.

I would like to talk about our work to build the community services sector. We know that for all our reforms and initiatives to be effective and to support the people who need it most we must have a strong, growing and capable sector and workforce, so we have invested heavily in this area. We began consultations around regulation, with the outcome being the community services fair jobs code and *Social Services Regulation Act*; indexation, which resulted in additional indexation for around 800 community service organisations; and accessible career pathway programs, which has resulted in the Switch to Social Work program and inclusion scholarships for social work placements. We have also invested in the Jobs that Matter and Go Where You're Needed advertising campaigns to attract people to work in the community services sector. Our research indicates that more than half of the people who saw the latest Jobs that Matter campaign took action as a result of seeing it, whether that be by clicking through to learn more about the sector or applying for a role.

The numbers on the next two slides reflect our commitment to increasing community participation, inclusion and connectedness through designing, funding and delivering a range of activities, projects and programs that contribute to the communities we serve. We do this by being on the ground, bringing people together and creating the infrastructure for people to have their needs met in a way that is safe and supportive. For example, through initiatives delivered under the Victorian government's African communities action plan we have strengthened employment outcomes for over 400 jobseekers from African communities through job readiness training and supported over 2100 students of African heritage through dedicated homework clubs and school community liaison officer programs.

We aim to meet people where they are, provide what they want and need and address the challenges most pressing to them. This can range from providing meals when people are impacted by floods to festivals that celebrate communities to practical programs to improve social and economic participation. For example, we funded psychosocial recovery programs to support people after emergencies. One program saw 2570 people participate in nearly 40 events and workshops targeted to seniors, families and young people following the June 2021 storms and floods events. Following the October 2022 flood event, we worked with key partners, the Australian Red Cross and the Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry to create over 1000 connections to support impacted people. Outside of emergencies we work to make under-recognised groups more visible and empowered to support their communities. This includes the investing in women grassroots grant program, funding projects to help spark community change and improve outcomes for women and girls.

We support our on-the-ground work with action plans, legislation and equity programs. We operate as the government's engagement hub with people from under-recognised groups, including women, young people, veterans, people with disability, carers, seniors, LGBTIQ+ people and multicultural communities. For example, part of this work is our delivery of the *Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan (2022–2026)*, which is a key vehicle for driving the government's disability inclusion reform agenda. The department continues to work with the Victorian Disability Advisory Council and government departments to build momentum for the plan's implementation and showcase promising practice.

Victoria leads the nation in many of these initiatives and activities listed here, which support other jurisdictions to leverage our work to create a fairer and stronger society more broadly. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a summary of the department's activities. We welcome your questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Secretary. We are going to go straight to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, Secretary. The Commission for Children and Young People's report *Let Us Learn* revealed that as of 31 December 2022, there had been an 83 per cent increase in the number of children aged nine to 11 and a 33 per cent increase in children aged six to eight in residential care. Why is the department putting six- to 11-year-olds in residential care and not foster care if they cannot go into kinship care?

Peta McCAMMON: Thanks for your question. I will probably pick up the latter part there in that the priority obviously when a child comes into our care is first and foremost to find a kinship care placement for that child. That is not always possible. It is also a priority in terms of foster care. Again, that is not always possible for us. But when you look at the numbers, overwhelmingly our children are largely in a kinship care arrangement or a foster care arrangement, with the smallest number actually being in a residential care placement. I think that is important context for the question. In terms of the age groups that you have mentioned, often children who present are very complex, but I might ask Danny to maybe talk a little bit more about our placement and particularly that age group.

Danny O'KELLY: Thank you, Mr McGowan. Thank you, Peta. In the first instance we work really hard to try and support family preservation for kids when they are that young. But in the event that we do have to provide safety through alternatives, the work that we do most immediately is around kinship care, so family first, and the majority of kids who come into care who are in those age cohorts are in kinship care. If we cannot find kinship care, we look to home-based or foster care options. So in terms of the number of kids who are that age who are in care, the majority of those children are with kinship care, followed by foster care, followed by residential care. With kids when they are that age and they are in residential care, our work that we are doing is geared very much at doing whatever we can to support either reunification or a movement out of residential care back into a home-based care option.

Nick McGOWAN: Just on that, there has obviously been something like a 10 per cent or thereabouts decline in children in foster care, and that is obviously due to hundreds of foster carers leaving the system. Secretary, perhaps this is a better question for you and the department – the department are recommending an increase in foster care allowances. Is that one of the issues? What are the issues in us losing foster carers – us Victorians, that is?

Peta McCAMMON: Obviously foster care is a really important part of the system, and there are a number of reasons we think around the declining numbers of foster carers, including just generational type changes in the demographic. So previously you might have had foster carers that looked like a fairly traditional family unit; perhaps the woman was not working. So we have got a number of generational, demographic type changes that we think are actually driving some of our challenges in relation to foster care. We are actually working quite closely with the centre for excellence around what those policy responses look like, because we absolutely recognise the importance of – and obviously financials is one part, but it is not the only part.

Nick McGOWAN: Has the department done or are you doing any – or perhaps with the centre you are doing it. But are you doing any analysis of those that have left – particularly I am talking about foster but also kinship care and the barriers to people taking that up as opposed to people leaving foster, so on both those sides – to try and understand how to stem the loss on both ends?

Peta McCAMMON: Yes. So we work really closely with the sector and the peaks, and they provide us a lot of intelligence about the experiences of foster and kinship carers. In terms of whether we have got anything more specific, I am not sure, but engagement with those agencies and peaks is a really important source of information, and we will continue to work really closely with them about what are some of those challenges around attracting and retaining for the foster carers.

Nick McGOWAN: I suppose what I am wanting to hear really is – if I was the Secretary I would want to know, because this is clearly a problem, right? It has been a problem ever since we were in government last time. We had the same issues, we are talking about the same problems and no-one has got a solution. And you would want to quantify how we fix it, because we cannot keep going on this path where we are farming out kids to residential care. We all know the problems of residential care; it is pretty bad.

So on that – residential care, six- to 11-year-olds: do we know whether there are any being housed with kids that are older than six-to-11, or are they a six-to-11 cohort only?

Danny O'KELLY: I mean, the population cohort in residential care is probably changing today.

Nick McGOWAN: Daily, yes. There are not specific units for six- to 11-year-olds versus the older cohort?

Danny O'KELLY: No.

Nick McGOWAN: So you would have a six-year-old with a 17-year-old child who has been –

Danny O’KELLY: That is highly unlikely, because there is an assessment process that placement teams will be going through around the appropriateness of a placement. The only scenario where that might happen is if we have a sibling group, where we would prioritise not separating a sibling group.

Nick McGOWAN: But that could happen commonly. From my observation of the system that is not infrequent.

Danny O’KELLY: A six-year-old with a 17-year-old?

Nick McGOWAN: No, siblings.

Danny O’KELLY: Siblings.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes.

Danny O’KELLY: We would do everything we can to keep a sibling group together.

Nick McGOWAN: That could be with other sibling groups, correct? That would in fact be logical. So you would have two lots of sibling groups and two different families. You might have siblings housed together.

Danny O’KELLY: From two different families?

Nick McGOWAN: Yes.

Danny O’KELLY: I would not think that that was common. I certainly cannot think of a circumstance where that has happened.

Nick McGOWAN: Is the department able to come back to us and give us a snapshot – so take today, for example – of those who are actually in residential care at the moment and just give us an idea of what that looks like today?

Danny O’KELLY: In terms of an age breakdown, we can, yes. Yes, we can.

Nick McGOWAN: And how many units are there in total across the state?

Danny O’KELLY: We can tell you there are over 100 units. We have got I think it is 480-odd beds that are funded – and apologies, Mr McGowan, I should know the numbers off the top of my head, because we are working in them every day, but we can provide you with that breakdown.

Nick McGOWAN: Well, like you say, it changes. Do you know how many six-year-olds are currently in residential care as of today, let us say, or the last you were aware of?

Danny O’KELLY: We can take that on notice, Mr McGowan.

Nick McGOWAN: You will take that on notice – okay. The same for eight-year-olds and 11-year-olds, if we could?

Secretary, perhaps a question for you. The DFFH questionnaire, page 64, lists emergency hotel accommodation as a reason for additional funding being required under the child protection budget lines. Do you know how much was spent on emergency hotel accommodation during 2021–23, the last two years?

Peta McCAMMON: I do not have that with me today. I will have to take that on notice.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. And do you know in what circumstances they might be using emergency hotel accommodation? Is that someone at 1 in the morning and you cannot get residential care? I am imagining there are a number of scenarios.

Danny O’KELLY: Yes, it is that type of scenario. So what we try and do is work, particularly in the after hours space, to ensure that we have got some capacity in either the home-based care or the residential care

sector, and after hours are aware of what that looks like. But there may be circumstances where the immediate safety of the child is the focus of the team, so it would mean they might use a hotel for that night until alternatives are worked up the next day. On occasion it might be more than a day while we work out what we put in place, but it is based on an emergency circumstance more than anything else.

Nick McGOWAN: Can you tell us how many – sorry.

Peta McCAMMON: And I think it is worth clarifying, there are supports that are provided, you know.

Danny O’KELLY: Yes, so there are obviously staff with anyone who is in a hotel overnight.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes. Can you tell me how many children under child protection spent a night in a hotel room in the last two years, for the reporting periods we are looking at?

Danny O’KELLY: I would have to take that on notice.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay, if you could, that would be very useful. It seems like an innocent question: but what do we do with infants? Is it a one-on-one scenario? Do you have somebody that is tasked, literally with children that young, to be looking after them from the get-go? Do they go into a hotel, do they go into residential care? What is the –

Danny O’KELLY: We do not usually have as much of a challenge identifying a home-based carer for an infant, even in an emergency situation, so usually we are able to provide home-based care for infants almost immediately in most circumstances. But they would be with the child protection staff until we were able to identify home-based care. If there was a removal that needed to happen, they would be with our staff, who are obviously trained, until we could identify a home-based carer who could take care of that infant.

Nick McGOWAN: Are you able to shed any light for the reporting periods – both of them – on how many children you were required to intervene with, and/or when you take them away for kin, residential or foster care, whether it has required for a visit to a doctor or a hospital prior to them actually moving on to the next stage?

Danny O’KELLY: Immediately at that point, or –

Nick McGOWAN: Correct. Before they even get past the first step, they have to go off to the doctor and the hospital first.

Danny O’KELLY: We would probably have to take that on notice, in terms of that level of detail, Mr McGowan.

Nick McGOWAN: That would be great, thank you. Secretary, I would like to refer you to page 216, budget paper 3, 2022–23. The average waiting time for public rental housing for clients who have received priority access housing or priority transfer location due to family violence has now blown out to some 17 months – I think you alluded to that in part of your presentation today. That is 17 months, 2021–22 and 24 months in 2022–23. If 24 months is the average waiting time, what are the longest waiting times being experienced by family violence victims?

Peta McCAMMON: I do not have that data point, but I think it is probably important for the committee that, obviously, social housing is one very important option for the majority of women who are fleeing family violence, but it is not the only option that we provide. As I said in my slides, notwithstanding the wait times, we are actually allocating more housing than ever before to people on the priority list for family violence. But I might ask Mel, who is the deputy of family violence, in terms of what those other options are, because a really important option is actually keeping women safe at home. So if maybe Mel could give a bit of detail for the committee?

Melanie HEENAN: Absolutely. Thanks, Secretary. If we cast back to when women would be first fleeing family violence, there are a range of options that they would have available to come into the system. So there is obviously Safe Steps, which is the 24/7 crisis response across Victoria that is available for family violence victims to contact, as I say, 24/7 to be able to access those kinds of emergency accommodation options. The Orange Doors, of which there are now 18 across the state, are also a really important entry point, where at that

point if there is a need for emergency accommodation because risk is assessed to be at that rate or at that level, then there are those types of risk assessments that are undertaken and the triaging I guess around the best possible option for that woman and their family.

Nick McGOWAN: I suppose – sorry to interrupt you – but I get all that, right. But this is not new to any of us, and you guys have been doing this for a long time, so you can anticipate where there is going to be growth in family violence because of increased reporting, and there is a lot of that there in the last couple of years, we can see that too – but you anticipated that. So my point is, with these sorts of lists where the median waiting time is 24 months – much less the extreme of that, whatever that looks like – and if we could come back to that figure, that would be great, because I think we need to understand what it looks like –

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, if we have it.

Nick McGOWAN: But surely anticipating that is my point. What are we not doing? What is it that you need from government? Is it more money for more houses?

Peta McCAMMON: I mean, obviously wait times are a product of demand and supply, and –

Nick McGOWAN: And that is infrastructure for you, right? And people to man it.

Peta McCAMMON: I think it is a product of demand and supply. Obviously we have investment and we are working as hard as we can to translate that to as many homes that are fit for purpose as possible. But I think in that wait time, supply is also – I mean, it is a really crude way of looking at it, but keeping women at home. There is investment in terms of what that looks like, and for a lot of women that is preferred. They do not have to move their children out of schools, they are within their local community, so –

Nick McGOWAN: And these waitlists are not for women who want to stay in that environment with the alleged offender?

Peta McCAMMON: There might be different things that we can actually do around keeping a woman at home yet still safe from the perpetrator.

Melanie HEENAN: I might be able to assist.

Nick McGOWAN: Do we do any of the reverse? Do we remove the perpetrator and put them somewhere else, so that the female – it is not always the female, I accept, but broadly speaking –

Melanie HEENAN: But the majority, yes.

Nick McGOWAN: Is that ever looked at or ever contemplated?

Melanie HEENAN: Yes, absolutely. There are those options. It is often the case that women and children need to leave, given the circumstances, but there certainly are, as part of a suite of responses to perpetrators, initiatives that will enable the perpetrator to be removed from the home, and case management support, I guess, for both the victim-survivor and for the perpetrator to start addressing their violent behaviour. But I should also say where there are long waiting times – and we appreciate the question, Mr McGowan, but I guess the other aspect of that is that women can also be accessing services during those times. Whilst there might be a wait for a housing option or a private rental assistance option, there is –

Nick McGOWAN: I know, but if you are coming home to that every night, that does not help them very much, does it? I think what I am hearing is you just need more money for more houses and more staff to house more people. Is that it, at its simplest form?

Peta McCAMMON: As I said –

Nick McGOWAN: I am oversimplifying it terribly, but –

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, I mean, as I said, wait times are a product of how many people need a service and what we have, and we do our best locally to, within that, prioritise those in the most need. But as we were saying, it is not that then there are not other supports and a proper risk assessment that sits around –

notwithstanding people waiting for, potentially, a house, that they are not getting other things from us to keep them safe.

Nick McGOWAN: And this sounds gratuitous, but there was some suggestion recently that women were being offered tents of some sort. Is that correct?

