



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 20 June 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Daniel Andrews

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Jacinta Allan

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

| Member | District | Party | Member | District | Party |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Addison, Juliana | Wendouree | ALP | Lambert, Nathan | Preston | ALP |
| Allan, Jacinta | Bendigo East | ALP | Maas, Gary | Narre Warren South | ALP |
| Andrews, Daniel | Mulgrave | ALP | McCurdy, Tim | Ovens Valley | Nat |
| Battin, Brad | Berwick | Lib | McGhie, Steve | Melton | ALP |
| Benham, Jade | Mildura | Nat | McLeish, Cindy | Eildon | Lib |
| Britnell, Roma | South-West Coast | Lib | Marchant, Alison | Bellarine | ALP |
| Brooks, Colin | Bundoora | ALP | Matthews-Ward, Kathleen | Broadmeadows | ALP |
| Bull, Josh | Sunbury | ALP | Mercurio, Paul | Hastings | ALP |
| Bull, Tim | Gippsland East | Nat | Mullahy, John | Glen Waverley | ALP |
| Cameron, Martin | Morwell | Nat | Newbury, James | Brighton | Lib |
| Carbines, Anthony | Ivanhoe | ALP | O'Brien, Danny | Gippsland South | Nat |
| Carroll, Ben | Niddrie | ALP | O'Brien, Michael | Malvern | Lib |
| Cheeseman, Darren | South Barwon | ALP | O'Keefe, Kim | Shepparton | Nat |
| Cianflone, Anthony | Pascoe Vale | ALP | Pallas, Tim | Werribee | ALP |
| Cleland, Annabelle | Euroa | Nat | Pearson, Danny | Essendon | ALP |
| Connolly, Sarah | Laverton | ALP | Pesutto, John | Hawthorn | Lib |
| Couzens, Christine | Geelong | ALP | Read, Tim | Brunswick | Greens |
| Crewther, Chris | Mornington | Lib | Richards, Pauline | Cranbourne | ALP |
| Crugnale, Jordan | Bass | ALP | Richardson, Tim | Mordialloc | ALP |
| D'Ambrosio, Liliana | Mill Park | ALP | Riordan, Richard | Polwarth | Lib |
| De Martino, Daniela | Monbulk | ALP | Rowswell, Brad | Sandringham | Lib |
| de Vietri, Gabrielle | Richmond | Greens | Sandell, Ellen | Melbourne | Greens |
| Dimopoulos, Steve | Oakleigh | ALP | Settle, Michaela | Eureka | ALP |
| Edbrooke, Paul | Frankston | ALP | Smith, Ryan | Warrandyte | Lib |
| Edwards, Maree | Bendigo West | ALP | Southwick, David | Caulfield | Lib |
| Fowles, Will ¹ | Ringwood | Ind | Spence, Ros | Kalkallo | ALP |
| Fregon, Matt | Ashwood | ALP | Staikos, Nick | Bentleigh | ALP |
| George, Ella | Lara | ALP | Suleyman, Natalie | St Albans | ALP |
| Grigorovitch, Luba | Kororoit | ALP | Tak, Meng Heang | Clarinda | ALP |
| Groth, Sam | Nepean | Lib | Taylor, Jackson | Bayswater | ALP |
| Guy, Matthew | Bulleen | Lib | Taylor, Nina | Albert Park | ALP |
| Halfpenny, Bronwyn | Thomastown | ALP | Theophanous, Kat | Northcote | ALP |
| Hall, Katie | Footscray | ALP | Thomas, Mary-Anne | Macedon | ALP |
| Hamer, Paul | Box Hill | ALP | Tilley, Bill | Benambra | Lib |
| Haylett, Martha | Ripon | ALP | Vallence, Bridget | Evelyn | Lib |
| Hibbins, Sam | Prahran | Greens | Vulin, Emma | Pakenham | ALP |
| Hilakari, Mathew | Point Cook | ALP | Walsh, Peter | Murray Plains | Nat |
| Hodgett, David | Croydon | Lib | Walters, Iwan | Greenvale | ALP |
| Home, Melissa | Williamstown | ALP | Ward, Vicki | Eltham | ALP |
| Hutchins, Natalie | Sydenham | ALP | Wells, Kim | Rowville | Lib |
| Kathage, Lauren | Yan Yean | ALP | Wight, Dylan | Tarneit | ALP |
| Kealy, Emma | Lowan | Nat | Williams, Gabrielle | Dandenong | ALP |
| Kilkenny, Sonya | Carrum | ALP | Wilson, Belinda | Narre Warren North | ALP |
| Wayne Farnham | Narracan | Lib | Wilson, Jess | Kew | Lib |

¹ ALP until 5 August.

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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Tuesday 20 June 2023

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:03): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 to change the title of that act and to remove requirements relating to work plans and to make consequential amendments to the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (Environment Mitigation Levy) Act 2020 and other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:04): I ask the minister if she could provide a brief explanation of the bill.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:04): This bill will introduce a new duties-based framework for the management of resources operations in Victoria, streamlining the approvals for industry and ensuring stronger risk management.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Statute Law Amendment (References to the Sovereign) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 in relation to references to the sovereign, to amend the statute law of Victoria to revise language referring to the Queen and Her Majesty as a consequence of the death of Queen Elizabeth II and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (12:05): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (12:05): The bill seeks to amend the statute book to correct references from 'Her Majesty' to 'His Majesty' or similar terms. While the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 provides that those references should be interpreted as the successor, the actual wording in each act is incorrect. It is not intended to change the effect of the laws and how they are currently interpreted and applied. The bill also seeks to amend the ILA to clarify the operation of certain provisions and further future-proof legislation for demises or successions of the sovereign. The chief parliamentary counsel is intending to write to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee to confirm, as per ordinary practice, which amendments aside from the ILA changes are only of a statute law nature.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 7*

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:06): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being the *Alert Digest* No. 7 of 2023, on the following act, bills and subordinate legislation:

Building and Planning Legislation Amendment Act 2023
Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023
Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (Transition Away from Coal) Bill 2023
Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023
State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023
Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023
SR No. 76 – Forests (Forest Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation) Regulations 2022
SR No. 115 – Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling) Regulations 2022
Order in Council – Declaration of Surf Coast as a Distinctive Area and Landscape
Order in Council – Extension of Period of Declaration of Bellarine Peninsula and Bass Coast as Distinctive Areas and Landscape

together with appendices and extracts from proceedings.

Ordered to be published.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Regulating Food Safety – Ordered to be published
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 – Education and Care Services National Amendment Regulations 2023 under s 303
Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 – Victorian Government report in multicultural affairs 2021–22
Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Electoral Matters Committee’s Report on the Inquiry into whether Victoria should participate in a national electoral roll platform
Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:
Alpine – C66
Baw Baw – C145
Bayside – C184
Boroondara – C378
Cardinia – C276
Glen Eira – C253, C254
Glenelg – C96
Greater Bendigo – C281
Greater Dandenong – C233
Hume – C257
Latrobe – C137
Mansfield – C54

Maroondah – C152
Melbourne – C425
Merri-bek – C226
Mildura – C123
Monash – C151
Port Phillip – C207
Wangaratta – C94
Whitehorse – C247
Whittlesea – C257
Yarra – C314

Road Management Act 2004 – Code of Practice for Worksite Safety – Traffic Management (Gazette S280, 1 June 2023)

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 – SR 35
Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – SR 41
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – SR 46
Electricity Safety Act 1998 – SR 40
Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958 – SR 39
Forests Act 1958 – SR 42
Land Act 1958 – SR 43
Marine Safety Act 2010 – SR 36
National Parks Act 1975 – SR 44
Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – SR 38
Transfer of Land Act 1958 – SR 47
Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 – SR 48
Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014 – SR 37
Wildlife Act 1975 – SR 45

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Meat Industry Act 1993 – PrimeSafe Determination of licence category and fixing fees for meat processing facilities and meat transport vehicles 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

Seafood Safety Act 2003 – PrimeSafe Determination of licence classes and fixing fees for seafood safety licences 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

Wildlife Act 1975:

Wildlife (Closure of Lake Bookar State Game Reserve) Notice (*Gazette S250, 19 May 2023*)

Wildlife (Closure of Lake Buloke State Game Reserve) Notice (*Gazette S220, 5 May 2023*).