Melanie HEENAN: That is not correct. I am aware of the matter you are referring to, and I cannot comment on the particular circumstances of –

Nick McGOWAN: But it is not the department's policy ever at any point to offer a tent, notwithstanding how magnificent that tent may or may not be –

Melanie HEENAN: That would not be offered. A tent would not be offered as emergency accommodation.

Nick McGOWAN: Caravans?

Melanie HEENAN: Not to my knowledge, so the answer to that would be no. I know, Mr McGowan, you are talking about people, and women in particular, perhaps, who have been waiting for housing for some time, but the crisis response model that was introduced in August, in fact in this calendar year, would look at a range of options but particularly motel options where necessary, I guess, where refuges are not an option, that have got case management support around those victim-survivors as well. As the Secretary is saying, there would not be a time where it is impossible for risk to be reassessed, understanding that risk can shift. It is dynamic, often. There would be opportunities for women, if they were concerned about safety after having those supports put in place, to come and reconnect with their case management and have risk assessed again. There are other safety initiatives that can also be placed around her and the home itself to help her to feel safe in her own home.

Nick McGOWAN: I know this is a complex area and there are many drivers, but to the extent that you have investigated it, is the lack of social housing impacting the waiting times for family violence victims? Is there a relationship between the two that you have observed or that you have actually studied – the lack of social housing?

Peta McCAMMON: In terms of whether that is impacting on incidents of family violence, I do not know whether we have got evidence about the correlation in relation to that.

Nick McGOWAN: There were some 73 child death notifications to the commissioner for children and young people over the last two years, 2021–22 and 2022–23, and it is of young children who had died within 12 months of their last involvement with child protection. I am sure you are only too painfully aware of these details. Have you had the opportunity to look at your own systems and to see where you might improve those, where there were failings, where there were successes? Maybe there were successes too, right? We always look at the failings. Successes tell us the other half of the coin, right?

Peta McCAMMON: Obviously any child or young person's death is absolutely tragic, and when it is somebody known to us I know my staff feel it very keenly. But what I would say is where there is a death of a child within 12 months, as you have said, the CCYP do a child death inquiry, and we participate in those inquiries. As you said, as part of those inquiries on occasions they will find good practice, and she acknowledged that in her latest annual report. But there will be also cases where she makes findings or areas where we can improve, and in those cases we accept those recommendations.

Nick McGOWAN: Are there a couple that stand out to you in terms of lessons learned from those cohorts or ones that are top of mind for you as Secretary?

Peta McCAMMON: I think consistent with what the commissioner has said around engagement with other services in terms of referrals once we determine that they are no longer within child protection, some of the areas where she did acknowledge good practice were that in our safer framework, which is our risk assessment, we now actively have the voice of the child in there. There are lots of opportunities through the report for us to look at what are those issues that are perhaps isolated but also what are those issues where we absolutely need to look at system improvements. As I said, we accept those recommendations and look to implement them.

Nick McGOWAN: It is a nice follow-on. There were a number of recommendations, 28 recommendations. There were like 41 inquiries in total – insurmountable in number. Does the department track those recommendations against implementation?

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, we do.

Nick McGOWAN: Is that publicly available, or can we perhaps see that?

Peta McCAMMON: My understanding is that the commissioner is going to start reporting that publicly, I think. Is that right?

Annette LANCY: Mr McGowan, if you are referring to the systemic inquiries where the CCYP typically looks at issues, sometimes from child death inquiries they see a theme emerging. For the four most significant of those that were completed over the last few years, we both track those recommendations and meet with the CCYP regularly and formally update them at the end of each financial year as to progress the department has made, and the CCYP publishes on their website what the department for each recommendation has advised as an update. Then also in that public reporting, people can see the commission's commentary and assessment on our assessment of our progress, and that is all publicly available on the commission's website.

Nick McGOWAN: Secretary, do you know whether there has been a net gain in social housing figures allocated to family violence across the periods? We can come back to it.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr McGowan, your time is up. I am going to go straight to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Secretary and officials. Secretary, I would like to ask you about veterans. I note that page 14 of the questionnaire discusses the \$6 million which has been provided over a two-year period to support Victorian veterans. I understand that a part of this funding was to deliver the first ex-service organisation or ESO summit, which was in August 2022. Can you please outline what this summit was and what it achieved?

Peta McCAMMON: Sure. I might call on – she has managed to sit right at the back of the room – my colleague Lou. I do not know whether you were able to hear the question, Lou, around the veterans portfolio.

Louise PERRY: No, I was not.

Michael GALEA: No worries. Hi there, Ms Perry. The question was in the veterans space. I understand that the first ESO summit was held in August of 2022. I am seeking some information about what that involved and what the outcomes of the summit were.

Louise PERRY: Great. Thank you so much for the question. I will just go through my notes, if that is all right, and right myself.

Michael GALEA: Sure.

Louise PERRY: In terms of the veterans portfolio in general, I might just give you a bit of context and then see what I have got on the ESO summit itself. So the office of veterans really delivers on government priorities that are designed to support Victorian veterans and their families and recognise and thank them for the significant contribution to the state and indeed the nation that they have made. We have got a number of programs that we deliver, including the ESO summit, like the Victorian veterans card and like the enriching students Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize that we do. We do a lot of work with the war memorials and the avenues of honour, we operate funding and do operational funding and support of the Shrine of Remembrance and of course we have got a big recognition of prior learning program as well. The \$6 million that you are referring to was funded – sorry, where was it on the budget paper?

Michael GALEA: I was referring to the questionnaire, page 14.

Louise PERRY: Right, page 14. Okay, great. I just have not got that right in front of me. So 250 people attended the ESO summit, which was really designed to bring together veteran organisations to collaborate and work towards veteran outcomes. It was a really successful summit. It was led by the Minister for Veterans at

the time. We had great stakeholder feedback on it, and certainly we will be looking at running something like that in the future.

Michael GALEA: Terrific. I would also like to ask about – perhaps to you as well, Ms Perry, still in the same veteran space – the RSL Active program. I had the opportunity to actually meet with a bunch of the people that took part in that earlier this year – which was really, really great to be part of – and see what they get out of it. It is basically providing more support for veterans to actually engage in various sporting or other recreational activities. Can you talk to me about this program? This is referenced in the 2022–23 state budget, budget paper 3, page 51, and is outlined in there. Can you please talk to us about what that program has delivered in the two-year period in which we are looking?

Louise PERRY: Yes, absolutely. Just give me one second. The RSL Active program, as you have touched on, really provides a way for veterans to connect with other veterans and to develop social networks. It gives them an opportunity to share ideas, to tell stories and to enhance support circles and improve physical and mental health. The uptake of the RSL Active program has steadily increased, which is fantastic, and participating RSL sub-branches run varied activities on a regular basis as part of the program, so everything from yoga, to cycling, to golf and to croquet. We are finding that it is an incredibly well-attended program. What we saw with the funding of the RSL Active program, particularly in the 2022–23 budget, was that it really supported the continuation and expansion of the program to those additional sub-branches, so we were able to move out further. As you know, the program aims to reduce social isolation and improve veterans' mental health, which we see over and over again is a key part of the support that we provide.

Michael GALEA: Terrific. Can I ask for some of the, perhaps, examples or in broader terms what the outcomes you have seen from this program are?

Louise PERRY: I have not got any outcomes in front of me, but I am super happy to take that on notice and supply you with them.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Just in the veterans space as well, the same budget paper, page 50, refers to support for veterans infrastructure. Can you please talk to me about what has been delivered in the infrastructure space for veterans in Victoria over the two-year period?

Louise PERRY: Yes, absolutely. Across 2021–22 and 2022–23 the department spent \$1.77 million on supporting veteran infrastructure. The first component of that was around the National Vietnam Veterans Museum. The Victorian government made a commitment, as you would know, on 18 August 2022 to provide \$10 million to assist the National Vietnam Veterans Museum's relocation on Phillip Island. That investment will support the museum in constructing a purpose-built space to honour Vietnam veterans. The veterans capital works grants program was another component of that funding. That program upgrades facilities belonging to ex-service organisations, and in 2021–22, \$688,000 was allocated to 24 projects. In 2022–23 the state budget committed \$2.8 million over two years to continue what is called the veterans capital works grant program and support building improvements for ESOs, or ex-service organisations, delivering services to veterans and their families. In 2022–23 we had \$977,000 allocated to another 31 projects, and all those projects have been incredibly well received by the veteran communities and the ESOs that support them.

Michael GALEA: Terrific. Based on what you are saying as well, it sounds like there is a spread between venues in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. Is that correct?

Louise PERRY: Yes.

Michael GALEA: Terrific. Thank you, Ms Perry. I will go back to you, Secretary – to the equality space. I understand that the same budget paper, page 39, discusses Victoria's 10-year pride strategy, *Pride in Our Future*. Could you please talk to me about what has been achieved through this strategy in the same two-year period which we are looking at today?

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, sure. I am going to call on Lou on that one. Just while she finds her notes, obviously it is a strategy we are really proud of and one that reflects a lot of work across the whole of government in terms of the commitments to equality. Lou, do you want to provide the committee with some more detail?

Louise PERRY: Yes, super happy to do that. Thank you so much for the question. In February 2022 the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing released what was a landmark long-term plan for LGBTIQ+ equality, as you say, called *Pride in Our Future*. The department is leading the whole-of-government implementation of the strategy, and that includes a focus on ensuring that services across Victoria are equitable, ensuring that those services are inclusive and ensuring that they are accessible to really drive equality for our LGBTIQ+ communities. In the 2021–22 state budget the government provided \$6.5 million over four years for the delivery of this strategy. That included \$5.2 million for the equality portfolio, and critically, \$1.3 million through the health portfolio. So that investment of \$6.5 million, just to break it down for you a little bit, was \$2 million to deliver statewide training and resources, \$1.3 million to support the health and the wellbeing of people with an intersex variation, \$2 million to support the government's trans and gender-diverse peer support program and \$1.2 million to roll out a couple of awareness-raising campaigns.

Now, the 2022–23 state budget went further and invested \$14.7 million over four years to implement the strategy. It helped us deliver a statewide LGBTIQ+ celebration called Victoria's Pride, which is an amazing event; trial safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ young people, particularly in western Victoria; and establish a dedicated LGBTIQ+ legal service. Since its launch last year, to go to the specifics of your question, achievements under the strategy include delivering the inaugural street party, Melbourne Pride, which we did in February last year, so that marked over 40 years since Parliament decriminalised sex between men in Victoria; supporting LGBTIQ+ celebrations across the state, so that included the annual LGBTIQ+ Victoria's Pride event, which was held on 12 February this year, and that attracted more than 49,000 attendees, so that was really significant; and continuing to remove discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people in Victorian laws by supporting the Attorney-General's portfolio with recent key legislative reforms, including the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*, as well as amendments to the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*.

We officially opened the Victorian Pride Centre, which you would remember, in July 2021. That is Australia's first specifically LGBTIQ+ community hub. We have supported the health and wellbeing of trans and gender-diverse Victorians to provide critical peer support. We have implemented the LGBTIQ+ grants program. That comprises the LGBTIQ+ organisational grants program and leadership program to support organisations and individuals to really grow and sustain their crucial work. We are looking to mainstream this sector which has now really matured, delivering the Pride Events and Festivals Fund to support the delivery of events and festivals that celebrate our LGBTIQ+ communities and promote inclusion and diversity across Victoria.

Lastly but by no means least, we are delivering the Rainbow Ready road map, which includes a set of best practice case studies, includes training modules and also includes a toolkit that is designed to improve LGBTIQ+ inclusion specifically in rural and regional communities here in Victoria to provide safe and welcoming environments for LGBTIQ+ people wherever they are from across Victoria. So that is just a bit of a snapshot of some of the things that we have delivered as part of that strategy.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. I know you said in July 2021 the Pride Centre opened, and actually it is obviously within the scope but feels like it was such a long time ago as well.

Louise PERRY: It does.

Michael GALEA: So it was kind of surprising to realise that it actually was in this period, and I have had the chance to visit a few times, especially recently as well, and Justine Dalla Riva does an outstanding job running that centre. It has been great to see it so well used by all sorts of different community groups, big and small. Has the department formed a view on how it has been taken up, the usage of that centre, and has it exceeded those expectations?

Louise PERRY: Thank you so much for the question. The Victorian Pride Centre has been incredibly well utilised to date. As I say, it is the first of its kind in Australia. The centre is now home to a really broad range of major LGBTIQ+ organisations. So we have got Switchboard Victoria there, we have got Koorie Pride Victoria, Thorne Harbour, Minus18, Australian Queer Archives, Melbourne Queer Film Festival, Transgender Victoria, the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council and Star Health. It is also being used as a dedicated and inclusive space for the provision of health services, and as I just referenced earlier, it has also become home to a new specialist legal service, which is called Q+ Law. That is a statewide legal service that is designed to meet the unique needs of the community and has seen terrific take-up so far. So yes, it is a busy and lively place.

Michael GALEA: It is quite a stunning building as well, I have got to say.

Louise PERRY: It is a beautiful place as well.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned a few things in there I would probably like to pick up on, but in terms of general services, and I would say the Pride Centre is obviously one of them, in terms of things that have been implemented as part of the strategy that you have spoken about, specifically those that are designed to protect the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people and ensure that they have equitable access to the services as well as justice services – you mentioned Q+ Law being based in the Pride Centre – are there any other initiatives that have been undertaken in this scope period?

Louise PERRY: In the Pride Centre specifically or just generally in relation to equality and anti-vilification and those?

Michael GALEA: In the general equality space.

Louise PERRY: Yes, absolutely. I might go first to vilification and discrimination, if that is all right, and then talk more about equality. I think the first thing that I would like to say on the record is that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is committed to safety and equality for all LGBTIQ+ Victorians. While equality in Victoria is not negotiable and the department continues to support trans and gender-diverse communities to uphold their rights and dignity that is equal to that for all Victorians, we have talked a little bit about the 10-year road map that is part of equality across our state, and what we have seen is a commitment to strengthen anti-vilification protections to better prevent and address hate speech and conduct. The Department of Justice and Community Safety of course is leading on those reforms, but we are supporting them, and they have been seeking views from Victorians on how to change the law to better prevent and address vilification. I think the public consultation process on that closed on Engage Victoria on 16 October. So I think we will see some movement in that space.