PROCLAMATIONS – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Act 2022 – Sections 34, 36, 37, 38, 41, 47, 53, 54 and 55 – 31 May 2023 (Gazette S273, 30 May 2023).

*Bills***Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023****Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (12:09): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023.

Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023*Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (12:09): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 4, after line 24 insert –
 - “7AA **Statement of acknowledgement**
 - (1) The Parliament acknowledges that removing an Aboriginal child from the care of a parent may –
 - (a) disrupt the child’s connection to their culture; and
 - (b) cause harm to the child, including serious harm.
 - (2) The Parliament does not intend by this section to affect in any way the interpretation of this Act or of any other laws in force in Victoria.”.
2. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 4 –
 - ‘4A **Aboriginal Child Placement Principle**
 - (1) After section 13(3) of the **Children, Youth and Families Act 2005** insert –
 - “(4) For the avoidance of doubt, the Court or a bail justice (as the case may be) must have regard to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in making any decision or taking any action in respect of a child in need of protection under Chapter 4.”.’.
3. Clause 7, page 14, lines 33 to 36, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
4. Clause 7, page 15, lines 1 to 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
5. Clause 7, page 15, line 4, omit “(9)” and insert “(8)”.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:11): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house’s decision.

Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023*Introduction and first reading*

The SPEAKER (12:11): I have received a message from the Council sending a bill for an act to amend the Public Administration Act 2004 and the Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017 to provide more control over lobbyists, for which they request the agreement of the Legislative Assembly. Is there a sponsor for this bill? I understand that the member for Brighton will take charge of this bill.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:11): I move:

That this bill be now read a first time.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Noes (52): Juliana Addison, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I just seek your guidance and clarification about the appropriateness of the member for Northcote being in the chamber to vote on this matter, given the origins of the bill and that it relates to her family and to her funded campaign. I seek your guidance.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order. There is no point of order.

Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023****Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023****Gambling Taxation Bill 2023***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (12:17): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Building Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023, the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (12:18): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023.

*Address to Parliament***Governor's speech***Address-in-reply*

The SPEAKER (12:18): I presented to the Governor on 7 June 2023 the address of the Legislative Assembly, agreed to on 4 May 2023, in reply to her speech on the opening of Parliament. The Governor was pleased to make the following reply:

In the name and on behalf of His Majesty The King I thank you for your expressions of loyalty to Our Most Gracious Sovereign contained in the address you have just presented to me.

I fully rely on your wisdom in deliberating upon the important measures to be brought under your consideration, and I earnestly hope that the results of your labours will be conducive to the advancement and prosperity of this State.

*Committees***House Committee***Membership*

The SPEAKER (12:18): I have received the resignation of Ryan Smith from the House Committee, effective from today.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:19): I move, by leave:

That James Newbury be a member of the House Committee.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Schools payroll tax**

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:19): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house notes the Minister for Education's remark that she was 'unaware of any of our schools actually qualifying' for the \$10 million payroll, despite almost 70 independent schools qualifying, who will consequentially be hit with three additional taxes thanks to Labor's horror budget.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY: I ask that that be placed on the notice paper.

The SPEAKER: It will be placed on the notice paper.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:20): I also desire to move, by leave:

That the Minister for Education provides the Legislative Assembly with the names of the 110 non-government schools that are on the government's secret schools hit list, a tax that was announced without any consultation and will hit schools with three additional taxes thanks to Labor's horror budget.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY: Speaker, I ask that that also be placed on the notice paper.

The SPEAKER: It will be placed on the notice paper.

*Business of the house***Standing and sessional orders**

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:20): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 15, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe that the Premier called me a ‘halfwit grub’. I find that absolutely offensive. It is a shame on him, and I ask him to withdraw.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier to withdraw.

Daniel Andrews: In deference to you, Speaker, I withdraw.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, I heard the Premier withdraw the comment, but I think he owes an apology to this house, the Victorian people and the member for Eildon. You apologise – that is a disgraceful comment.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition! You will resume your seat when I am on my feet. The Premier withdrew.

Program

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:22): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 22 June 2023:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023

Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023.

It is the last sitting week of this session, and it is fitting that we end this session debating two very important bills – bills that demonstrate very clearly to this house and indeed to the people of Victoria the values that this Labor government brings to this house every single day. We made a commitment to the people of Victoria to establish Australia’s first royal commission into mental health. We were very clear with the people of Victoria that our mental health system was broken and it needed to be rebuilt from the ground up. We have committed to delivering on every single one of the recommendations of that royal commission, and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 is one of the ways in which we are delivering on that very significant, important commitment that we made to the people of Victoria – a commitment, I might say, that we made with a funding mechanism that was opposed by those on the other side. This is a mechanism that understands that the investments that are needed in mental health have not always been what they need to be and that only this government has a clear plan and, what is more, the will, the commitment and the strength of conviction to see it through to full implementation.

The second bill on the business program for this week is of course one of my own bills and indeed delivers on a very important election commitment. We took to the people of Victoria a commitment that we would work to authorise pharmacists to deliver repeat prescriptions of the contraceptive pill, to be able to treat uncomplicated urinary tract infections and skin infections and to be able to deliver travel medicines. I am obviously not going to debate the bill, because that would be inappropriate. However, it is important to note that quality and safety for consumers is always at the forefront of

every decision that we make in health and in every bill that we bring to this place, and of course there are a range of ways in which this initiative will be overseen.

This is about delivering particularly for women of Victoria, because what we know is that for too long women's health needs and women's conditions have been seen as niche issues. It is only our government that is ensuring that we are giving women's health the focus that it needs and that we are delivering on the commitments made to the people of Victoria – including 20 women's health clinics, including an expansion to 20 sexual health and reproductive hubs and including a pain management inquiry, more laparoscopic surgery procedures for women suffering from endometriosis and of course a commitment to a women's health research institute, because we know that for way too long the body of medical research and knowledge that is out there has been built over time on research into men yet we know that many common conditions impact women so much differently, and they present differently in women than they do in men. Women's health is impacted by our sex and gender expression and identity, and it is important that we deliver health services that are inclusive and deliver services to all those who need them.

These are two very important bills before the house this week. I know that many members on this side of the house are obviously anxious to get their opportunity to speak on the budget – a budget that delivers every single one of our election commitments to the people of Victoria. I know many members will want to talk about how those commitments are delivering in their own electorates. Indeed they may well have electorate-specific initiatives that are in the budget papers and will want to speak on those too. As always, we come to this place with a full agenda, an agenda that is driven by our values, and our values are very clear for everyone to see – unlike, I might say, with those on the other side, who flip-flop and hang out with the far right when it suits them.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I understand that the Leader of the House has run out of things to say, but that should not lead her to stray.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House's time has expired.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:28): The coalition will oppose the government business program, and I will explain why in a moment. Can I start by picking up where the Leader of the House ended, and that was on values. What the house did just prior to this debate was, with the government using its numbers, vote down the introduction of a bill which we could have considered this week and which we should have considered this week. In fact had it not been for the vote that just took place, the government would have been debating better standards in Victoria.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, of course the government business debate is an opportunity to talk about the government business program, and I ask that you call the Manager of Opposition Business, who should know better than that, to actually talk to the government business program instead of using the opportunity to sledge the government.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Speaker, it is entirely within order to talk about the proposed business of the house this week, and that is what I was doing.

The SPEAKER: I would encourage members to speak to the government business program without any additional comments around the government business program.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Speaker. Had we had the opportunity, we would have been dealing with that bill tomorrow. This government business program displays what the government has been doing over recent weeks and has been called out for, and that is mismanaging the house. We, the coalition, contacted the government and sought an opportunity to talk about the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 in detail, which was an opportunity for the house to go into the detail of the bill – look at each clause and work through the mechanics of the bill, for those that are watching. That is the process of consideration in detail in this place. The government declined to provide the opposition with that opportunity despite clearly not being able to fill its week with its government

business program. This term the coalition has not had an opportunity to go into consideration in detail, and to be fair, going into the detail of a bill is something that this government is not known for providing time for in their program. In fact it is effectively as rare as hen's teeth for this chamber to –

Danny O'Brien: Twice in my time, I think – three times in my nine years.

James NEWBURY: Three times in nine years the house has been provided with an opportunity to look at the detail of a bill through a consideration-in-detail process. So for that reason alone we will be opposing the government business program. The government business program more broadly speaks to the mismanagement of the house – the government's lack of control of its time and also its legislative program. Controlling a legislative program is one of the most important things that a government does – works out how they turn an idea into reality through law. That does require several steps – through cabinet, through internal processes, through Parliament – and what we are seeing is that there has been a go-slow on what the government is doing. We are seeing this chamber filled with debates around motions, debates that frankly have no meaningful impact on the way this state is legislated.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House!

James NEWBURY: I understand that the Leader of the House is embarrassed about being called out. I understand that. But this debate is an opportunity to shine a light on the government's mismanagement of this place. We are seeing that on a daily basis. We are seeing that in the way the government is not allowing debates on items on the notice paper, and we are seeing both the coalition and the Greens regularly now get up and speak to their frustrations about the Parliament not being given an opportunity to debate matters of importance.

For example, I just raised a number of matters in the education portfolio that the house should be considering – but they are not the only ones. There is an important motion that the Nationals have put on the notice paper in regard to a regional sitting, a very important motion – that the Assembly should be taking itself out into the regions to speak to the broader community beyond Melbourne. These issues are not being debated in this chamber, and of course on that basis we will be opposing the government business program and calling on the government to do a heck of a lot better with managing this place.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:33): I am very pleased to speak on the government business program. Certainly values underpin everything we do, and it is almost laughable that those opposite are querying our capacity to deliver. We have done nothing but deliver constantly. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which has been spoken to already, is certainly a matter of pride but also a matter of ethics and strength and a connection amongst all Victorians. We have absolutely backed it in and are delivering on all the recommendations, and you can see the benefit of that through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, which we will be debating in the chamber. You are welcome to turn up; you are welcome to debate the bill; we invite that –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Albert Park will not refer to 'you'.

Nina TAYLOR: Pardon me for that indiscretion there. I take that on board. Members of the opposition are welcome to speak to the bill. We welcome that; this is a chamber of democracy. I am not sure – maybe they are shy about speaking on this bill. Certainly it is us on this side who have absolutely led when it comes to mental health reform. Indeed there is probably not a Victorian who is not in one way or another touched by issues of mental health or does not know of someone who has experienced significant challenges in that space, and hence we have taken it on 100 per cent and are therefore absolutely delivering when it comes to these critical reforms for our state.

I did not really appreciate the lecture on how to put together a bill. I found that a little bit extraordinary. I am not sure why the opposition think we do not know how to put together bills. We have put together many fine bills and many, many wonderful reforms since we have been in government, whether it be

on wind farms, renewables, mental health or otherwise or whether it be in terms of delivering on level crossings and the like. So if you want to take us on when it comes to delivering, we will have that debate any day of the week.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, just on standing order 108, I would ask if you would remind the member to not keep using the word ‘you’, as it is a reflection on you, and to speak appropriately throughout the debate.

The SPEAKER: I have reminded the member for Albert Park to not refer to ‘you’.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, Speaker, and I apologise for using that terminology. Now, to continue on the government business agenda, we also have the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023. This is certainly bringing about some very important reforms that we have promised to deliver on as we do continually deliver. I will not debate the bill proper itself, but I will take up a particular point when it comes to a focus on women’s health, because we know that for many decades unfortunately it has been seen as a niche issue, when we know that very much it deserves the investment in research, which we are absolutely committing to, but also in terms of having accessible women’s health clinics around the state. I know that everyone has a friend or a mother or otherwise who has experienced all sorts of vicissitudes of health issues that do happen to be specific to women, and it is great to see that as a collective – and it probably it may even have to do with having quotas and having such great representation of women in our government – this also helps in terms of backing in these wonderful reforms and bringing them forward.

There are more laparoscopy surgeries; they are certainly welcome. I have been talking about these reforms with people in my electorate, and I tell you they are welcome and it is certainly timely. I think this is what Labor is all about, because we are values based. We are also delivering on all our election commitments, and I am really, really pleased about that, because we respect our electorates and we know how important it is to be able to on the one hand deliver great policy and then implement legislation which is underpinned by great values.

So I think that it is going to be a fantastic week in Parliament. There will be plenty of opportunity to debate these important reforms, and I encourage the opposition to take their opportunity to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill and the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 and enjoy.

Danny O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:38): I am pleased to say a few words on the government business program this week, and I am sure I will be taking up the offer of the suggestion of the member for Albert Park and making contributions on the two bills that are on the business program this week, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. I can say from my own perspective I have probably spent enough time in this place in the last couple of weeks, and I am sure maybe the member for Point Cook would also agree that we would like something exciting and interesting to keep us awake this week –

Mathew Hilakari: I’m excited.

Danny O’BRIEN: You are excited? Okay. Well –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Danny O’BRIEN: It is good to hear that the member for Point Cook is excited. It has been a long couple of weeks through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearings, and we have been exercising the great democratic tradition of a bit of accountability and transparency. But unfortunately with respect to the government business program we are seeing again the government not continuing that in this particular chamber, because once again the opposition has requested to go into consideration in detail on some legislation and once again we have been rejected – not only rejected, this time it is a flat out rejection as I understand it. With the former Leader of the House there

used to be a bit of a 'We'll see. We'll see if we've got time. There might be an opportunity.' But I think we have just been told this time that, no, we cannot have consideration in detail. And that is why we object to this government business program –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, it might be a small thing but it is important that I correct the member for Gippsland South. In fact I did have a conversation – the member is misleading the house. In fact the –

The SPEAKER: Order! That is no point of order.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, I wonder, then, from the contribution just made by the Leader of the House, if we are going to go into consideration in detail on Thursday. Is that with the plan is? Because it has certainly not been mentioned to those of us on the side. It would have been –

Mary-Anne Thomas: I have considered it.

Danny O'BRIEN: Considered it and it was –

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the member for Gippsland South to address his comments through the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, it is a little bit difficult because –

The SPEAKER: It is not that hard.

Danny O'BRIEN: The Leader of the House is interjecting repeatedly, and I am not quite sure what the situation with the government business program is, because –

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland South will ignore interjections and speak through the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: They are disorderly, Speaker. Thank you for correcting me. The point that I was getting to, though, is that we are trying to actually have open and transparent debate in this place, and we have already seen just now the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023 coming from the upper house also rejected, not to be debated here.

I have also spent the last couple of weeks sitting next to the member for Melbourne. The member for Melbourne and I do not agree on a lot of things, but she has just moved the motion about bringing in non-government business, which we on this side have supported of course in the past. That is something that we should be able to do in this chamber – to have some debate on things that are not just the government's plan, things that the Parliament, that the people of Victoria, would actually like us to be talking about. We do not have to agree on them. We do not have to have a debate and then all vote in favour of them – we do that every week with the government's agenda – but it would be nice to be able to actually, firstly, bring up other things in a non-government business debate and, secondly, on the government's legislation actually get into the weeds of it, firstly to find out if the minister knows what they are talking about and secondly to actually interrogate the important things in legislation, which should be done to ensure that legislation is improved. Nobody is perfect, and there should be the opportunity for the government to be scrutinised, for legislation to be scrutinised and for the opposition to be able to ask questions on those things, just as we have done for the last couple of weeks in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

On a positive note, I do note that, thanks to the budget take-note motion, there is no additional motion this week to fill in time, to allow government members to get up and rehearse their lines from the Premier's private office, so they have just got the lines from the PPO for the budget this week. I look forward to the opportunity to get into some of the detail of the budget, having spent that last couple of weeks on PAEC, but it is disappointing that once again we are back to this government program with no opportunity to go into consideration in detail, to actually do the job of parliamentarians – not just as members of Parliament but actual parliamentary work – and get into the detail, line by line, of

legislation. Those opposite do not want to hear it because they have never done it – because it has been done three times in nine years. (*Time expired*)

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:43): It is my pleasure to make a contribution on the government business program. We have heard a lot about things that are not on the government business program from those opposite today, who have in fact almost exclusively devoted their 15 minutes here to matters that are not on the government business program. I guess I just want to bring the house back very specifically to the two matters that are on the government business program, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. These are very important bills. They warrant the full attention of this house. We are back to the sort of game playing and time wasting that has become a feature of these sitting weeks as those opposite seek to deflect from their own substantial problems internally.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the government business program debate is not an opportunity for the government to sledge, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the program itself.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member was straying a little from the government business program, and I do ask him to come back to the government business program.