We regularly consult with LGBTIQ+ communities across Victoria, including through our LGBTIQ+ taskforce and associated working groups. In August this year the Minister for Equality hosted a round table at the Pride Centre with community members and other stakeholders that really focused on safety concerns in the context of the rise in vilification. The event aimed to provide stakeholders, I think, the opportunity to discuss emerging issues that they were feeling in relation to community safety, particularly given the challenges and threats that they were experiencing for trans and gender-diverse communities and help to identify areas of vulnerability and ongoing concerns in that space – so lots of work happening in that space.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Again, another thing that you mentioned that feels like it was a long time ago, and perhaps should have been a bit longer ago, was the banning of conversion therapy within the scope period. That is another big achievement for the community, I know. We have spoken about the Pride Centre a bit. Fantastic though it is, we know that there are lots of LGBTIQ+ Victorians in outer suburban places like where I am – regional areas too – and I believe you mentioned western Victoria briefly before. Can you talk to me about areas like that and some of the safe spaces that have been provided for communities that are not perhaps within the tram tracks?

Louise PERRY: I can, yes. In terms of a regional presence, the department supports a variety of programs in regional Victoria through both its funding programs and its strategic funding commitment. These programs are designed to celebrate but also promote inclusion of Victoria's LGBTIQ+ communities, really focusing in on priority area 4 of the government's strategies in creating safe, strong and sustainable communities. Two of those funding programs and commitments are the Bendigo Queer Arts Festival and the regional activation program component of Victoria's Pride, which is delivered by Midsumma. That gives you an example I think of some of the events and festivals. We have also got the Pride regional activation program. That is \$1.7 million annually from the 2022–23 state budget that delivers Victoria's Pride. It builds on the inaugural Melbourne Pride that was delivered, and that we talked about earlier, in February 2022. The introduction of that program directly facilitated activities in regional areas in the lead-up to the 2023 Victoria's Pride Street Party, and funding of \$15,000 was awarded to projects that were led by organisations that are based in regional Victoria in particular. The regional projects that were selected included: Queer-ways mapping; queer history in Geelong, Ballarat and Shepparton; Wangaratta Pride Fair Day; and Gippsland hosting a festival and workshop series for LGBTIQ+ people who are deaf. So there is lots of work happening in the regional and rural space.

Michael GALEA: Terrific. Another aspect obviously of a policy focus I know that has happened is across ageing Victorians who are LGBTIQ+. I know a colleague of mine on a local committee that I served with before I came into Parliament was going into aged care and was very concerned that he might have to go back into the closet, which is a concern that a lot of elderly LGBTIQ+ people do have to deal with. Fortunately, the centre he was going into in the Cranbourne area was fantastic and that did not become an issue at all, which was really, really great to see. But I know for many people that is still a challenge. So can you please talk to me about what is being done in this space specifically so that people in this situation do not have to go back into the closet.

Louise PERRY: Yes, absolutely. Give me one minute here. In terms of pride in ageing – are you talking about that aspect of the strategy specifically?

Michael GALEA: Pride in ageing fundamentally, yes.

Louise PERRY: As you know, pride in ageing is a really, really big part of the work that we do here. We are doing a number of pieces of work. One of our focus areas is for LGBTIQ+ members of the seniors community who find themselves in aged care. What does that look like for them? Making sure that they can be housed together and making sure that aged care has an understanding of their needs is a really big focus area for us. There are a number of measures that we use in that space as well. In addition to the –

The CHAIR: Apologies.

Michael GALEA: Thanks, Ms Perry. Thanks, Secretary.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Galea. We are going to go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: No.

Nick McGOWAN: Me.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: That is okay. Just following up from earlier, if you could come back to us in terms of the Commission for Children and Young People, their 41 inquiries and their 28 recommendations – on the recommendations the department believe have been fully implemented and the ones that have not – that would be great.

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, sure.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much for that. Likewise, I think we ended the last session on trying to understand the net gain in social housing allocated to family violence across the period. Do you have any picture of that or what that looks like?

Peta McCAMMON: When you say net gain, as far as I am aware, we do not allocate properties for family violence survivors, but we have numbers about, of people who identify that as a priority, how many have been housed.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, it is more the latter.

Peta McCAMMON: Do you have that, Simon?

Simon NEWPORT: In terms of the allocations for last year, 1132 people or households were housed from that priority cohort.

Nick McGOWAN: People or households?

Simon NEWPORT: It will be registrations, so that could be one person or a family. So it will be households, and that represents a 49 per cent increase from the year before. To speak to the demand, I do not have the exact figure on me, but at least 4000 additional registrations or applications were made during the last 12 months. So that does show that it is, unfortunately, a demand-driven factor at the moment.

Nick McGOWAN: In terms of operating assumptions for the department, are you doing work that looks forward from the last two periods of planning in terms of when you anticipate there will be a reduction in wait times for family violence victims?

Peta McCAMMON: In terms of the wait times I do not know whether we have anything specific, but it is an area particularly where I think Family Safety Victoria are starting to see the numbers actually plateau. Obviously with the royal commission what we would have expected, which we did see, was a greater awareness of family violence. So we get a greater level of reporting that comes through, which is actually a positive thing. Now we are starting to see a little bit of a plateau and starting to build that evidence base around when we expect that we might start to see some reductions in those numbers. That is our primary area of focus, and then that obviously will trickle down as to what that means in terms of a whole range of services including housing. But I do not know whether there is anything to add to that, Mel.

Melanie HEENAN: Not specifically to the heart of what you are asking, Mr McGowan, but there are other crisis accommodation properties, small in number, that are designated for family violence victims as well. So it is part of, I guess, a suite or a number of options that are available for accommodation, including emergency accommodation, for women and children fleeing family violence. There are six, as I understand it, additional crisis properties that have been funded, so they will be part of that.

Nick McGOWAN: Six additional from when, sorry?

Melanie HEENAN: Six additional properties that have been funded out of the 2022–23 budget. That is in addition to the refuge redevelopment project.

Nick McGOWAN: Are you able to give us a picture of or take on notice the suite of options that you have when you sit there and you look and you plan – do you use hotel rooms for family violence victims as well?

Melanie HEENAN: Yes, we do. I can give you a bit of a picture of that suite now if you would like, but it is not at the social housing end I guess in terms of that longer-term option.

Nick McGOWAN: I suppose what I am looking at and what I am interested in is: as the Secretary sits there, she is trying to manage all this and she knows the demand on the waitlist is over here and that is what she has got to put them in – you are trying to plan operationally every day going forward and trying to anticipate movement which is very difficult.

Melanie HEENAN: Post a motel option, which of course is not ideal, and if risk is assessed at a certain level, then there could be a placement at a core and cluster refuge. Again, that is very early on in the piece, but it is those core and cluster refuges and the kind of redevelopment of the communal approach, which was a pretty institutionalised approach. The royal commission was absolutely steadfast in its views that there needed to be a much more modernised system of refuges available to women and kids. When women and kids are in the context of core and cluster models, they have got access to all manner of services including connections with homelessness and housing services, so that starts them on that road in terms of being able to make those connections with what could be exit pathways. There is huge demand, and that is partly what we are talking about here. But there are real opportunities for there to be those needs assessed in relation to longer term housing – even shorter term to medium term housing options – and the refuge redevelopment project is but part of that equation. But the crisis accommodation properties are, though small in number, still important. There are partnerships that we have with community organisations such as McAuley community services, Berry Street and Good Samaritan Inn that also have transitional accommodation to assist victim-survivors of family violence.

Nick McGOWAN: Would you mind providing a list of those providers and what they provide to the department?

Melanie HEENAN: Absolutely. I can give you a sense of that now, but if you would rather move on, that is fine.

Nick McGOWAN: Only because I have such limited time – unless the Chair is willing to give me a couple of hours. That is probably not going to happen. We had the police commissioner here the other day, Secretary. I was saying to him I am getting exasperated with our failure to protect women and girls in particular, and I am

sure everyone else here is – you probably more than I am. Ankle bracelets and such are an extreme method and methodology, but I am sick of the proportionate response. It does not seem to be working. We still seem to be killing women and children, girls, with some regularity in this country and elsewhere. You have got a wealth of knowledge from what you are having to deal with. Is there any advice that you can share with us that you are giving to government in terms of ‘this is what we need to do to confirm what is going on’?

Peta McCAMMON: I guess, going back to what I said in the presentation, obviously the Orange Door has been a really important part of the new system, but also the MARAM framework, in terms of providing not just to specialist family violence providers but to the entire system an uplift in an understanding of family violence and an ability to identify risk.

Nick McGOWAN: Just with the Orange Door, I had heard anecdotally that they are finding it difficult to get people into housing. Is that your experience too at the moment?

Peta McCAMMON: In terms of women, yes. I think we have talked about that. That is obviously an area where we have longer wait times. You were talking before about how we manage the day-to-day. I mean, our system is one that manages based on good risk assessment, and it is a dynamic risk assessment. That uplift in capability and the work around MARAM – as I said, over 100,000 people are trained in MARAM, so that is 100,000 people who have an ability to identify family violence and to assist women in terms of getting assistance – is a really outstanding piece of reform for the system. I might get Mel, though, to talk a little bit more about I think what you have identified, in one option that is being presented around the ankle bracelets, which is really high-risk perpetrators. What the royal commission told us as well is that we do need to build our evidence base around which perpetrator programs are the most effective. But I do not know whether, Mel, you want to talk a bit more about the high-risk end perpetrators.

Nick McGOWAN: I am particularly interested in what advice you are giving or would give that we are not yet looking at, based on the last reporting periods, your experiences there, and what you think we should be doing. If there are specific examples, I suppose I am most interested in that.

Melanie HEENAN: Sure. I will definitely speak with you, Mr McGowan, about the serious risk pilot, which I think goes to the heart of those issues. If I may also just call out the central information point – I am not sure whether you have learned a little bit about that – it is definitely the first of its kind in Australia if not the world. I know that sounds very pious, but we believe it may well be the first time that there is a co-location of workers that become part of the workforce at the central information point. So these are workers from Victoria Police, Magistrates’ Court Victoria, Corrections Victoria, and they are able to put together reports on risk of a particular perpetrator very, very quickly. They might get those requests from Orange Doors where they are very concerned about the risk they are hearing about from the victim-survivor. They may receive that call from Safe Steps or from the men’s referral service or from the RAMPs, the risk assessment management panels. Those services have the opportunity to seek those reports very quickly from the central information point, and the central information point was able to provide something like I think in excess of 4500 reports over the last year. That is an incredibly nimble approach, to be able to pull that level of information from all of those various systems – literally from Victoria Police systems, from corrections systems. All of those CIP workers have access to those respective systems to be able to compile a report that can really give a sense of what the perpetrator’s risk might be, and I think that is groundbreaking. In terms of the perpetrator programs, again it is a suite of interventions that might be offered through behaviour change programs. You will have heard about men’s behaviour change programs in other particular responses, but I will take you to the serious risk pilot that has been funded. That is beginning – in fact, there are going to be three pilots, and they focus on perpetrators that have been identified as at particularly high risk of committing –

Nick McGOWAN: How many are we talking? How many are identified?

Melanie HEENAN: Sorry, how many people will be worked with? I think it is 32 victim-survivors and adults using violence, but this is a pilot program.

Nick McGOWAN: Sorry, did you say 32 survivors or 32 –

Melanie HEENAN: Thirty-two victim-survivors and adults using – sorry, so, it would be 32 perpetrators and their family members, because with men’s behaviour change programs, and obviously in this context, the work will always happen with the people that are affected by the violence as well, so women and children.

Nick McGOWAN: Is that rural areas as well or just metro to start with?

Melanie HEENAN: The first pilot has been set up in the Bayside Peninsula area, the second in the Barwon area, and the third is an Aboriginal-led pilot, in fact, with Dardi Munwurro, so that will commence I think soon into next year. They are going to be really important pilots, and perhaps most important of all in some ways is what we will learn about it, because there will be an independent evaluation that is undertaken so that we can really see the extent to which this intensive case management approach from multiple different service agencies is able to really reduce that risk.

Nick McGOWAN: I wish we had all day to keep talking on this, but unfortunately I will have to just come and see you professionally later on and ask for a brief.

Secretary, to change subjects, you might be able to help me: this 12,000 figure for new social and affordable homes, I know you are probably sick of hearing it, like I am. We are trying to understand, of the 12,000, notwithstanding that they might call it 'new' when you demolish one and build one, what is your understanding of those 12,000 will actually be a net increase – that is, not a tower that we have smashed down and built back up to the same number?

Peta McCAMMON: I will make a start, and then Simon is much more across the numbers. When you say 12,000, you are obviously referring to the Big Housing Build.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes.

Peta McCAMMON: The 12,000 will be new properties. In terms of the net number year on year –

Nick McGOWAN: Net gain. Of the 12,000, net gain. If you are operating a hotel and you have got 12,000 rooms and you smash down the 12,000, there are no new. What is new of this lot?

Peta McCAMMON: They will be new, and then there are –

Nick McGOWAN: New in terms of, they are being built, but they are not additional stock on top of what you have got, right?

Peta McCAMMON: I guess it depends on how you term it. They will be additional stock, but yes, there is stock that then we sell. As a good asset management program, you would. There will be properties that are no longer fit for purpose and are not economic to necessarily keep, so you will see – and we are very transparent in our publication every year in terms of the number of new properties that come online and then the number of properties that might go offline for a variety of reasons. Yes, the 12,000 is new, but there will be year on year also some other asset management decisions that are taken. But I might –

Nick McGOWAN: But you know where I am going, right? I am hearing you, but what I really am wanting to know is, from a planning point of view, I think to date since the big build, we have got 379 new – that is extra – homes. Once we have done the 12,000, how much further ahead are we than when we started the program in the first place?

Peta McCAMMON: Simon is much more across the year on year than I am. But I think it is also worth pointing out that when we do say 'new', new is important in this space, because new, actually, for people is homes that are accessible, more energy efficient and more likely to match the demand that is on our waitlist. But I will get Simon maybe to talk a bit more.

Nick McGOWAN: I do not dispute it is relevant – I get it. But I suppose the person on the waiting list who has not got anything is saying, 'Well, let them wait for their new air conditioner. We just want to get in a house.'

Peta McCAMMON: Yes, I accept that.

Simon NEWPORT: To specifically answer your question on the big build, the commitment is 8200 will be net new of the 12,000.

Danny O'BRIEN: 8200?

Simon NEWPORT: 8200.

Nick McGOWAN: Now, these housing commission towers – this is one of my favourite subjects at the moment. The Greens might even agree. Do you have any documents you can give us for any one of the towers that can convince me and everyone else who is supposed to be in this Parliament that they are at the end of their life, because the minister has talked about how they are made of concrete – and of course, you only need to go to Nicholson Street to see a housing commission tower built of brick, with some concrete. And that brings me to another interesting question about that particular project, which seems to be standing idle for quite some time at the moment. This is at Nicholson Street and Johnston Street I am talking about specifically. But my first question is: what evidence base is there that all 44 towers are absolutely obsolete, not fit for purpose and we should smash them down and start again?

Simon NEWPORT: Well, I think the first thing – and I am pretty sure you are talking about the two what we could call colloquially red brick towers at Carlton.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes.