Will FOWLES: Thank you for your guidance, Speaker. I would agree that it is not that hard for members opposite to confine their comments to the government business program as well, and they perhaps ought to have a crack at that every once in a while. I think we have spent most of this debate thus far talking about other things – and that is a direct quote; not me saying ‘other things’ but them talking about other things: ‘We want to do other things.’ Perhaps the member for Gippsland South can lobby his great friend the member for Brighton for those matters –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, with respect, the member is now defying your ruling, and I would ask you to bring him back to the motion.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Ringwood to come back to the government business program.

Will FOWLES: Thank you very much, Speaker. There are those two very important bills. I was endeavouring to respond to matters raised in the debate by those opposite, but I will crack on. The drugs, poisons and controlled substances bill is a very important bill. Without in any way anticipating the debate, we know that the bill has at its heart matters regarding travel vaccinations, the contraceptive pill and being able to access medication for urinary tract infections. As I said, I do not offer a view about whether it is a good or bad thing – that is for later in this day – but for travel vaccinations in particular, I know some in this chamber might be contemplating a trip to Ghana and it would be very, very useful to have access to those travel vaccinations via a pharmacist.

These are very important bills, and they are bills that reflect the government’s progressive agenda when it comes to women’s health. These are very, very important matters, and women’s health is something that we have put front and centre. We put them front and centre throughout the course of the 2022 election campaign, in which we were resoundingly re-elected, and we will continue to put those matters front and centre when it comes to determining the business of this government both inside and outside of this chamber.

The mental health and wellbeing bill similarly advances the government’s agenda. Specifically, that bill will amend the act in order to ensure there are, for example, clear powers to detain and transport security or forensic patients who are absent without leave from a designated mental health service. These are clearly important matters that ought to be addressed by way of substantive changes to the legislation. This is an emerging area and an area in which the Labor government has a very, very proud record. Only Labor accepted every single recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, only Labor is getting on with the job of delivering a brand new mental health

system built from the ground up and only Labor is making sure that the critical piece that sits between primary care and acute care is addressed right throughout the mental health system. These are very, very important matters, and they are particularly important matters to constituents in the Warrandyte area. I have spoken in recent days with members of the Warrandyte Cricket Club as they deal with their very, very difficult circumstances post the Hunter Valley bus crash.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, these issues are important – and I acknowledge they are important – but they are not related to the motion before the house.

The SPEAKER: The member for Ringwood to continue on the government business program.

Will FOWLES: I commend the program to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:48): When the government likes to talk a big game on doing what matters, this is a very narrow government business program with only two pieces of legislation. You have really got to ask the question: what has the government been doing all of this time? It is a tired government, and after eight, nine years in government it has very limited legislation to put before this house. This is the Parliament, and the Parliament should be respected, and to have only two pieces of legislation before the house I think is pretty underwhelming. The Victorian people know that this is a tired government that often regurgitates legislation that it could not get passed in the last Parliament. Indeed one of the pieces of legislation that is on the government program today is the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, which is coming back so very soon after it was introduced by this government because there were issues. The mere fact that this government cannot even get spelling, syntax and grammar correct in their pieces of legislation that they put before this house and that it is a reason for them to come before the house, to have those things fixed, is astonishing and embarrassing, quite frankly, and I am embarrassed for the government.

What has the government got wrong here in relation to transparency and integrity? This government does not have one iota of care or responsibility when it comes to transparency. They do not value this Parliament and they do not value the institution of this Parliament – particularly on the bill on the government business program, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill. Just to preface this I will say that the Liberals and Nationals fully support all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, but what we would like to do with this particular bill is to go into consideration in detail. The member for Ringwood is casting aspersions that we do not fully support all recommendations of the royal commission – it is rubbish. I think that he is doing himself a disservice to say so, because that is absolutely wrong and we are on the record for saying so.

With this bill we would like to go into consideration in detail. What is the government hiding? Why doesn't this government want scrutiny? Why doesn't this government want this piece of legislation to be improved? This is already the second time that this piece of legislation is coming back before this chamber, because they got things wrong last time. We want to work together. The Victorian community expects us to work together on something of such significance and importance as mental health and the mental health and wellbeing of Victorians. We want to work together to make sure that this bill is solid going forward, and unfortunately this government will not open it up to scrutiny so that we can go into consideration of several clauses that we have concerns about within the bill.

In terms of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023, this is an interesting one in terms of pharmacies and pharmacists being able to prescribe certain drugs, including but not limited to the oral contraceptive pill. This is another example of the government being slow to act. This was in fact an election commitment of the Liberals and Nationals in the 2018 election. We took this to the election, and finally the Andrews government is coming to the party and looking to allow the oral contraceptive pill to be prescribed at the pharmacy.

But there is something, in the short time I have remaining, that is not on the government business program that should absolutely be on the government business program, and that is notice 19 given on 31 May, particularly:

That this house:

- (1) notes allegations of unworked or partially worked 'ghost shifts' being invoiced to Victorian taxpayers by labour hire firms on government infrastructure projects; and
- (2) calls on the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure to comply with all independent investigations into corruption that has allegedly occurred on her watch ...

on the watch of the minister. This is on the government's signature infrastructure programs, which I might add are billions of dollars over budget and years behind their agreed schedules.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the member has strayed from the government business program.

The SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Mick Simpson

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:59): I would like to congratulate Mick Simpson from Kyabram, who again this year has walked the 184 kilometres from Kyabram to Melbourne to raise awareness of the issue of dementia. I would also like to thank Mick's support team, including the Kyabram Community & Learning Centre, for what they have done in helping to organise the trip and being with Mick all the way there. So well done, Mick. You are doing your bit in actually raising awareness about dementia.

Echuca Twin Rivers School

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:59): On behalf of the Echuca Twin Rivers multischool campus, I want to raise a ridiculous situation in which that state-of-the-art school, which was only opened in 2018, has no air conditioning in its gym, rendering it unusable for almost half of the year. Only the Andrews government would build a school in inland Australia and not have it air-conditioned. This school is shared by the primary school and the specialist school and used by the Echuca Basketball Association, but the basketball association refuses to use the gym in summer, ruling it unsafe because of the extreme temperatures, which also means Twin Rivers School misses out on the valuable rent income to further supplement its school program. Now the school is going cap in hand to funding bodies to try and raise enough cash to install industrial-strength fans – a poor compromise and hardly a solution. Even worse, the Twin Rivers school has been told the specifications for the gymnasium may not allow for air conditioning to be installed anyway and the school will need

an engineer's report at its expense to see if it can actually be done. The lesson to be learned here is the ongoing incompetence of the Andrews government to even get a small project right.