Simon NEWPORT: I think the reason why they were vacated is fairly well known, and that was serious sewer failures. So yes, they are masonry. But to answer your question, the other 42 towers are all effectively designed and built in the same way. They are all concrete –

Nick McGOWAN: Every single one of the other ones? All the 44?

Simon NEWPORT: I believe so, yes.

Nick McGOWAN: I just do not want to have to go drive around town and look at every single –

Simon NEWPORT: So the architecture is different in terms of the shapes of the properties, if you get my meaning. So we refer to them as ‘Y towers’ and ‘Z towers’ and ‘S’, and as you look at them from above, they all have different shapes. They all have slightly different structural strengths and weaknesses because of the configuration, but the commonality between them all is that they are built out of concrete panels stacked on top of each other one at a time. Concrete over time will – the technical term is spall, but it will delaminate and start to crumble. The fact is that the properties are safe now, but long term they have to be replaced. The best time to have started that process genuinely is 20 years ago. So the time to do it is certainly now. Every one of them has the same design attributes.

Nick McGOWAN: I get a rolling program of replacement – I get that – but what we are being pitched here is that they have all got to go, they are all not fit for purpose, they are all a complete disaster. I have yet to see an engineering report to say that they are at the end of their life. Do we have any reports from any engineer that says they are actually unsafe?

Peta McCAMMON: I think the other important point, and having just recently gone up in one of the towers, one of the things too is, for example, they do not meet disability access. The showers in the towers have a step that we cannot remove. So we cannot actually make them accessible. We cannot widen the doorways. So key contemporary accessibility standards – and we do know, we have a number of people probably disproportionately on our waitlist who have a disability, so that is also a really important consideration. And coming back to homes that are fit for purpose, we also know that the energy efficiency of the towers directly impacts on people on their bills, so there are also a number of considerations around the utility, I guess, of the towers.

Nick McGOWAN: I get that, but you could build a tower tomorrow just for disability access if that was the urgent need. It does not mean you need to destroy all 44 towers, does it? My point is – and I have not heard yet that we are wrong – there is not one document and not one engineering report that has been done to actually say that these towers are either unsafe or actually structurally at the end of their life, which is what the government is presenting to us.

Simon NEWPORT: It is not just one single factor, okay? Asset condition is a very significant factor. It is certainly disability mods, and if you do not mind I will just roll through a few things. We talked about accessibility, but there is noise insulation, ventilation, sustainability and thermal comfort, compliance with

better apartment design guides, waste and recycling – as an example, the waste chutes are too small; they do not even fit a pizza box. Guess what happens when someone shoves a pizza box down the chute. Now that in and of itself is not a reason to replace a tower.

Nick McGOWAN: No.

Simon NEWPORT: What I am saying is when you go through all of the different factors – and I would just reiterate in terms of the disability, it is a huge factor. The turnaround times for the towers is more than twice as much as any other buildings that we have. It takes on average 66 days to be able to turn that around.

Nick McGOWAN: Sorry, can I just interrupt you there? I am limited for time. I am interested in that, but there are 10,000 families in the 44 towers – is that correct?

Simon NEWPORT: There are 5800 families at the moment, and 10,000 people, give or take.

Nick McGOWAN: I guess you are projecting forward, so for Flemington and North Melbourne how many of those are you anticipating will not return to the towers – that is, they will be rehoused in other suburbs?

Simon NEWPORT: Well, first of all, they have got –

Nick McGOWAN: The operating assumption – what is your operating assumption?

Simon NEWPORT: Well, first of all they have got a guarantee in writing. I have written to all of those tenants in those three towers giving them the right to return, as all tenants do have.

Nick McGOWAN: And no-one will be forced to sign a non-disclosure agreement at all, ever?

Simon NEWPORT: I am not aware of anybody being asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement.

Nick McGOWAN: This government loves it, that is all, so I just need to make sure that that is clear.

Simon NEWPORT: No. To my knowledge, absolutely no. In terms of –

Nick McGOWAN: You must be making an operating assumption of how many you think will not return.

Simon NEWPORT: We do; however, each site is different. A general operating assumption is somewhere between a third, so about between 30 per cent and 40 per cent, but typically about a third of people that have moved will absolutely wish to come back. Most people end up being quite satisfied with where they are being relocated to. That does not mean that we work on that and that alone. We work on higher numbers just to make sure that we have got that covered. I think it is fair to say that not every single person that will move will absolutely elect to come back, but they have that absolute right to do so.

Nick McGOWAN: I think I am ahead of time.

Michael GALEA: With that last bit of time can I just ask: what are the reasons why you struggle to fill tenants into those old towers?

Simon NEWPORT: It is self-selection, there is no question about that, and the overwhelming anecdotal evidence when I talk with tenants is: why can't we move into the new building across the car park?

Nick McGOWAN: On the Anzac spirit award – I might just add this quickly; I have got 10 seconds – I was disappointed. There seems to be a habit in government at the moment of only inviting government ministers or government people. In the old days we used to invite opposition and all the parties, and I did not get an invitation to the spirit of Anzac awards. People in my electorate of Ringwood were awarded.

Danny O'BRIEN: Same.

Nick McGOWAN: Same with Danny. My plea to the department is: you have got your own discretion as senior public servants. Please invite all parties – independents, Greens, you name it – to these public events, particularly multicultural ones but also Anzac Day awards. It is excluding –

Danny O'BRIEN: Our constituents.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, all our own constituents. That is a plea to you, Secretary.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Chair. We will go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. My favourite subject is multicultural affairs. Secretary, I refer to 2022–23 budget paper 3, page 39, and the \$6.4 million investment for the continuation of the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund. Secretary, in my electorate of Clarinda, in the south-east, I am very pleased to note that the Cambodian Buddhist Association of Victoria has received \$250,000 in funding to undertake works to upgrade the existing Wat Buddharangsi Melbourne – that is a Buddhist temple in Springvale South – including outdoor equipment, shade sails, lighting, security cameras, plumbing and painting. It is a whole host of new things our community will receive. Can you please provide an update on how this investment has delivered on the government's commitment to ensuring that Victorian multicultural community organisations have safe and secure places to celebrate, share their history and traditions and build connections.

Peta McCAMMON: Thanks for your question. I am going to ask Lou to come up and assist me on this one as well. You have called out a specific investment, but there is a lot that we actually do in the multicultural space, some of which is really important capital grants and community grants. You only need to look at our annual report each year to just see the absolute diversity of grants. But I might see if Lou can provide a bit more on the specifics if that is okay.

Louise PERRY: Thank you so much for the question. I might just give a bit of context first and then jump into it more specifically. As we know, Victoria is home to one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world, and it is also among the fastest growing and most diverse states in Australia. We know that that cultural diversity here in Victoria is an absolute bedrock of who we are. It is one of our greatest strengths, and it is central to our identity. Just to give you a sense of the recent census, the 2021 census, Victoria's population was 6.5 million, and of that, 27.6 per cent spoke a language other than English at home and 54 per cent followed one of more than 130 different faiths. So we are an incredibly culturally diverse state, and that is why the department has delivered and continues to deliver significant grant funding and support to communities to ensure that they can celebrate and include others in the celebration of their cultures, to ensure that community facilities are fit for purpose as places to come together to feel safe and also to ensure that work is ongoing around social cohesion, which we know is absolutely critical, inclusion and workplace equality.

To go to your question specifically, across the 2021–22 and 2022–23 state budgets the government invested a combined total of \$46.1 million in the multicultural affairs portfolio. In 2021–22 the government invested \$23.8 million over four years in multicultural affairs. That was \$8.7 million over four years to continue programs that support refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers across Victoria. There was \$8 million over four years for multicultural seniors support grants. There was \$4.5 million over two years in COVID-19 jobs, which was obviously relevant to the period, and stimulus initiatives. That included \$4.25 million in 2021–22 for multicultural community infrastructure, to go to your question, and \$160,000 over two years to develop a bicultural worker strategy and pilot program. \$1.5 million over three years was to support the government's response to the parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections, and there was \$1.1 million to support the continuation of the multicultural festivals and events program.

In the 2022–23 state budget, we invested \$22.3 million, and that included \$6.7 million over two years for new initiatives to support newly arrived migrant communities, \$6.4 million to deliver upgrades to multicultural community facilities through the infrastructure fund, \$4.4 million to continue the delivery of the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*, and \$3.7 million to support multicultural communities during the COVID-19 recovery, so a significant commitment to multicultural affairs there across those two budget years.

Meng Heang TAK: Do you happen to have figures for the Migrant Workers Centre?

Louise PERRY: The Migrant Workers Centre – let me just have a quick look at that.

Meng Heang TAK: It is okay if you do not.

Louise PERRY: Yes, I can take it on notice and come back to you.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Deputy Secretary. Thank you for your answers. Multicultural senior supports – you rightly point out that having a safe place and accessible space for multicultural and multifaith Victorians to come together is very important. However, connecting people is more than just providing adequate infrastructure alone. With respect to multicultural seniors, and with reference to the 2021–22 budget paper 3, page 47, can you for the benefit of the committee elaborate more on how the Victorian government's \$8 million investment for multicultural seniors is ensuring our multicultural seniors stay engaged and connected to their community, please?

Louise PERRY: Yes. Thank you. I will just have a look in here. Multicultural senior –

Meng Heang TAK: Senior supports.

Louise PERRY: Yes. Just give me one moment. I have not got details exactly on the multicultural seniors support grants other than that in 2021–22 it was \$8 million over four years for those grants. So I might come back to you, if that is okay, with any specifics.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, that is fine. Another big thing is festivals and events in the south-east. It is where multiculturalism is showcased, knowing that many of the community organisations and collectives celebrate their cultures and traditions and show the pride that we have in our multicultural society, and more importantly, foster connections across the culture, and most importantly, also pass them on to the second and third generations. I am drawing your attention to the budget paper on page 39 – the \$1.1 million investment for the multicultural festivals and events program. Can you please detail how many multicultural festivals and events this has supported and what key outcomes this important investment has yielded? I know that the Secretary also had this in her slideshow. Thank you.

Louise PERRY: Great. Yes, absolutely. Thank you. In terms of multicultural festivals and events, there is obviously an awful lot that we do in this space. Hang on a second. Sorry, I will just be a minute.

Multicultural festivals and events – we have done close to 500 of those over the period of time that we have had, over those two financial years. The total investment across multicultural festivals and events in 2021 was \$1.58 million, and in 2021–22 it was \$2.57 million. Those festivals and events are obviously a really great opportunity for our culturally diverse communities to demonstrate their culture and invite inclusion into that space. That is a really key part of why we fund them. We know that is really, really critical for social cohesion as well. In terms of actual numbers – how many people have come to those events – and where those events have been held, I am happy to pull a list of that together and get it to you.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you so much. Moving on to carers and volunteers. Secretary, 2022–23 budget paper 3, page 50, outlines the funding provided to continue the carer pathway into employment for unpaid carers program. In Victoria there are more than 700,000 unpaid carers who provide care and support to family members and friends with disability, terminal illness, chronic mental health issues or age-related conditions. For many this means ceasing full employment or part-time employment, which can make returning to work very difficult. Can you share with the committee some of the important investments that the government has made into supporting employment opportunities for unpaid work in Victoria?

Peta McCAMMON: Sure. I might ask Argiri to answer that one, if that is okay.

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: Thank you, Mr Tak, and thank you, Secretary. Maybe just by starting in terms of our carer strategy, it is an important document, it is an important living document, and the strategy is from 2018 to 2022. The Victorian government has invested nearly \$50 million across Victoria's unpaid carers from 2019 to 2023. In the two-year period that that investment was around, \$10 million went towards 100,000 more hours of respite to an additional 5000 Victorian carers each year. This is an important source of support for our carers in terms of how we support them in their caregiving responsibilities. We also have funded nearly a million dollars worth of investment in public transport concessions for carers as well, providing concessional and free public transport to Victorian carer card holders, including a week of free public transport during Carers Week as well, which is such an important week to recognise the work that our carers do. Also, \$1.75 million worth of investment was funded to support carers locally. Grants in 2021–22 supported 56 groups to help carers connect and access local supports to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. These are obviously important supports to our carers.

The government also delivered several statewide partnership grant projects to increase support for Victorian carers to create carer-friendly spaces, local communities, online hubs for young carers and peer support programs for carers and to increase carers' financial management skills as well. In addition, obviously the carer forum in October 2022 was put in place to celebrate and recognise the valuable contribution that our carers are making across our state. Over 150 carers attended in person, and probably more than 300 carers joined online as well.

Specifically in terms of the career employment programs that the government has invested in, \$2.3 million in 2022–23 through the Ageing Well in Victoria initiative to continue the career pathways into employment for unpaid carers initiative for a 12-month period. The carers employment support program provides tailored employment support and mentoring for carers and is being delivered by 22 funded providers until 31 December 2023. They are important investments. They are important supports for the invaluable work that our carers do right across the board.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, thank you. That is very good to hear. Would you be able to talk more about the carers card that we provide?

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: Yes. The carers card is also an important initiative that supports carers to enable them to be able to get free access and subsidised access to a range of community events. It is an important program that supports carers in their participation and supports their role in the work they do in supporting their caring partners. I can come back to you with more specific advice about that, because I do not have that in front of me at the moment.

Meng Heang TAK: Okay. All right. I am more than happy to come back on that. For the committee's benefit, can you also outline the impact of the careers pathway into employment for unpaid carers program and describe some of the ways in which pilots and programs were built around this investment?

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: We have had quite a few positive contributions that have come out of the career pathways into employment for unpaid carers. It has been an important employment initiative. Whilst that program has continued to operate over the last couple of years, we will be taking the learnings that came out of that important program and facilitating that across the broader system. The learnings from the program will be embedded across the support for carers program and other government initiatives within the carer and employment sectors where possible. And embedding those learnings, particularly in terms of how we enhance the support for carers in terms of their career options – we know that a lot of carers want to make a valuable contribution and be employed in making that contribution. We know that there are a number of barriers in relation to that, and some of the work that we have done through this program has been able to identify those barriers, break those barriers down, provide input to those individuals to enable them successfully seek employment, and they are learnings that we will embed across the system.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you very much. I would like to come back to multicultural affairs, to the grant programs. We know for a fact that even when it comes to matched funding requirements that are imposed on competitive and merit-based grant programs such as for the multicultural festivals and events grant program, Secretary, that new and emerging multicultural communities from regional Victoria face additional difficulty or barriers. Can you please outline how the government is seeking to make multicultural funding programs such as these programs more inclusive, flexible and equitable for such groups?

Peta McCAMMON: Thank you. It is a really important question and something really focused on.