Kororoit electorate teachers

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (13:00): I rise to make mention of the hundreds of Victorian teachers who have been recognised for their long-serving dedication to students and families through the Recognition of Service to Victorian Education program. This program is a chance to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of our Victorian teachers and other wonderful education staff. I want to especially congratulate the following four teachers from my electorate of Kororoit, who are among the many exceptional teachers across our state who are being recognised and honoured for their commitment to Victorian education and to the students of Victoria: firstly, Christine Barnes, a primary school teacher at Deer Park North Primary School for her fabulous 40 years of service; Senka King, principal of Deer Park West Primary School, who has been serving for 40 years and is in her tenth year as principal; a long-time teacher at Victoria University Secondary College, Philip Wood, who has been in the classroom for the past 40 years; and finally, last but certainly not least, David Mildenhall, a STEM teacher at Victoria University Secondary College, who has been serving for a whopping 55 years. For four of these he was assistant principal before returning to the classroom to teach physics, science and mathematics. We are so lucky to have some of the most talented and dedicated teachers in Kororoit, and I want to thank them for their extraordinary commitment to education. Your service and help have helped deliver many students and shaped the future of our youth. Thank you very much.

King's Birthday honours

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:02): We always push above our weight when it comes to service in our community, and I would like to recognise particularly those who were recognised as part of the King's Birthday honours: firstly, in the AO category, Alan Schwartz and Professor John Zalberg; in the AM category, Anton Block, Dr Sharonne Zaks, Rita Erlich, Professor Michele Grossman, Professor Danielle Mazza, Ruth Picker, Associate Professor Louis Roller and Judith Lucy; and in the OAM category, Phillipa Edwards, Jamie Lawson, Miriam Bass, Elly Brooks, Anneke Deutsch, Lisa Kennett, Peter Lewis, Stephen Marks, Raoul Salter, Alexander Waislitz or Alex, Michael Zervos, Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, Adina Allen and the late Samuel Allen. These community citizens do a wonderful job. We would be nothing if it was not for the volunteers that we have in our community, and I want to particularly recognise them. Some of those I have recognised are not particularly within the Caulfield electorate but certainly within the Jewish community more broadly. I note that Alan Schwartz has been doing some fantastic work on the affordability of education, something that is a key topic that we have been talking about in this Parliament – how we need to ensure education is affordable and for all. Thank you to all of these wonderful volunteers who received King's Birthday honours.

Narre Warren North electorate schools

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (13:03): I firmly believe that every child deserves access to the best quality education facilities, and that includes our special schools. The Andrews Labor government is committed to upgrading every specialist school in our state, and I am thrilled to share with you the extraordinary developments taking place in my own electorate of Narre Warren North. Recently I visited Dandenong Valley special school to get an update on the planning work for the \$14.7 million upgrade and modernisation project. The school's dedicated principal Rhonda and her team do an incredible job of educating kids who have special needs across the south-east, and I am proud to be part of a government delivering facilities that match.

I also had the pleasure of visiting principal Karen at Endeavour Hills Specialist School, a brand new school built by the Andrews Labor government with incredible facilities and a beautiful community of staff, educators and family. By investing in the education of children with special needs we are investing in a brighter future for all.

I might sound a little bit biased, but I do believe that my electorate is home to some of the best schools in our state. All of our principals, our teachers and our staff who I have met with in my visits are working really hard to deliver the best outcomes for our local families. I have seen some of the results of the upgrades and the modernisation thanks to the investment of the Andrews Labor government, and our local schools could not be prouder of their new facilities.

From Zero to Hero boxing

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (13:05): From Zero to Hero in just six weeks, a program run by Locky Burke and Marcus Burke at Personal Performance Training Centre out in Berwick, gave an opportunity for people who wanted to get in the boxing ring for the first time to train From Zero to Hero in just six weeks. Now, anyone who has been in a boxing ring will know it is exceptionally nerve-racking to walk in for the first time. They were tough fights. It was courageous and disciplined, and I was so pleased to support such a great event. It gave people within my community, effectively, something to take off their bucket list, with the two gyms PPTC and Beast from over near Frankston.

Big Freeze

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (13:05): Berwick Junior Football Club, Beaconsfield Junior Football Club and the Beaconsfield Netball Club all ran events this year for the Big Freeze, obviously raising money to fight MND. Amazing groups and amazing local sporting clubs got people together to go down the big slide into the water at the bottom of that slide to ensure that money was raised, awareness was raised and our community also had the benefit of a wonderful community event. Can I thank all of the committee of management, and also I want to thank CJ from the Hawks; Ed and Charlie Curnow from the Blues; Bianca Chatfield, who is a former Diamonds player; Emily Mannix, who is a Vixens and a Diamonds player; Anthony Koutoufides; and also Shanikas, who supported me. I went down on both the slides, as a Shanikas waiter and as Mike Trout on another one, who is one of my favourite baseballers over in America. But to all of those kids, well done. Thank you for the funds and getting the awareness raised around fighting MND.

Sunbury electorate infrastructure

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (13:06): It is terrific to be back in the house as we continue to do what matters for those in my electorate and right across the state. It has been a very big program of works locally as we work hard to deliver the brand new multideck car park in Sunbury, a joint project between the City of Hume, the federal Labor government and of course our Labor government. With more spaces for commuters and more spaces for shoppers and traders, it is to be opened late next year. This is a cracking project, and only this government will get it done.

Speaking of getting it done, we continue our really significant upgrade of Sunbury Road – new lanes, new signalised intersections, shared user paths and lighting. This project is marching ahead, creating a safer, less congested and smoother journey for my local community.

It was also terrific to visit Sunningdale Avenue kindergarten last week to chat to the next generation of infrastructure experts about road safety and the Sunbury Road upgrade. Kitted out in their high-vis and helmets, the kids were thrilled to share their ideas on what makes a community, from parks and pools to homes and hospitals.

We are also upgrading Goonawarra Primary School and Sunbury West Primary School. It was terrific to visit St Anne's primary last week to talk about my role as an MP as they embark on their study of democracy. We are getting on with our upgrade at Leo Dineen Reserve and upgrading local community facilities. This government will continue to keep delivering; this government will continue to get things done.

Eastbourne Primary School

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (13:08): I recently had the pleasure of visiting Eastbourne Primary School. Eastbourne currently educates over 250 students, with about 22 students receiving disability inclusion support funding. The school and its principal Mr Wilkinson do a sensational job nurturing students from a range of personal and learning backgrounds and with different experiences. Often this means that some of the most vulnerable students in that school need access to different facilities and expertise, and they do an incredible job there at Eastbourne Primary. I was also able to meet with the student leaders of the school and present the student of the week awards to the kids and hear about their prowess on the sporting field, which was nice.

Peninsula Specialist College

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (13:08): I also recently visited Peninsula Specialist College in Dromana, where I met with their student representative council. This school does an amazing job and provides irreplaceable services to students who need specialist attention throughout their educational journey. The SRC had some bright ideas about a new bus for them to get out in the community, playgrounds, how to fix their fields and some ideas for their classrooms but also for their sensory room. Different students have different needs in an environment like that: some need to be able to bash and crash – and there is a boxing bag and a trampoline to jump into a big thing of pillows – and some students just need a quiet space where they can get away. At the moment though that school has all those services in one room for their students – a tiny little room – so there is certainly need for an upgrade there. I commend the work that the students and staff are all doing at Peninsula Specialist College.

Jenny Morrison

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (13:09): We have some remarkable achievements to celebrate in our region, showing commitment and dedication, and it is a pleasure to share them with you. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful Jenny Morrison. For an incredible 35 years Jenny has served as a sexual health nurse at Ballarat Community Health. Having had the privilege of working alongside Jenny, I can attest to the magnificent job she does day in and day out. Jenny, your professionalism, enthusiasm and love for our community has impacted the lives of many. Thank you for an incredible 35 years of service, and here is to many more.

Country Fire Authority Buninyong–Mount Helen brigade

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (13:10): Another huge milestone is being celebrated. This is the year of the 150th anniversary of the Buninyong–Mount Helen fire brigade. To put this into perspective for you, this brigade predates the telephone, the light bulb and, yes, it is even older than sliced bread. Over these 150 years, the brave men and women of the Buninyong–Mt Helen fire brigade have protected thousands of homes and put their lives on the line for our community. To all the past and present volunteers of the Buninyong–Mount Helen fire brigade, thank you. I wish the brigade all the best for their 150th anniversary celebrations in July. I feel very lucky to have such remarkable people in the electorate.

St John's Primary School, Euroa, pedestrian crossing

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (13:11): I visited St John's Primary School in Euroa last week to meet the talented young students and to hear their concerns about the unsupervised school crossing. A lack of funding support from this state government has left our kids in a dangerous position. The local council has now decided it will no longer foot the bill for this government's responsibility. No-one can explain how dangerous the decision to remove school crossing supervisors from high-traffic state-managed roads where primary school students frequently cross better than the students themselves. I want to quote the intelligent and clever grade 6 leader, Brianna Maher, who wrote about the dangers and need to protect her friends in an article in our local paper. Brianna said:

... if we did not have crossing guards cars would not know to stop quickly, because there would be no flags, whistles and fluorescent clothing to warn them.

She said:

There are so many accidents, each and every year on our roads. Without school crossing supervisors, this amount of accidents will increase dramatically ...

Euroa electorate road infrastructure

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (13:12): I was also able to witness the shocking state of the region's bridges, road infrastructure and transport issues with member for South-West Coast Roma Britnell, who visited my electorate last week. Of particular concern are the decaying flood-impacted Chinamans and Kirwans bridges near Nagambie, which are having a considerable impact on our region's waterways, local economy, tourism and sporting clubs. With major sections of the Goulburn River under an exclusion zone, accessibility is limited and there are genuine safety concerns for locals who travel near these bridges. Local community groups are continuing to advocate for updates from the government but have been ignored time and time again.

Coburg North Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:12): On 24 March I had the privilege to visit Coburg North Primary School on O'Hea Street to celebrate Ride2School Day. Joined by principal Monika Gruss, parents and students, it was a pleasure to talk to the school community about the health and wellbeing benefits of riding and walking to school, which my family and I do every single day. I was pleased to also see the school's completed \$6.9 million facilities made possible by the Andrews Labor government, which includes a new science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics hub, a great asset to the school, which dates back to 1942.

Pascoe Vale Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:13): I was happy to have also recently visited Pascoe Vale Primary School on Gaffney Street to touch base with principal Anne Naughton and to tour the school's magnificent new \$18 million upgrades, much of which remains under construction. The school was opened back in 1891, and the school's new gymnasium and state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor learning spaces are proudly being delivered by this Labor government and will ensure the school can cater for the 540 students of today and tomorrow.

Merri-bek Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:13): Yesterday on 19 June I was delighted to join the Minister for Education to visit Merri-bek Primary School to unveil the school's new name and logo as determined and designed by the school community. Joined by school council president Lee Cath and school principal Maria Giordano, the minister and I enjoyed a wonderful celebration from the Djirri Djirri cultural group and beautiful speeches from students of all year levels on the school's commitment to reconciliation, recognition and support for First Nations people. I was also pleased to see the school's \$700,000 upgrades, which include a new outdoor learning and sensory area made possible, again, by the Andrews Labor government. I look forward to working with every single one of my local schools to help improve education and learning outcomes.

Victoria Day Awards

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (13:14): I would like to congratulate the nominees of this year's Knox Victoria Day Awards. MLC member Nick McGowan and I awarded a total of 51 awards to various community, sporting and school groups within the community of Knox. The Victoria Day Awards were established to recognise Victoria Day and those Victorians that make this state a vibrant and welcoming community. This year we celebrate the 16th Knox community Victoria Day Awards and Victoria celebrated its 172nd birthday. I would like to congratulate the following winners from the electorate of Rowville: Emma, Ada, Tom, Liz, Graeme, Alan, Belinda, Col, Ann, Gayle, Tom, Sarah,

Kerrie, Danuta, Lillie, Sonia, Brooke, Susan, Brian, Mary, Chantal, Mel, Brad, Justin, Malgorzata, Jolanta, Shelley, Helen, Srikanthan, Luke, Helen, Michael, Ian, Michael, Jason and Junrong. Happy birthday, Victoria, for 1 July, and congratulations to all the worthy winners.

Alphington Melbourne Innovation Centre site

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (13:15): I rise to update my community on a local issue that has caused deep concern and distress, and that is the fate of the innovation precinct at Wingrove Street in Alphington. After months of uncertainty we now know Alphington Farmers Market will live to fight another day – Darebin council has offered them a new lease. But the same cannot be said of the vast majority of businesses that once made up this vibrant startup ecosystem. Darebin council has painted this as a win, as though we should be grateful that the market did not get sent to the wall like dozens of others. The reality is that my community has witnessed the ruthless decimation of a precinct that once buzzed with entrepreneurs, artists and innovators. From beekeepers to brewers, antique restoration to cutting-edge carbon engineering, they have all been told to go. It is a devastating blow to local traders, local jobs and our innovation economy. Our community deserves better. Most concerning, there is now nothing preventing Darebin council from seeking to sell off parts of this sensitive and valuable riverfront land that is no longer in use. Let us hope they have more sense. I am calling on Darebin council to commit to retaining the land for the benefit of the community and undertaking comprehensive consultation on its future use. It will take a lot of rebuilding to get this site humming again, but we cannot afford to lose it. This precinct encapsulated the very best of what the inner north has to offer: creativity, innovation, sustainability and collaboration. Darebin council needs to honour these values in its future plans.

North Melbourne Primary School road safety

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (13:16): Last week the new campus of the wonderful North Melbourne Primary School was finally opened, and the community is so pleased to have this new facility – something that happened due to the hard work and dedication of local parents and local residents working with my office and fighting to make sure that North Melbourne students have all the facilities they need. We also fought hard to make sure this school would be a second campus of the existing North Melbourne Primary School – a wonderful school – so our local community would not be divided, and it is wonderful to see that happen.

But unfortunately the planning around the school, such as how kids can get safely to and from school between the old and the new campus, has been very much lacking. Over the past month I have heard from so many concerned parents about pedestrian and road safety issues around the new Molesworth Street campus, which is the one for preps and early grades. Many families have children at both campuses of North Melbourne Primary and have been disappointed by the lack of safe road infrastructure between the school sites. The school has been open for weeks but there are still no pedestrian crossings, and the parents have been told that installation works are still months away. Meanwhile, families have to contend with traffic on a number of major roads, including cars driving 60 kilometres an hour on Harker Street and lots of different traffic, including trams and cars on Abbotsford Street. There are no signs indicating a school zone or warning drivers that they are nearing a new school, and this needs to be fixed.

Paramount Chief Kuol Adol Foundation

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (13:18): A few weeks ago I was lucky enough to represent Minister Carbinas at the Paramount Chief Kuol Adol Foundation's graduation ceremony, where I met Alor Deng, Casey Hodges and their team along with all the youth involved in the program. The PCKAF provide the South Sudanese community a mentor program for young people at risk across the west, including in Melton. Twenty-five per cent of young Sudanese–Australian offenders in custody have a sibling with past or present involvement in criminal activity. PCKAF aims to break this chain of criminal activity involvement by engaging with younger siblings of offenders. The foundation speaks directly with members of South Sudanese youth who have incarcerated older siblings. Peer pressure,

fear and violence are all factors for offending and recruitment into criminal activity for younger family members. The pattern of reoffending of Victorian South Sudanese youth has become increasingly normalised, especially in the west. It is crucial for foundations like PCKAF to continue its key work in breaking the cycle and re-engaging with the youth of Melton. The mentor program provided by PCKAF supports youths transitioning into positive adulthood and builds an understanding of risk factors and resilience. Increased connection with positive role models aids in re-establishing engagement. The foundation has successfully completed two mentor programs engaging over 30 young people. The significance of this program will be felt by its participants for many years to come, and it is a foundation I am very proud to have in the Melton community. The Andrews Labor government is committed to crime prevention, with \$300,000 of funding for PCKAF.