Louise PERRY: I am happy to take that one. Thank you so much for the question. I guess the first thing I would say in response to the question is that we do know that of the total overseas-born population in Victoria, only 10 per cent reside in regional Victoria, and that has made it, just to be really frank, a challenge to I guess build engagement and uptake on our festivals and events programs and our infrastructure programs in regional Victoria. And that was seen I think in the 2021–22 outcome. And then in the 2022–23 outcome where we were able to stretch and meet the BP3 measure, which you would have seen, there were a lot of things that were put in place in an effort to do a better job in regional and rural Victoria. I will talk you through a little bit of that.

We have got a range of measures that are designed to support increased representation of rural and regional organisations in the multicultural festivals and events and the community infrastructure fund in particular. Programs are designed with an equity lens for regional and rural inclusion. To give you an example,

applications from regional and rural organisations have reduced event attendance requirements, and they also have reduced matched funding requirements that we might apply to other organisations. Applications from rural and regional organisations are prioritised through the merit assessment in the multicultural festivals and events medium and large stream and the infrastructure fund is open round, so these applications score on the priority group criterion, which is around 10 per cent of the merit assessment score.

Rural and regional organisations can apply via auspice arrangements as well, which is really important because not all of those organisations have the required legal status but we do not want them to be prohibited from receiving funding to support their event. Programs are supported by dedicated communication and engagement strategies, and the departments engage with the rural and regional multicultural groups and partners like RDV, Regional Development Victoria, to promote grants and to deliver dedicated information sessions for regional and rural grant applicants. Any unsuccessful regional and rural applicant is offered individualised feedback to support stronger future applications.

So that is what we have been doing. What we are going to do moving forward – we are ratcheting it up more. To support applicants from regional and rural areas, a regional roadshow was delivered when the 2023–24 MFE round 2 and open round programs opened for applications. We are now doing a roadshow around the regions to talk to people about the grant programs that we have and how to have the best chance of success in applying for those grant programs.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tak. The committee is now just going to pause and take a very short break. We will return at 3:15 pm.

The committee will now resume its consideration of DFFH. I am going to be throwing to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Secretary and witnesses. Can I go back to social housing. The department's target for total number of social housing dwellings in 2023–24 was 89,832, but the annual report indicates a 1643 shortfall for the 2022–23 period. Can you explain why that was?

Peta McCAMMON: I might ask Simon to talk to that one.

Danny O'BRIEN: So the outcome was 88,189. I do not want to answer it for you, but I am guessing it might be because of homes knocked down.

Simon NEWPORT: In terms of that, probably the biggest single driver behind it has been just some delay in projects, and certainly the overall stock number, you are right, in terms of retirements. What I would say is that we are very mindful in terms of when we add stock in and take stock off. It is a bit of a balancing act sometimes. There were some significant delays in projects, particularly still on the hangovers from COVID, which were quite significant, particularly over the period that we are talking about. Trade shortages were a significant factor. Cost escalations were another one, and yes, you are right in terms of some of the stock coming off. Most notably I will just point out that there was a retirement of about net 500 headleased properties, which I honestly do not think was quite contemplated at the start of the year.

Danny O'BRIEN: As in, they went back to being owned or rented privately or something?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, that is a significant gap, and that was a shedding of headleased stock.

Danny O'BRIEN: About a third of them. On that basis and the issues you have just raised, does the government still expect to meet its 12,000 homes commitment by 2024?

Simon NEWPORT: I do not think it is by 2024. I think the budget papers reflect 2027 for the Big Housing Build in terms of money that is allocated.

Danny O'BRIEN: The Premier's original media release said the 'package will boost our state's social housing supply by 10 per cent in just four years'.

Simon NEWPORT: Okay. I think – that is next year. No, I think I can, unfortunately, comfortably say that all 12,000 homes will not be completed within the next 12 months. I know we are here to cover off the last two

financial years, but certainly the latest update we have now got is we have finished 3200 homes – this is as of last month. We have now got over 6000 that are underway, and I can give you the exact number, but it is just over six –

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, is that including those 3200?

Simon NEWPORT: No, that is in addition to, so we are over the 9000 mark. And whilst, again, we are not talking big build – but in terms of the throughput that is going through Homes Victoria at the moment there are over 8000 homes that are in various stages of being underway. Six thousand of that, roughly, is the big build, and 2000 of that is all of the other programs that we have got going on at the moment as well.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay, so just to clarify: there are 3200 homes finished under the big build, literally?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Are they occupied yet?

Simon NEWPORT: Not all of them, because some of them have only just been handed over.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right. And then 6000 are underway, and they are in various stages of underway?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, they are.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is that literally ground broken or is that including planning?

Simon NEWPORT: In some instances it is right the way through. Our target for this year across all programs – this financial year we are now in – is to finish 2801 properties, so that gives you an idea of what we are trying to achieve or what we will achieve this year.

Danny O'BRIEN: This financial year.

Simon NEWPORT: This financial year – FY24. So that gives you an idea of what the timing of that pipeline would be. That is probably the best indicator. Some of them are only fairly recent. The ground lease model 2, which you may well have read about recently – those properties have been demolished, if you like, so that is the first stage of that. That is probably at the lower end of underway – so demolition is either complete or almost complete before we start onsite remediation. So it is quite the way through.

Danny O'BRIEN: Of the 12,000 proposed, how many are new builds and how many are purchases – or is it all new builds?

Simon NEWPORT: I do not think I have that breakdown in front of me here.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I perhaps ask you to take that on notice, and in addition, how many will be public housing versus social housing?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes. Of course.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is there anything private at all?

Simon NEWPORT: Out of the big build there was a small component of private, I think, but I think it was a number of around about 500. I would like to be able to clarify that –

Danny O'BRIEN: If you could clarify that.

Simon NEWPORT: but I think it was quite a small number.

Danny O'BRIEN: Finally on this one, can I just ask what the actual spend at 30 June was on the Big Housing Build?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes. Okay. I might have to take that on notice, specifically. Look, can I say that the number which has widely been reported in the press of \$3 billion – I think, you know, the papers do what they

do. I think what I would really like to call out is that when you are talking about expenditure on a program, clearly houses do not start and finish within the same financial year, so I would really talk to the huge amount of work that is underway. As I said, 6000 are underway for the Big Housing Build. So when there is talk in the press about \$3 billion being spent to deliver 3000, I hope people do not mind me being frank but that is pretty misleading, because it does not speak at all to the 6000 houses that are in various stages of being underway. So I will of course provide you with that precise information.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you. On maintenance, what were the final maintenance costs for upgrading housing stock for the years in question, 2021–22 and 2022–23?

Simon NEWPORT: Let me just check that for you. In terms of pure maintenance that went through the profit and loss statement for the year just gone, it was \$291 million. I do not have the upgrade figure on me at the moment, but in terms of what went through the profit and loss statement: \$291,400,000.

Danny O'BRIEN: For 2022–23?

Simon NEWPORT: That was \$281.6 million.

Danny O'BRIEN: Oh, sorry, so –

Simon NEWPORT: \$291 million, and \$281 million for the two years.

Danny O'BRIEN: For 2021–22 and 2022–23?

Simon NEWPORT: I beg your pardon?

Danny O'BRIEN: For 2021–22 and 2022–23?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. And how many homes did that involve in those two years?

Simon NEWPORT: I do not have that number with me at the moment in terms of how many upgrades. What I can say is we tend to handle between 6000 and 7000 orders each week throughout the year.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Which goes to my next question: what is the current backlog of maintenance? I do not know whether you have it in dollar terms or in orders or in job lots?

Simon NEWPORT: I would have to check on the precise figure but there are about 24,000 work orders that are outstanding. Obviously that has come down significantly and everybody is working very hard, again, from the issues for COVID. I would point out –

Danny O'BRIEN: But that is at now, sorry.

Simon NEWPORT: That is at now. I can check the final number, but I think it is somewhere in the order of about 24,000, coming down from a significantly larger number. I note that during COVID, particularly as we could only do urgent works, I read recently of the day there was a net 250 lost days over the period throughout all of the entire issue of COVID, so that was a substantial impact on the program. But that has largely been addressed. We have still got a little bit to go.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I ask also how many homes are actually out of action because of maintenance issues?

Simon NEWPORT: How many homes are out of action because of maintenance issues? I would have to take that on notice precisely. I have got vacancy numbers for relettable.

Danny O'BRIEN: That would be interesting, if you could take the other one on notice.

Simon NEWPORT: I figured that would come next, so 1735 is what we have got for vacant relettable as at 30 June.

Danny O'BRIEN: At 30 June? I think at the last hearings we discussed this – there is a 30-day window to give you time to clean-up and make repairs. They would be literally in that 30-day window?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, that is the number. That is correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: Broadly speaking, yes. Can you tell me how many demolished public housing sites the department is currently in charge of that are vacant?

Simon NEWPORT: I would have to take that specific number on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. And perhaps looking at it, I guess the question is: at any given time there will be some that are being rebuilt, but if there are any that are either long term or are not proposed to be rebuilt, if could you provide that, that would be –

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, there would be, and we can provide that information.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Just a follow-up question on family violence refuges: I have got some questions I want to clarify. We heard before the figures – I cannot remember who it was actually who gave them to Mr McGowan – that there were 1132 people, it might have been women, got homes from a priority list. I think that was the family violence priority list. Was that –

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, it was.

Danny O'BRIEN: That was correct, and I think there were 4000 added to the list. That was specifically for family violence priority? Yes. Then, sorry, Ms Heenan, I think you said six new homes – was that homes or refuges?

Melanie HEENAN: They are crisis accommodation properties, so they are in effect homes. But I neglected to say there are already in existence more than 60 of those crisis accommodation properties, so this is in terms of new properties.

Danny O'BRIEN: I probably need you to give me a delineation on the difference – are they permanent or –

Melanie HEENAN: In terms of the family staying at the property?

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes. Sorry, that is where I am heading.

Melanie HEENAN: I certainly believe it is for at least medium term. Longer term, I will need to take that on notice, though, Mr O'Brien, in terms of how long. I do not believe families stay in it for the duration, but I do believe they stay in for the period of time through which they can be really stabilised, have genuine options into employment – all manner of things that will help them to kind of craft a pathway into a future.

Danny O'BRIEN: I guess I am getting into the difference between what is crisis housing versus what is a refuge.

Melanie HEENAN: Yes. I can tell you that is usually up to 12 months, but it is often longer.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So there are 60 homes?

Melanie HEENAN: Sixty homes, exactly.

Danny O'BRIEN: And six added.

Melanie HEENAN: Sixty properties, yes, which I understand are mainly homes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is there a separate category of refuges?

Melanie HEENAN: Yes, there is, indeed.

Danny O'BRIEN: There are. That is I guess where I wanted to go, because the budget figures last year show on the output measures that the department has fallen fairly short on both the number of family violence

victims who receive a refuge response and the number of nights of refuge accommodation. Was there any additional refuge accommodation built or purchased during the two years in question?

Melanie HEENAN: The refuge redevelopment program is part of that equation, I guess. The royal commission recommended, as I was saying, a move from communal refuges to core and clusters, essentially, which would be a much different way of being able to offer services to women, where there are quite independent residential units and a core of supports that can be offered and where there is case management and a workforce there to be able to provide the kinds of supports that families will need. They can live quite independently in those core and cluster environments in a house-like or apartment-like equation and be able to adopt a very similar life as they would in their own homes. There are 14 of those core and clusters that have now been finalised. There is one more that was completed in October, and there are two more to come.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is out of the royal commission recommendation?

Melanie HEENAN: That is right, but in terms of the numbers of refuges in operation today – so the numbers which are broader than just the core and clusters, I should say – there are 31 family violence refuges in operation across Victoria. They have capacity for 164 households per night, and that number will ultimately grow. That number of refugees, in terms of those that have been completed et cetera, will grow to 35 all up when the refuge redevelopment program is completed. That will allow for a capacity of 197 households per night. That is obviously separate to the more than 60 crisis accommodation properties, but there also are those safe-at-home options that we were speaking about before.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, but can I maybe ask, probably to 30 June this year, what is the number of, firstly, women and, secondly, family groups that were unable to be accommodated in either of those types and then had to be put into a motel or hotel?

Melanie HEENAN: We will have much better data on that, Mr O'Brien, toward the end of this calendar year. Certainly we are hoping by next year we will be able to answer that question, because it is obviously really important for us to understand how many women, victim-survivors and kids are going into motels. As I said, there is now a crisis response model, which means there is case management support where that is required for women while they are in hotels and motels. And our partners Safe Steps, the 24/7 crisis response organisation, are kind of the entry point into emergency accommodation, including where motels might be the option.

Danny O'BRIEN: Do you have the data now – any of it?

Melanie HEENAN: I do not have the data now, I am sorry, but the crisis response model has been in place since August, so with that has come a system through which we will be able to compile the data. We will be able to come back to you next year on that.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I am not sure if this is also a question for you, Ms Heenan, but the budget papers from last year indicate a decrease in funding for prevention of family violence. How has that impacted the ability to run programs and things and to be at that front end and reduce the prevalence of family violence? The reference, if you need it, is budget paper 3, pages 39 and 197.

Melanie HEENAN: If I can speak broadly perhaps about the prevention program that we do run, all of our prevention work is supported under our *Free from Violence* and 10-year plans. There are a number of different programs and initiatives under that body of prevention work, so that is work that is done at that very response end, I guess, of prevention and early intervention, but also in terms of primary prevention. Some of those programs are sometimes shorter term to be able to test initiatives and, I guess, be able to learn what is likely to work most effectively, and there are others that we can scale up through other initiatives or where we can see that evaluations or interim findings are showing that there are some particular benefits for those programs and then we can scale those up.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I have got some more questions about veterans, so I may need Ms Perry to come back, but in the interim – multicultural. Is that also Ms Perry?

Peta McCAMMON: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, okay. In the interim, what about youth?

Peta McCAMMON: Ms Perry.

Danny O'BRIEN: Ms Perry, come on down. We have questions for you.

Simon NEWPORT: The price is right.

Louise PERRY: The price is right. That is right.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, we will decide that, Ms Perry. We will start with multicultural if I could. The Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund supported 99 projects in 2021–22 and 32 projects in 2022–23. Is it possible to get a list of the recipients, the organisations and their locations from those grants?

Louise PERRY: I think that should be possible, yes. If it is not in the annual report, we will be able to get that for you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes. We are particularly interested to know how many are in outer-suburban growth areas, but presumably if you tell me where they are, we will be able to work that out. It is not publicly available, is it, on a website somewhere?

Louise PERRY: I would be surprised if it is not in the annual report. I think we publish where those grants go. But I will look into it.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, if you could look anyway. We often get told that it is in the annual report, and good luck finding it.