Narracan electorate homelessness services

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:19): I rise today to talk about my wonderful community of Narracan again. Hopefully before we come back to this chamber after the winter break we will have completed four independent living units for homeless women over 55. Through the campaign at the last election I was fortunate enough to meet up with user groups like Quantum and Fairview homes. It was a surprise to me that we have up to 500 people homeless at any one point in time in Narracan, and of those homeless, women are a very big proportion of that. So it was discussed – and obviously I have the skill set, being a builder – and at the meetings with Fairview homes and Quantum we decided to revamp four old units that were out at the Fairview homes site. I did not just do this by myself; my whole community was involved in this project, probably at a cost of over \$300,000, but people gave money, time and materials. It has been a fantastic project. I really look forward to the opening of these units. It will not be too far away, and hopefully before we get back in this chamber I can stand up and say, ‘There are people in these units.’ It has been a fantastic community project, and I want to thank my electorate and the people of Narracan for the hard work and effort that they put in.

St Anthony’s Catholic Primary School, Lara

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (13:21): I recently visited St Anthony’s primary school’s grade 6 class in Lara, where students are learning about government and had a myriad of intelligent questions for me about Parliament and my role as a local MP. They were particularly interested to know what my local priorities were, and I was pleased to confirm that the Andrews Labor government has invested \$11 million in this year’s state budget for Serendip Sanctuary and the You Yongs, which I know are much-loved places for these students and the Lara community. Special thanks go to the class and teachers for arranging my visit. It was such a great experience.

Lara electorate sports facilities

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (13:21): I recently visited the Lara tennis and netball clubs to officially open their new pavilion. The new, modern facilities include female-friendly change rooms, a kitchen, office spaces, public amenities with a baby change facility and a large multipurpose room. This was made possible thanks to \$250,000 from the Andrews Labor government and funding from the City of Greater Geelong. The Andrews Labor government also provided \$150,000 to deliver 200 lux LED lighting at two netball courts there. Congratulations to all involved from the Lara netball and tennis clubs, along with the Lara Sporting Club, for bringing these projects to life.

Investment in local sporting clubs like these is so important to ensure that everyone, including women and girls, has the opportunity to play the sports that they love. These upgrades are stage 1 of the Lara Sporting Club’s master plan to upgrade the entire precinct. Stage 2 has kicked off already with \$1 million in funding from the state government, and I am so excited to see this sporting and community precinct transform in the years to come.

Willum Warrain reconciliation walk

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (13:22): On Sunday 4 June Willum Warrain held its reconciliation walk. It was a beautiful day in Hastings. It was quite cool. The sun was shining and the skies were blue and clear, and the atmosphere around town was really positive. The walkers all met at Pelican Park, and at 11 o'clock Uncle Peter welcomed us and led the way to Willum Warrain. I would like to say thank you to the volunteers and to the Victorian police for their help and assistance in keeping everyone safe. There was a great mix of people, from the very young to the very old and everyone in between, and of course there were lots of furry four-legged friends. When we arrived I did not think everyone would fit in, so I think there were probably upwards of 2000 people on this walk. There was a smoking ceremony, speeches and dancing, and there were sausages on bread with onions on top. It was a beautiful day of solidarity, reconciliation and support for our First Nations people.

Budget 2023–24

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (13:23): On another matter, I had the great honour of talking to the principals from Somerville Primary School and Somers Primary School to let them know that in the 2023–24 budget each of them was allocated \$1 million to cover their double basketball courts. Needless to say, they were very excited about this, and it means that the kids can now be out there on the courts in rain, hail or shine.

Also in the budget was \$990,000 to upgrade the French Island boat ramp, which will be a game changer. I am very proud to have a seat on the table of the sitting government, getting things done.

Parents Battle of the Bands

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (13:24): Primary school students have been holding their parents hostage at home for far too long, and that is why I am really grateful to the Parents Battle of the Bands, which is a registered charity and music festival that promotes mental health and music education and supports music venues, because it is getting parents out and doing what they should be doing – reliving what it was like 20 years ago. It is really, really fantastic for babysitters as well. The recent southside and northside battles saw 12 parents bands battling it out in front of sold-out crowds at the Prince Bandroom and the Northcote Social Club. All the money raised goes to the music programs of those competing primary schools. They have been doing this since 2018, and it is only getting bigger and better. I understand there is going to be a westside battle down the track at some stage and an eastside battle as well. I would sincerely like to thank the founder and CEO Anna Vermooten, her chief operating officer Dagmar Yeaman, the board, the bands, the venues, the parents, music lovers and even the kids as well for what is a truly great community event.

Preston Market

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:25): I rise to draw the house's attention to three petitions that have been gathered regarding the Preston Market. The first is an online petition that has been organised by Darebin City Council, and to date it has attracted 15,000 signatures. The second petition is one organised by the Save the Preston Market Action Group, and to date it has attracted 12,000 handwritten, physical signatures, and we hope to table it later this week. Finally, there is a more recent petition organised by some of the traders at the market. It has only been in circulation for a couple of weeks, but it has already attracted over 10,000 signatures. That particular petition notes that most traders will not survive an extended period of closure at the market, and it asks the Victorian government and the landlords to reach a compromise that makes the livelihood of traders a top priority and 'ensures our businesses don't lose a single day of trade'. There are some things you could say about that final phrase in particular, but I just want to draw the house's attention to the general sentiment of that petition. One of the reasons people shop at the market is because they like buying from people they know, who they consider their friends and their family, and there is growing concern in the community and certainly among the traders and workers themselves at the way in which they

are being treated and the actions of some people who are purporting to speak in their interests but are really acting in their own interests. I draw these three petitions to the attention of the house.

Air pollution

Katie HALL (Footscray) (13:27): Today I rise to provide an update on an important issue in my community, something I work hard on every day, and that is limiting the impact of truck movements from the port and improving air quality in Melbourne's inner west. Last week I visited the SCT Altona precinct. The precinct is a logistics hub that connects Melbourne's port by rail to regional Victoria and across the nation. Significantly for the inner west and the electorate of Footscray, the precinct is pivotal in limiting truck movements in the area, reducing emissions and improving air quality. Each daily train to Perth takes 200 B-doubles off the road. I also met with a local company, Environmental Technology Solutions, who are doing great work around the development of diesel engine filters. ETS's cutting-edge technology will filter out diesel particulates from engine exhausts and help safeguard public health to create cleaner, more livable communities.

I am excited about what this innovative solution can do for the inner west. The Andrews Labor government has committed to improving the air quality in the west, as evidenced by the clean air for Melbourne's west program. Part of this program, announced in the budget, is to remove old trucks from our roads and help operators to modernise their truck fleets. Finally, I am looking forward to my upcoming meeting with the Footscray truck action group to continue our ongoing dialogue. We will be discussing FTAG's 10-point action plan and continuing our work on creating a cleaner and safer Footscray.

Hampton Park Turkish Seniors Group

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:28): I was very pleased to join the two Narres, Narre South and Narre North, at the Turkish senior citizens last week. We danced, we ate food and we enjoyed their hospitality. Thank you to Kim Hassan and her husband Jeff for everything that they do on behalf of the whole community. We are very fortunate.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:29): I move:

That the consideration of government business, notice of motion 1, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Reference

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:30): I move:

That, under section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, this house refers an inquiry to the Integrity and Oversight Committee for consideration and report no later than 29 March 2024 on the operation of the following matters relating to the Freedom of Information Act 1982:

- (1) the effectiveness of the act's current policy model, which is based on formal requests for information, and other options available, including options utilised in other jurisdictions;
- (2) mechanisms for proactive and informal release of information, including the effectiveness of information publication schemes;
- (3) efficient and timely mechanisms for persons to access their own personal and health information;

- (4) the information management practices and procedures required across government to facilitate access to information;
- (5) opportunities to increase the disclosure of information relating to government services using technology;
- (6) the purposes and principles of access to information and whether the act meets those purposes and principles, including:
 - (a) the object of the act as set out in section 3;
 - (b) the definition of document in section 5; and
 - (c) the operation of exemptions and exceptions in part III and part IV;
- (7) the effectiveness of processes under the act and how those processes could be streamlined and made more effective and efficient; and
- (8) the time and costs involved in providing access to information.