Peta McCAMMON: Yes. I think the annual report provides the recipient of grants and the amount. It might not give us detail about which particular grant program, but anyway, we will take that on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you could provide that –

Louise PERRY: I can confirm it is in the annual report.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you could provide that detail that I have asked for, that would be great. Likewise, the Multicultural Festivals and Events Program supported 697 festivals in 2022–23. Could we get a list of those too?

Louise PERRY: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: I have some quick questions on veterans. The royal commission indicated the Victorian veterans sector study from July last year was provided to the veterans minister in December last year, almost 12 months ago. I understand the minister has not responded to that report, as is required. Can you advise why that is?

Louise PERRY: Yes. Thank you so much for that question. As you say, it did come up in the royal commission when the executive director at the time, Anthony Plummer, was there. As you say, the study and recommendations have been provided to the minister, and they are currently under review. The six recommendations that were provided to the minister in December really encompass different issues: the veteran sector stewardship and data collection; improved recognition of benefits for cohorts; and greater transparency, collaboration and coordination. And I think –

Danny O'BRIEN: Which is a good point. I am just wanting to know – as a transparency – why the minister has not responded.

Louise PERRY: Yes. Understood. I think it is important to note that the veterans sector study involves members who serve in a sessional capacity, and so it took some time for that study to be finalised.

Danny O'BRIEN: Wasn't it handed to the minister last December?

Louise PERRY: It was handed to the minister last December. Of course we had a caretaker period before that and then a new minister come in in December.

Danny O'BRIEN: Do you know when the minister will be responding?

Louise PERRY: I do not.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. That might be a question for us to ask the minister. Just on youth, the 2021–22 budget provided funding to support young Victorians at risk of disengagement from the community, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds and also from Aboriginal backgrounds. Can you provide a complete list and description of all the programs that were delivered under that funding?

Louise PERRY: Not here today, but I am very happy to do that. Was that the supporting at-risk young people package?

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes. Page 47 of the 2021–22 budget, and the same for the Aboriginal children as well. If you are happy to provide that information –

Louise PERRY: I am happy to provide that information.

Danny O'BRIEN: And any sort of feedback or criticisms of the programs that you received, and the success of them – if you could provide some information on that, that would be wonderful.

Louise PERRY: Anything we have got that does not identify anyone in particular.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. We will now go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: I am going to actually follow on right now on youth and probably some of the same areas. So I will not be asking for a list of the projects, but I might ask about some of the themes they have drawn out from them and particularly for our younger community in Point Cook, in the suburb of Point Cook, and our diverse community. So I am just hoping you can go into some of the programs, particularly the early intervention investment framework. If you could start there, and I am going to take you to a few other places after that.

Louise PERRY: Okay, great. So I might talk to the community support group program.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. That is exactly where I was going to take you next.

Louise PERRY: Okay. Is that all right if I jump to that?

Mathew HILAKARI: Let us take it there.

Louise PERRY: And the Le Mana Pasifika program.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is great. Thank you. You are hitting all the right notes.

Louise PERRY: All right, excellent. Just give me one minute so that I can talk to you sensibly about it.

Mathew HILAKARI: Certainly the community that I represent has a good Pasifika community, but they are sometimes disengaged at a higher level than across the board, in education in particular.

Louise PERRY: I think that is right. And you know I am always very conscious with language around these, that we do not elevate particular communities, but we acknowledge that there is some overrepresentation in different areas. The department is delivering on the Victorian government's investment to support at-risk young people through programs that really work to encourage community engagement and provide access to services. We know that young people are facing challenges – I mean, some of you are much younger than me – that perhaps we did not face though when we were youths, so real challenges around mental health and wellbeing, job insecurity, housing affordability, cyberbullying, financial instability and all of those things. We know that additionally, to go to your question, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse

communities can face further challenges, including discrimination, access to culturally responsive services, family fragmentation, barriers to employment, post-migration challenges and, as you referenced, early disengagement from education. So we really seek a collaborative approach with other departments, including Justice and Community Safety; Education; Health; and Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions to reduce the risk of young people coming into contact with the justice system right at the other end of the spectrum.

In 2021–22 the government invested \$18.4 million over two years under what was called engaging and supporting at-risk young people. That package included a continuation of initiatives that had been funded earlier, the first being the community support groups. So the package supported six community support groups to engage and support more than 3000 young people from particular ethnicities, and their families, annually across the north, the west and the south-east of Melbourne. And the Le Mana Pasifika project, which is delivered by the fantastic Centre for Multicultural Youth, provides direct intervention and support to over 800 Pasifika young people every year. The funding package that I just talked about also provided a range of wraparound supports that enhance the work of those CSGs, and that includes intensive case management and alcohol and other drugs support. That is delivered by the Youth Support and Advocacy Service. So these investments together are designed to strengthen youth engagement, build social cohesion and provide access to opportunities and services for young people and their families.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic. I am just going to step away from youth a bit and just follow on from Mr Tak in terms of the grants programs for multicultural communities more generally and the MFE program. We had an equity lens for regional communities, but for newer migrant communities I think there is a similar facing – and particularly those who have not applied for grants before or they are really at that early stage.

Louise PERRY: For what communities, sorry?

Mathew HILAKARI: For newer multicultural communities. We have had some great multicultural communities that are really well established to understand the grants program and are really engaged with it over time and then those communities and organisations who are maybe doing the grants program for their first time. Do we provide some reaching out to support them or how do we support them to be as successful and celebrate their cultural additions to Victoria in a way that we also do for regional Victorians?

Louise PERRY: It is a great question. One of the things that we do where an organisation is unsuccessful in their application for a grant is we will offer individualised feedback to that organisation to talk them through what went wrong, for want of a better way of describing it, and how they might improve their applications going forward. Where requested or required we provide individual support to those organisations to help them get those bids fit for purpose, and we are very conscious that there is a capacity building requirement. It is incumbent, I think, on multicultural affairs as part of our work to build the capacity so that particularly our smaller organisations are able to access those grants to celebrate culture.

Mathew HILAKARI: Do we have a way of flagging when an organisation is applying for a grant for the first time, or is that something that the department takes into account or maybe you might think about taking into account for the future?

Louise PERRY: Yes. I do not want to make anything up, but we have an incredibly strong grants management framework that flags all sorts of things, so what I will do is I will go away and ask that specific question and come back to you.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic. I might move to a different subject, which is the state disability plan. I will turn to budget paper 3, page 38 and table 1.8, and I might just ask initially a little bit about the state disability plan. I am going to take us to Changing Places, which is a particular passion of mine. I was involved in ACD as we set up the initial Changing Places in Victoria, and I am so glad to see the state is running with that, but maybe if we can start with the state disability plan?

Peta McCAMMON: Sure, I will make a start, and then I am glad to see Argiri has positioned himself at the table. The state disability plan is interesting in that it is a legislative responsibility for the state to actually prepare the plan. The basis of the plan is really building on the social model of disability, so what that means is it is not a person's disability that is the barrier; it is actually all the barriers that we put in place in society. That can be barriers around physical access, it can be other types of barriers, and we know that for people with a disability unfortunately they are over-represented in a number of areas – unemployment, violence, particularly

women – so it is a really important whole-of-government effort for not just people with a disability who we think of as having really high support needs but the millions of people living with a disability who face barriers to community and social life. As you can tell, it is something I am really passionate about and something that, as I said, is a whole-of-government endeavour. Changing Places is an amazing program and one that we have got interest in from the Commonwealth as well. People's ability to access toilets is a really important part about being able to access the community. They are probably some introductory remarks, but Argiri is much closer to the work with the rest of government on that one.

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: Thank you, Secretary, and thank you, Mr Hilakari, for the question. The state disability plan, as the Secretary has just been talking about, *Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022–26*, is our response for how we uphold the rights of people with a disability and honour the lived experience that they have as well. It is a four-year vision built on consultation and advice from many Victorians with a disability, their families, their carers and the service sector more broadly. It acknowledges where we have made progress, but importantly, it also highlights areas where we still have further work to do, and there is a lot more work to be done in this space. The fact remains that Victorians with a disability continue to face unacceptable physical, attitudinal and structural barriers to inclusion, as the Secretary has just alluded to. That is why *Inclusive Victoria* lays out a really ambitious reforming agenda, one that gets us closer to the vision of a genuinely inclusive and fair Victoria for the 1.1 million people with a disability across our state. To achieve this, *Inclusive Victoria* outlines six systemic reform areas for government action. They are focused around co-designing, importantly, with people with a disability; a focus on Aboriginal self-determination, so we elevate the rights and interests of our First Nations people with a disability; we focus on intersectional approaches; accessible communications and universal design; disability-confident and inclusive workforces; and effective data in our company reporting, which is so critically important to understand the impact that we are having and to understand the gaps that exist across the environment as well. Importantly, all government departments are responsible for embedding these reforms within their policies, their programs and the services that are delivered, and for implementing their actions under the plan. The department works very closely across government to ensure that this work is ongoing, is connected and is being driven as part of our reform agenda.

Just looking at some of the recent funding to support it, \$11.7 million was committed in the 2021–22 financial year via the Changing Places and building inclusive and safe communities for Victorians in disability initiatives. In the 2022–23 financial year this increased to a \$15.1 million allocation committed by the Victorian state disability plan initiative. Funding has supported the program's initiatives noted here today and remains critical to our work to build a safer and more inclusive place for Victorians with a disability.

A range of grant programs are supporting this process and have delivered really positive local infrastructure and service delivery outcomes on the ground during 2022 and 2023. Accessible infrastructure grants delivered improved access to community facilities, enabling more people to participate in community and social activities, which is what we want to achieve through our disability inclusion plan. Funding also supported accessible emergency communications for people with a disability. This is a potentially life-saving skill set, as you can imagine, which will enable them to prepare for emergencies and support their resilience and recovery. As you mentioned, funding for Changing Places grant rounds in this period have funded a combined 32 accessible public toilets across Victoria. Similarly, funding has also delivered the universal design grant program and was provided to continue the Victorian disability advocacy program, or VDAP as we call it. VDAP is such an important element of safeguarding and support for people with a disability. It supports self-advocacy, individual advocacy and systemic advocacy and ideas which are critical when thinking about human rights and dignity of people with a disability.

Just to give you a little bit more detail around each of those, self-advocacy really talks to building capacity of people with disability to speak up and represent themselves. This might include working with parents with intellectual disability to build their capacity to speak about traumatic experiences, including at forums like the disability royal commission, which was an important element of collecting that intelligence and the lived experience of people with a disability. Individual advocacy talks to individual representation by a professional advocate. This might be a relative, a friend or volunteer, someone to prevent or address a specific instance of unfair treatment or abuse. VDAP has provided individual advocacy through agency advocates facilitating case conferences and new assessments to support people with a disability. With the NDIA support, the clients wish for independent living arrangements, that is another layer of support that is undertaken through that individual advocacy. And finally, systemic advocacy focuses on working for long-term social change to ensure the collective rights and interests of people with disability are served, including through legislation, policies and

practices. An example of this is the work that the department was doing, working very closely with Deaf Victoria and Expression Australia, to develop better processes to provide Auslan and accessible communications in critical Victorian government announcements, which is so important and people with a disability have told us how important that is, for them to understand the messages and the announcements that are being made.

Funding also supported the continuation of the successful disability liaison officer program for another year. This initiative sees the department working closely with the Department of Health to support people with a disability to access critical health and vaccination advice. This commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the program has evolved to include providing assistance with improving accessibility to health services and supporting people to navigate disability supports and services. The program was extended in the 2023–24 state budget as well.

Funding was also provided for the Change Your Reactions public education campaign delivered by Amaze, and you might have seen some of that televised across our media modes. This is designed to promote better attitudes and behaviours towards people with autism. This work supports one of the key commitments under the *Victorian Autism Plan*, which is to change community attitudes towards and about people with autism. It is really pleasing to note that we have delivered a refreshed version of the *Victorian Autism Plan* in the last couple of weeks, so that is something that we have been very keen to make sure that we put out there in terms of the commitment that we have made to autistic people and particularly given the input that they have provided to that refreshed autism plan. That reaffirms our commitment to the actions under the plan and under *Inclusive Victoria*.

Other key actions that we have delivered during 2022–23 include the Diverse Learners Hub, a key pillar of the Victorian government's \$1.6 billion disability inclusion reforms and a flagship initiative of the autism education strategy. Early observations of the impact on schools have been positive, indicating increased awareness among school leaders on how to support diverse learners. We have also completed rollout of a \$30 million building stimulus program to upgrade 450 specialist disability accommodation homes across Victoria. This program has directly benefited around 1800 SDA residents, and residents and their families have provided positive feedback on the improved quality and the amenity of their homes.

We have also been working to implement recent legislative reforms to strengthen the rights, protections and safeguards for people with a disability through the *Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Act 2023*, which became law on 23 May 2023. We are strengthening the protections for people with a disability, and our systemic reforms are a key focus and driver of a significant amount of work for people with disability in Victoria. The key milestones include an accessible communications project, the start of work to develop a whole-of-Victorian-government accessible communications strategy alongside capacity building activities to support accessible communications across the emergency management sector. These are just some of those important initiatives that we are driving through *Inclusive Victoria*.

Mathew HILAKARI: I think you have done a great set of coverage there, and I might take you back to the very start, which is on Changing Places. We talk often in millions and sometimes even billions of dollars in these sorts of committees, but in a practical sense, what is Changing Places? Describe it for us if you could, if I am not taking you too granular.

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: No, it is a really important initiative. As the Secretary mentioned, we really pride ourselves on creating a more inclusive society where people can actually participate equally in their communities, and we do this, obviously, by supporting people in communities to have equitable access to services and by removing those barriers to participation, which is what Changing Places is all about.

Mathew HILAKARI: I think about those. As a teenager I volunteered with people with disability over my summer holidays. Changing people with disability on the toilet floor on the concrete – that is why these places exist.

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: Absolutely.

Mathew HILAKARI: So it is absolutely commendable – the expansion of this. I am going to take us to forensic disability support and other services on page 96 of the questionnaire, and it outlines \$33.2 million to

support people with disability, particularly cognitive disability, who are engaged in the justice system. I am just hoping you could take us through some of that if you are the right person to take us through that.

Argiri ALISANDRATOS: I am. Forensic disability services sit really at the interface between the disability and justice systems, as you have alluded to. These critical services provide specialist responses to people with cognitive disability involved in the criminal justice system and aim to divert them from the prison systems. We do not want people with a cognitive disability sitting in our prison systems. We want to find alternative pathways for them but, importantly, to give them the treatment and support they need to reduce their risk of offending and ultimately to make the community safer. With the transition to the NDIS these services remain the responsibility of the state, so we deliver these services.

People with cognitive disability are more likely to experience challenges that can lead to repeated contact with criminal justice systems, and they are over-represented at every stage of the criminal justice system. They experience earlier and more frequent contact with police, lower rates of court diversion and higher rates of imprisonment from an earlier age, and these are the things we want to obviously avoid by creating a different pathway. They are also more likely to have experienced a range of disadvantages, including being more likely than others to have experienced childhood neglect and abuse, lack of education and employment, deficiencies in social and communication skills and an increased prevalence of behavioural and psychiatric disorders.

A quarter of forensic disability clients identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, compared to 1 per cent of the general Victorian population. This means they require specialist responses, an appropriately trained and capable workforce, robust infrastructure and intensive clinical interventions to divert them from prison and address their offending risk, and that is what the service provides.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. We will go to Ms Sandell.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. Last session! I think this is for Mr Newport. You mentioned that the public housing towers are at the end of their life and the process for demolishing them and replacing them should have happened about 20 years ago or started 20 years ago. Less than 10 years ago the *Prahran Housing Precinct Development Plan* was being developed, and two alternative potential options were listed on the draft plan, one to retain the towers at Horace Petty estate and the other to demolish them. In 2016 the government made a decision, after I assume quite extensive work, to retain the towers at Horace Petty and on King Street, but now, seven years later, the government is saying they need to be demolished. So what has changed in that time?

Simon NEWPORT: Look, I hope you forgive me – I have been in the role less than four months, so I am probably not going to be able to be the best authority to answer that.

Ellen SANDELL: Well, maybe it is for the Secretary or someone who has been here for slightly longer.

Peta McCAMMON: I do not think many of us have been here since 2015, but I think the substance of your question is similar to the line of questioning before I guess in terms of the logic of the towers notwithstanding what decision was made at a previous point in time. And I am happy for Simon to talk in a bit more detail about some of the challenges we have with the towers, and some of those are in the category of, as we said, meeting contemporary standards for people on our waitlist.

Ellen SANDELL: I appreciate that, Secretary. Just because I have limited time, I guess we are trying to understand why – presumably condition reports were done back then. Presumably there was extensive work done. A decision was made that the towers were fine; now we are being told that they are not fine. I assume the department does condition assessments of the building, for example, for insurance purposes. How often are those kinds of assessment reports done?

Simon NEWPORT: There is a rolling program of I think about 140 individual components that are done across the entire portfolio on a five-year basis. Obviously there are *Residential Tenancies Act* checks that are done annually or biannually. But large-scale asset condition assessments are done on a five-year rolling basis across the portfolio, so my answer would be probably five years.

Ellen SANDELL: So do we know when the last condition reports were done of the towers – within the last five years?

Simon NEWPORT: No. There certainly have been reports that have examined – I have obviously not read every single one of the reports. I have read at least three or four of them in detail. There are reports obviously that exist which go through the condition. We have all heard about the \$2.3 billion projected figure that would be required to at least maintain the properties in some element of working order. That was the genesis of that number, that series of reports.

Ellen SANDELL: And so there are no reports that are publicly available or could be provided to the committee, such as engineering reports, condition assessments?

Peta McCAMMON: I know we have got a number of inquiries for documents, so we are happy to take that on notice.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. My understanding is that at the moment there are three models of public housing developments; we have the public housing renewal projects from a number of years ago, we have ground lease model 1 and ground lease model 2. And of those projects there will be some that have awarded tenders and some that are yet to have been awarded tenders. I am interested in the numbers for each of those models. Can we have a breakdown of, for each model, how much is public housing, community housing, affordable housing and market housing?

Simon NEWPORT: Look, I have got some of that information now. If you want me to rattle through that, I can certainly for the ground lease models. Or it is up to you whether you would like me to take that on notice and supply you that level of detail.

Ellen SANDELL: I am interested in it now.

Simon NEWPORT: That is fine. I was just checking.

Ellen SANDELL: But obviously we have limited time – in particular the breakdown of public versus community versus affordable versus market.

Simon NEWPORT: Yes, okay. So I hope you do not mind if I just start with ground lease model 1.

Ellen SANDELL: Sure.

Simon NEWPORT: I might have to do this on the individual projects – let us just check. So in terms of ground lease model 1, which was New Street, Brighton; two at Flemington, Holland Court – there are actually three at Flemington; and Prahran. It was 445 units across those developments. There will be 669 social houses when those projects are finished. I would have to go into the individual projects –

Ellen SANDELL: And it is all community housing –

Simon NEWPORT: I beg your pardon.

Ellen SANDELL: Was any of that public housing, or was that all community housing?

Simon NEWPORT: Those ground lease models are for social housing run by a community housing provider.

Ellen SANDELL: One hundred per cent of it?

Simon NEWPORT: For the ground lease model, yes.

Ellen SANDELL: So 445, up to 661.

Simon NEWPORT: 669.

Ellen SANDELL: 669, sorry. One hundred per cent of that is social housing?

Simon NEWPORT: Yes. That is a 50 per cent increase.

Ellen SANDELL: Do you have those figures for the other models?

Simon NEWPORT: I do. For ground lease model 2, there were 502 social before, and there will be 659, which is an uplift of 31 per cent.

Ellen SANDELL: But again, none of that is public housing – it is all community-run?

Simon NEWPORT: The ground lease model is in partnership with a community housing provider.

Ellen SANDELL: Do you have those figures for the public housing renewal projects which are before that?

Simon NEWPORT: Let me just check on that. I should. Okay, I am going to trust my detailed notes I wrote a few days ago. There will be delivered 1351 units, of which 489 are social. That is a 50 per cent uplift, so I guess we can reverse-engineer that number.

Ellen SANDELL: The rest of them are market?

Simon NEWPORT: In those particular cases 862 are market, 489 are social. That is a 50 per cent uplift on what was there before.

Ellen SANDELL: Thanks. Just to confirm again, all of that social housing is community-run housing – none of it is publicly run housing?

Simon NEWPORT: That is community social housing, yes.

Ellen SANDELL: Is there any component of that market housing which is affordable housing, or is it all just market-rate private housing?

Simon NEWPORT: I do not have that information available.

Ellen SANDELL: No problem. Thank you.

Simon NEWPORT: Certainly there is a substantial affordable component in the other programs, but I am not sure about the public housing renewal program.

Ellen SANDELL: Sorry, when you say in the other programs, you mean since ground lease 2?

Simon NEWPORT: As an example, ground lease 2 has got it, and ground lease 1 has an affordable component to it.

Ellen SANDELL: Sorry, I am just confused because you were saying that 100 per cent of ground lease 1 and 2 is social housing.

Simon NEWPORT: No, no, no, sorry. Ground lease models 1 and 2 are that the properties are building the consortia and run in management by a community housing provider. I gave you the social housing component, which will be a subset of that.

Ellen SANDELL: Understood. So do you have figures for the remaining houses on those sites that are not social housing – the breakdown of market versus affordable?

Simon NEWPORT: I would have to take that on notice. I think I have only got that on an individual project-by-project basis.

Ellen SANDELL: It would be wonderful if you could take that on notice and provide it to the committee. Thank you so much. We hear quite a lot about affordable housing. There has been some confusion about the definition of affordable housing. There are a few different definitions floating around. Can you confirm what the definition the department is working on at the moment is?

Simon NEWPORT: I am just going to read the official definition, if that is all right. It comes from the *Planning and Environment Act*. Let us have a look. Affordable housing, as I said, from the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, is to provide housing to low- to moderate-income households. There is an income band which starts at \$71,450 annually and – this is for household complement – up to \$150,030 for a large family with dependents.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. On the Homes Victoria website as part of the definition of affordable housing it says:

Rents will never be more than market rent ...

You have listed that there is an income eligibility to access the affordable housing, but I am interested in the actual definition of what is affordable. Is it correct that it is no more than market rent – that is the definition?

Simon NEWPORT: Sorry to split hairs. You are alluding to the rent policy that has been adopted by Homes Victoria. Obviously there is a definition on eligibility. There are two approaches – one for effectively greater Melbourne and one for the regions. In both instances there is an additional rent cap which is 30 per cent of the median income. But particularly for Melbourne it is set at no more than 10 per cent below market rent, and for regional areas it is set at no more than market rent. So there is a different approach depending upon where you are.

Ellen SANDELL: Essentially, that means that in regional areas affordable housing could be market housing, and you are just restricting the eligibility of who can live there.

Simon NEWPORT: Often what we find is the access to the property is as much the trouble as is actually the price. I have got some case study examples that I can talk to you about – families in Mildura as an example – what their rent is and what their income is, and often the case is that the income versus rent does not get to the 30 per cent, which is why they end up at market rent. It is very much about being able to access that property. We have found the ballot system, which I understand has drawn some criticism, is proving very successful particularly where there is discrimination against people. Aboriginal people in particular are highly discriminated against in the private rental market, so if you like, a tenure-blind ballot system is proving quite successful in granting access.

Ellen SANDELL: But essentially what you are saying is when the government talks about affordable housing it is more about restricting eligibility of who can access it, so it is actually more about access to that housing. It is actually not about how much the housing costs, because a lot of it will just be let at market rates.

Simon NEWPORT: I am not sure that I can agree with the characterisation ‘a lot of it’. It will depend upon where it is. As an example, at the Docklands development market rent was \$454 for this particular property. It was a one-bedroom affordable housing unit, and it was capped at 30 per cent of the average income, which meant it dropped \$110 per week, or a 24 per cent discount. That is a real-life example in the city. So it is very much horses for courses, but in that particular case, let us face it, that was only 75 per cent of market rent.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. Do you have the figures on the three models that we talked about? There is an affordable housing element of all of those. Do you have the figures of, on average across the affordable housing in those models, how much they were below market rate? You have individual examples, but I am wondering if you have got all the data together for overall.

Simon NEWPORT: No, I do not have that level of data here for all of those projects.

Ellen SANDELL: No problem. Thank you so much. For the public housing renewal project, could you give us what percentage of the public housing land used was sold versus how much was used on 40-year leases?

Simon NEWPORT: My understanding is the public housing renewal program is a program where you are renewing the public housing with a social housing provider and a builder, and then Homes Victoria retains ownership of the stock for which it has contributed either cash or land. The rest of it is owned by the provider and/or the developer/investor, and then that is managed holistically by the provider. I do not have individual break-ups of those. It depends upon what the land was worth and how much funding the government contributed on top, which in some instances is significant. That ultimately is what Homes Victoria ends up owning in those developments, but all collectively managed by the provider.

Ellen SANDELL: I understand that. I guess because the models have changed over the years since I have been here that –

Simon NEWPORT: Sorry to cut you off. That was just the public housing renewal program.

Ellen SANDELL: My understanding is for the public housing renewal project there were some that were sold to developers and some that are on 40-year leases, and now in the ground lease model they are using predominantly the 40-year lease model. So I am interested in how much of the land was sold and how much the government will retain.

Simon NEWPORT: Okay, I would have to check on that. My understanding is the public housing renewal program is the model that I just alluded to. The ground lease model, if you like, evolved from that original program, and obviously, as you would know, the ground lease model is one where the land stays in state ownership and is leased for 40 years and then returned.

Ellen SANDELL: My understanding is that for public housing renewal there was a mix of selling and ground lease, so I am interested in the percentage of each.

Simon NEWPORT: I would have to check. My understanding was that one evolved from the other, but I can certainly get back to you on that.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. Has there been any analysis done of essentially the opportunity cost for government? Obviously it is quite a complicated model in terms of leasing the land to developers and then getting it back after 40 years, but there would be an opportunity cost to government – that if that land was not leased to developers, how much return could have been gotten from that land. Has there been an analysis of that cost?

Simon NEWPORT: I would have to check on that. Are you suggesting the opportunity cost compared to divesting that land up-front or holding it? I guess we are still holding it in all instances.

Ellen SANDELL: Yes, but over 40 years presumably that land is valuable; it does not make no return. So I am interested in the cost difference between giving it to developers versus the return that government could have got if they had retained it.

Simon NEWPORT: Oh, okay. Well, I am not specifically sure about that. But I guess what I could say is I think it is pretty widely known that social housing or even public housing is not exactly a profitable business in its own right. So I think holding the asset with its current ownership, I do not honestly believe it would have been generating a profit, but I can certainly get back to you if there are any particular studies that have been made on that.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you so much. So in the annual report for DFFH 2022–23 the financial statements show an expenditure of \$939 million for grants and other expense transfers. Could you tell us what is contained in that category? So it is on page 199 of the 2022–23 annual report, \$939 million for ‘Grants and other expense transfers’.

Peta McCAMMON: Sorry, that is the DFFH rather than –

Simon NEWPORT: Look, I would have to provide all of that detail. I have got here a note that says that that additional increase is resulting from the Social Housing Growth Fund. I would have to check and provide you with the detail, but I would say that that is the Social Housing Growth Fund and other funding arrangements that flow out of Homes Victoria.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you.

Simon NEWPORT: I do not have a specific breakdown of what that \$939 million is here in front of me.

Ellen SANDELL: Are you able to provide it?

Simon NEWPORT: Of course.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. We talked a little bit before about the right to return, and you mentioned that about generally 30 per cent to 40 per cent of people, depending on the site, take up that right to return. In my electorate we had a public housing renewal project at Abbotsford Street in North Melbourne. It has not been built yet, but residents moved out in about 2018. They were guaranteed the right to return to that site, but now what is happening is that residents at Alfred Street in North Melbourne are being told they can move to Abbotsford Street, because for Alfred Street the plan is to demolish it. So what does that mean for the residents at Abbotsford Street who want to come back?

Simon NEWPORT: Okay. So the way that this is generally managed is that there is obviously a right of return, and yes, you are right, there is an operating model where not every single person will. And we are already seeing that some people are electing, even with the towers, to not move across the road. They are taking the opportunity often to move west, closer to family and schools and what have you. So everybody has a right; it very much depends upon the individual circumstances whether they do. So that right, if you like, will come in first, and we do manage that and track that information. I do have some data in there generally about relocations and how many have got to go, but it does not mean that one lot will miss out because, as we know, probably not everybody will choose to move.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. No problem.

Simon NEWPORT: Sorry – I would also point out that particularly for some of the ground lease model we have been able to convert some affordable housing to social housing, which has brought in stock from the outside, if you get my meaning – outside of the waitlist – and so that is one of the ways we are trying to manage the impact on the waitlist, trying to bring in stock from outside of the social housing network so we can try to bring in additional and try to balance all of that around.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. At the election the government committed to installing air conditioners in all public housing towers. Since then the housing minister has just referred to air-conditioning pilots. I am just interested in whether the air conditioners are still going ahead and where the pilots are happening. We have heard from some residents that they have had holes put in their walls already. I am interested: are these part of the pilots? And with the towers that are being demolished in the first tranche, will they still have air conditioning installed?

Simon NEWPORT: I will try to answer all of those. I will work backwards, if you do not mind. The three towers, being the two at Flemington and one in North Melbourne, given that, roughly speaking, we will be talking about 12 months or so before we expect those to be decanted, will not receive air conditioning. I think most people would not be terribly surprised that we would not be installing air conditioning in towers that are about to immediately be retired. The rest of the program is still going to go ahead. We have now narrowed it down – and I am sorry to bring props, generally speaking, I know in Parliament matters. There are two units, and we have now brought it down to one that is more a unit that can be moved more easily, and the other one is more fixed, which is called a unitary model. They were trialled – I think there were five different models that were trialled in Richmond, so perhaps you were alluding to Richmond when you talked about holes in the wall – but we have now settled on two solutions. Then there is the list of the first four towers. We are absolutely focusing on the older persons towers, that cohort. We would like to roll it out immediately for everybody, but we are starting with four towers: 25 King Street, Prahran; 27 King Street, Prahran; 150 Inkerman Street in St Kilda; and 150 Victoria Avenue in Albert Park, all being older persons towers.

Ellen SANDELL: So you are saying that the three in the first tranche, which are Alfred Street and the two in Flemington, will not receive them, but every other tower will receive them?

Simon NEWPORT: That is correct. That is what I am saying, absolutely. But we are starting with those four, and we expect the first lot of works to take place in February or shortly thereafter.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay, thank you. The annual report indicates the department paid consultancy firm Ontoit \$2.8 million last year as part of a contract for services related to the ground lease model. I understand the website says Ontoit has been working with the government since 2017. What are these services that they are providing?

The CHAIR: Apologies, Ms Sandell, the time is up. We will go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Secretary and officials. Mr O’Kelly, I saw on the questionnaire that there was information about the care support helpdesk. Are you able to explain what that is?

Danny O’KELLY: During the period that we are speaking about today we introduced carer support helpdesks across the state, so one in each of the divisions. Essentially they are a staffed helpdesk that carers can contact, either kinship or foster carers, directly if they are having any issues with care arrangements or they might need information about what additional supports might be available – pretty well anything where it might be difficult to get in touch with the CP worker or the agency worker that is looking after the placement. There is an arrangement there, a group of staff who are basically there as a resource to support a placement. So it might be about the level of payment, it might be about additional supports, it might be about a range of things that they need some information and support on around continuing that kinship.

Lauren KATHAGE: So is it more admin-y rather than, you know –

Danny O’KELLY: It is advice and guidance and then action – they will follow up actions. So if a carer rings and says that they are not happy with the level that their current arrangements are assessed at, they can organise for that reassessment to take place quickly and easily without having to navigate their way through – it might be a very busy child protection worker. It is a quicker way of getting access to supports that you might need. It might be –

Lauren KATHAGE: So they could phone and say, ‘I am feeling stressed out, can you help?’

Danny O’KELLY: Yes. They can ring and say, ‘We’re interested in going on a holiday and we want to understand how we get passports quickly.’ Any of those supports around things that will make a difference to a carer’s ability to support that placement. I almost think of it as a hotline where they can access that information and get some help.

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes. A VIP line, I think, for carers.

Danny O’KELLY: Yes. And we have seen that it is being used, and the kinds of things that people are responding to are many and varied. But we do have a sense that it is making a difference in terms of carers’ ability to get access to information in a more timely way and then get some support if there is some follow-up needed.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great. Mr O’Kelly, I keep seeing ads on Facebook to come and work for you. They are everywhere. I am tempted.

Danny O’KELLY: It is interesting work.

Lauren KATHAGE: Obviously there is a big push in social media at the moment; I see the ads about doing jobs that matter. What else are you doing to recruit at the moment?

Danny O’KELLY: We have been a bit excited in the last little while because we are really starting to get some traction on the range of initiatives we have. We have had a bit of a unique challenge in that we talk a lot about vacancies but the context for our vacancies has been that we have had growth. So we are getting resources for new positions and we are chasing people to fill those vacancies. There are streams of work that we are doing, and we are really starting to see the impact of that work. For our child protection employment program we have got \$5.4 million over four years to support our recruitment of social work students. This is a really strong and consistent pipeline for us, where we bring students in, usually in their final year of a social work course. They work, they are on the job, they get an opportunity to see what it is like to really work in child protection. We support them all the way through and then about 80 per cent of them end up coming on board and staying with us as recruits in the following year once they finish that program. We had a celebration here a few weeks ago with this year’s vac graduates, our vacation graduates.

We are recruiting from overseas, which has been a longstanding practice by child protection. So the vacation program is really good at bringing in new grads. The international recruits help us bring in experienced practitioners from overseas, so our pipeline is very strong on new staff. The overseas recruits help us by allowing us to bring in practitioners with more experience. They are trained social workers coming from a number of countries overseas. They are already trained in social work and child protection, so they come with

that experience and our effort is about supporting them to get a cultural context right here and support them with moving to a new country. So an international recruitment strategy provides wraparound support for the worker so that they can successfully transition into the child protection program across the state.

The other very deliberate and targeted one that we do is our Go Where You're Needed campaign, which is probably one that people see on social media a little bit. It is a very deliberate and targeted campaign. We are advertising for people to come and work in the child protection program specifically, and each time we do a run of advertising we see interest in working in child protection escalate for periods of time, so we know that it works. One of the things that we are doing at the moment is tweaking that to have a really specific rural element. Some of our recruitment challenges are about what we do for rural Victoria to fill our vacancies out in those environments. So we are doing work internally, and then we are part of broader strategies, so the Jobs that Matter campaign, which is really about recruitment to the community services workforce more broadly. We cannot do our work if the community services agencies are running vacancies as well. We benefit from that campaign as well. That has been running since August 2022. If people ever have a moment to have a look, when you go through that process it can take you to child protection or it can take you to other places, and we can see how many people are having a look at child protection. So we see a bit of a pipeline in that space.

Recent initiatives include our Switch to Social Work program, which is targeting career switchers. The majority of our workforce are social workers and psychologists, but when we think about our work, there are other professions that if we supported them well with a transition, we think they could be a really valuable part of –

Lauren KATHAGE: Politicians.

Danny O'KELLY: Yes. Practitioners. Yes. So we have got investment to support us in the development of those programs to support teachers, nurses, whoever – other professions that might have capacity.

Lauren KATHAGE: That broader recruitment program, is that also aiming to get staff into ACCOs for the transitioning of kids to ACCOs?

Danny O'KELLY: Jobs that Matter?

Lauren KATHAGE: Yes.

Danny O'KELLY: It is, and – actually I am looking to Camille – Jobs that Matter has some specific components that are around supporting our Aboriginal organisations. For our recruitment process and our onboarding process for job protection, we now do processes like beginning practice for our new workforce as they come on board. We actually do that with ACCO staff. So when we induct new child protection workers, we have got Aboriginal staff from Aboriginal organisations or staff who were working in Aboriginal organisations doing the training with our staff. Some of those practices are well and truly embedded.

Lauren KATHAGE: And with that program, the transitioning of Aboriginal children to ACCOs, are we seeing outcomes from that yet in terms of improvements for Aboriginal kids' lives?

Danny O'KELLY: I do not know whether Annette might want to jump in as well on this one. I will certainly say yes but hand to my colleague Annette for some more detailed responses.

Annette LANCY: Thanks, Danny. We absolutely have a long way to go in terms of addressing the rates of over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection and care. Where we have models in place that allow for self-determination and allow for self-management of Aboriginal children in care by the Aboriginal community controlled organisations, we see two things – one, that children and families case managed and supported by ACCOs report feeling more connected to culture and more connected to community, and I think most critically our evaluations show that when ACCOs are taking on the case management, they are able to reunify or allow children to return safely back to live with their parents at higher rates than we can when we are managing the same sorts of cases in the child protection program or where they are supported by community service organisations. Since 2016–17 when we commenced that program, we have had about a 250 per cent increase in the proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in the system who are case managed by ACCOs, and we have got a bit of a way to go.

We have been working with the Aboriginal Children's Forum, so late last year we concluded the draft report and the Aboriginal Children's Forum considered this year a report that is called the ACCO aspirations and rights report, and that is specifically looking at what further measures can be put in place to support Aboriginal community controlled organisations to take forward more work and more support for their families. A lot of that is not covered in this period of the hearings, but a lot of that informed the investment that was made in the 2023–24 budget where there has been additional investment in services to support our ACCOs to deliver services. Lots of those services that were funded in the budget for this year were born out of some of the funding and the programs we have supported through the Aboriginal learning and innovation fund, which is a grants-based program funded during this period of time which allows ACCOs to do the development work in terms of trialling new models. Often they are models that build on Aboriginal practice, knowledge, wisdom and ways of doing, so they are new to us, but they are not new to Aboriginal communities, and it is really about them building those models and being able to test and trial them in their local communities, and then we have been able to support Aboriginal organisations to start to take those to scale through the system.

Lauren KATHAGE: During the reporting period, has there been work undertaken to reduce the administrative burden on ACCOs in terms of grant management?

Annette LANCY: Grant management specifically?

Lauren KATHAGE: Reporting and grant management.

Peta McCAMMON: I mean, I think it is something to try and get the balance right with, with all of our sector partners, in terms of obviously accountability for delivery but also, as you say, that it is not in the space of red tape. We would probably have to come back to you about if there is anything specific about ACCOs. I know the acronym, but I do not know the full name – our APPs actually are located regionally. Our officers have a direct relationship with all of our providers, and one of their key tasks is absolutely to help in terms of delivery. It is something that we are aware of, but I will have to come back to you if there is a specific project.

Lauren KATHAGE: Okay. Thank you. Further down in the questionnaire it refers to family preservation and reunification response. Is this the name of what you were just talking about, Ms Lancy, or is that something different?

Annette LANCY: There is a component of the family preservation and reunification response that is the specific Aboriginal practice model, and indeed that is an element of the work that our ACCOs do with Aboriginal children and families. The family preservation and reunification response is broader. It has both an Aboriginal component and a component that is delivered by community service organisations. It is an evidence-based model that supports either family preservation – so families where child protection has been involved and they are able to remain at home, but we need to ensure that safety and support for that family continues – or reunification, so where a child is temporarily outside of the home and we are working with the child or young person and their broader family to support them to return home.

The way the family preservation and reunification response operates, if that is helpful to indicate, is we have as part of the program some specific positions in the child protection program. They are known as the child protection navigators. They work and are a link between our child protection practitioners and funded agencies, so both Aboriginal community controlled organisations and community service organisations. They work as child protection is getting to the end of its work with a family. They really make sure that then that family can be supported really seamlessly to come into the family preservation or reunification response. That will mean then when they are working with our other family services providers they will work really intensively with that family as child protection is completing their work so that that family has a really clear sense of what happens next and how they can continue with the supports and the activity that they want to do to make sure that they remain a family safe and well together. The response is intensive, so up to 200 hours of support from a dedicated practitioner, and most critically, I think, for the family preservation and reunification response, it is based on an evidence-based program of evidenced modules, so staff who are delivering the work in the program in our agencies have been through specific training and support and coaching to be able to deliver the program to engage families to help build that understanding, build trust and support families.

The work that we have done in the family preservation response started in COVID, and been invested further through the budget period that we are talking about here. We are seeing really significant outcomes. To give

you a sense of it, our latest data to December 2022 suggests that there are 229 less children, and that includes 52 less Aboriginal children than would have been expected based on outcomes from programs we used to provide to be in care. So that is over 200 children no longer in care and safely with their families. We see 53 per cent of families showing improvement in family functioning and 46 per cent of families showing improvement in parenting efficacy. That is rated on validated scales, and we know that those are really key indicators in terms of then parents being confident and being able to support their children, and that is a leading indicator of families being able to stay together. So that program, across both what we call 'mainstream' community service organisations but particularly the Aboriginal model where that design has been led by ACCOs with Aboriginal practice models, is proving to be really successful over the period.

Lauren KATHAGE: And that transition link that you were talking about – we heard evidence this morning from the Department of Health about their early parenting centres. We have had one completed in Wyndham. Mine is coming online soon, and all the way down the track all members have these early parenting centres coming. Do you see them as contributing to those same outcomes as this program?

Annette LANCY: I think absolutely a significant part of the work that we are doing both with Department of Health, with Department of Education and that early years work is really making sure that all of the services, particularly in those early years of life, are well connected and that families can access the full suite of services. And then particularly from our department it is about how we then make sure where families need some additional support that that can operate alongside early parenting centres, access to kinder. So particularly for us we have had in this period what we call the early help family services program that is looking at embedding family services workers in universal settings – in kinders, in hospitals, in schools – and as parents are perhaps preparing to leave those facilities, they can then help ensure that that support and referral continues on.

Equally, I mentioned previously the Aboriginal learning and innovation fund. One of the programs that was funded as a grant there and is now being scaled up is a model that Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative trailed with the Bendigo Hospital where they were specifically dealing with young, pregnant mums who may have been subject to an unborn notification for child protection or may just have been aware in the community, needed advice. They have been working in partnership with the hospital to really wrap a really holistic support model around that family prior to birth and post birth, and we have seen the results that BDAC were able to deliver from that program were fantastic. And on the back of that we are supporting the ACCOs to roll out a similar model, a diversionary model, right across the state where other ACCHs are keen to undertake it.

Lauren KATHAGE: Okay. Yes, I think I have heard that spoken about on a national level, that particular example, as being a stand-out.

Annette LANCY: It is a fantastic program.

Lauren KATHAGE: If I have time, I just want to touch on some questions about women if that is okay and equality, gender equality. The 2022–23 budget papers include an output for supporting gender equality and better outcomes for women across economic security, safety, leadership, health, wellbeing, everything – amazing. What are the big-ticket items under that initiative?

Peta McCAMMON: We have got Ms Perry back again. I think Lou can talk to us a bit about some of the economic programs that are being rolled out. Also, I think the gender equality commissioner is a really important part of this as well in terms of the accountabilities back to the public sector in terms of employment, pay equity, which I know we have talked about at this committee before as well. But perhaps, Lou, some of the budget initiatives from the last two years –

Louise PERRY: Absolutely.

Peta McCAMMON: because we know also obviously gender equality has a direct impact to family violence, so it remains a really critical area of focus from a prevention point of view as well. Oh, sorry. I did not do that deliberately, I promise.

A member: Let the record show!

Lauren KATHAGE: You always have to have the last word, don't you?

The CHAIR: I try to share this little clock around, showing everyone. Everyone feels better if they can see it rotating.

Peta McCAMMON: We are happy to take that on notice. Sorry, Lou.

The CHAIR: Secretary and officials, thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us this afternoon. The committee very much appreciates it. The committee is going to follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

I would also like to thank secretaries and officers who have given evidence to the committee today. I would like to thank Hansard and the secretariat and the wonderful hospitality staff who have looked after this committee very, very much indeed this week. That is the end of the public inquiry for these hearings. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.