The Freedom of Information Act 1982 is now a 40-year-old piece of legislation. Under the current act, I am pleased to report nearly 80 per cent of FOI requests are processed within the time lines required by the act and more than 96 per cent of access decisions grant access to documents in full or in part. It is important to put on the record that the act has served us well in the past. I do want to acknowledge of course that it was the late former Premier John Cain who introduced freedom of information to Victoria as Premier of this state – a great reforming Labor Premier – and indeed his freedom-of-information laws are amongst much of his great legacy here. It is important and fitting that our government, another Labor government, move the motion to seek a referral to the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) to review the act.

We know that despite the success that we have seen with the existing act we do need to keep pace with changes that have occurred in our society and community. We need a modern and accessible FOI act, one that makes it easier and more efficient for the public to access government-held information. Access to information legislation must reflect how a government creates, stores and manages its information in the digital information age. We know that better access to information and transparency is important for good governance, accountability and lawmaking while still protecting information from disclosure where the public interest requires it. We need an FOI act that reflects these principles, and a review of the FOI act provides an opportunity for Victoria to align its access to information policy with broader information management policies to enhance how the Victorian public sector manages its information.

As I have said, since we have been in government we have moved to reform the act from time to time to ensure that the system continues to work for Victorians and to make it fairer. These reforms have included the establishment of the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner. This office has more investigative powers than the former FOI commissioner, such as the power to review decisions made by ministers or departments and various powers to compel the release of information following a review. The 2017 reforms also introduced faster response time frames for all FOI applications, but as always, there is more to do.

The FOI legislation has never been substantially reviewed and has not kept pace with how contemporary government works. The current act was passed in a predominantly paper-based environment. I know that we all – well, maybe not all of us; I certainly remember those days very well. But the pace of change has indeed been rapid, and it is important that we have a Freedom of Information Act that responds to that. We understand the prevalence now of electronic documents, but we also need to be mindful of what is actually a government document, what is a draft and what is the final product, so we need an act that can respond to some of that as well. Indeed these advances have changed how governments store and provide access to information, and this transformation through digital processes and data storage has contributed to information-rich governments. We now produce more documents than ever before, and as I said, we store them in a completely different format.

Other jurisdictions, including New South Wales and Queensland as well as the Commonwealth government, have adopted what is known as second-generation FOI legislation. This is legislation

which encourages formal access requests as a last resort and in doing so reduces the total number of formal requests received by agencies in those jurisdictions. I certainly know as Minister for Health that there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that we are giving the people of Victoria greater access to information and easier access to information that is held about them in relation to their health, treatment and so on. We are committed to being able to deliver that.

What we know is that individuals are utilising FOI laws at ever-increasing levels to request access to information and that our laws require an individual to submit a formal request for information. In 2021–22, and I am sure this number will both astound and perhaps frighten members, Victorian government agencies received 43,978 FOI requests. This is the highest number of requests ever received in Victoria, and it has contributed to an overdependence on this very formal access model, rather than us taking the time, which is what we now propose to do, and exploring options to provide access to information proactively and informally. This consideration, as I said, is one that has been included in the terms of reference for this review.

Our government believes that individuals should not have to rely on FOI to access their personal documents. Victorian departments and agencies receive more FOI requests than any other Australian jurisdiction, including the Commonwealth. Victoria also receives one of the highest rates of FOI requests per capita. The majority of requests that departments and agencies receive are personal requests, as I mentioned earlier – requests which are for personal documents about the applicant. On average, personal requests represent almost 70 per cent of total requests received since 2014.

Individuals using FOI as the primary mechanism for accessing their own information is an inefficient use of their time and indeed an inefficient use of government resources. Individuals should be able to access their information through simpler means. I might take the opportunity just to share with you some information in relation to my own portfolio in order to illustrate this fact. I want to also take the opportunity to thank my department for the way in which they have sought to expediently manage requests and provide as much transparency as possible to people who have sought information from the department. During 2022–23 we received 349 FOI requests. This was a decrease, I might say, on the previous year, and that decrease was in relation to the number of requests that we were receiving about COVID. The department finalised 355 requests of which only seven were denied in full, so 98 per cent were granted in full or in part, and indeed 96 per cent of requests were processed within the statutory time frame. I do want to acknowledge my department for the work that they have done to make it easier to provide information to people and easier and simpler and faster for people to receive information that we believe they should be able to readily access.

How government departments and agencies communicate and inform the public of the work they do has also changed. Access-to-information legislation promotes greater transparency and accountability in government and enables the public to better understand the decision-making processes of government. The information management practices and procedures across government also need to be considered in the context of information access laws. The internet, through emails and cloud-based platforms, has replaced physical documents and briefs. These new ways of working need to be examined in the context of access-to-information laws, and I think this is something we can all agree upon. As I discussed earlier, the prevalence now of emails as a way to exchange and indeed to provide information and the way in which departments store their information – it might be news to some people that in fact we no longer keep everything in cardboard boxes. We no longer have the registries of old where all correspondence was kept and maintained. Indeed a lot of it, including the physical correspondence that is still received, ends up being scanned and stored in the cloud.

The FOI act is one of several integrity mechanisms that allow the public to scrutinise, participate in and have confidence in the work of government. This in turn promotes trust in government and indeed in the public sector. We were the first Australian territory or state to enact FOI legislation, and it is time to continue that very great legacy of that great Victorian Premier John Cain and once again lead the nation in this area of reform.

I commend this motion to the house. The time is right for there to be a review by a parliamentary committee of our freedom-of-information laws to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that they respond to the contemporary environment and to the changes that we have seen in technology, and I take this opportunity to commend the motion to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:44): The coalition will not be opposing the motion. However, I will move an amendment, and that is:

That after subparagraph (8) the following words be inserted: '(9) the long times taken to process FOI requests, including the deterioration of performance exposed by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner in its recent examination, the period of time taken by ministers for noting of requests, and the recent significant increases in challenges by agencies to the determinations of the information commissioner's office.'

It is important to sometimes start on a positive note, and it is time for Victoria to consider its freedom-of-information regime. There is no doubt that when you look around this country you see regimes that are different than ours, and the outcomes of those regimes are also different. The openness and transparency that those regimes allow or in fact promote are there for you to see, effectively because of the way that there is an onus on the regime to provide information. I think what we have seen over time is a growth in the number of applications, as should be the case with a growing population. I mean, it is only fair and reasonable that our governments, who are there to serve people, are open to the community and their workings are open to the community. That should be the case. But we have not just seen a growth in the number of applications, we have also seen a growth in the number of instances where the items are declined and declined for particular reasons, which I will get to later.

The coalition – the opposition – will not be opposing the motion, but we are proposing an amendment which speaks to some of those issues. In that amendment I refer to the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, who has done a power of work. I can refer to the five-year review of 2014–19, which is a significant document and a significant review. There has been more recent work, but I can refer to this particular review, which is a very strong document and which goes to a whole-of-government review of FOI in Victoria. One of the findings of the agency was that:

The number of FOI decision makers in Victorian government agencies decreased ...

So as we have seen a significant increase in the number of applications, we have seen the government choose to reduce the number of decision-makers. The agency also found that:

Agencies processed most requests the within the statutory timeframe. However, timeliness in decision making decreased over time ...

So the timeliness in the decisions that should be made to ensure we have an open and accountable government decreased over time, and that is very important to note. We have seen a decrease in the number of staff to process FOIs, and we have seen a decrease in the timeliness of decision-making. We have seen also:

... the percentage of full access decisions decreased over time ...

What we have actually seen is less people taking longer to make decisions and less full details provided to the public. Far less full transparency is the simplest way to put it. To talk in simple terms, in 2014–15 full release was at 70.25 per cent and by 2018–19 at 64.8 per cent, effectively – so over a 5 per cent decrease in the full transparency of government workings.

In terms of partial release of information, the denied number of FOIs between 2014–15 and 2018–19 increased from 2.3 to 4 per cent – so almost a doubling of the number of items that have been declined. These are important findings, and I would certainly refer the community to this report by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, because it is a power of work. Unsurprisingly, given the number of denials of full transparency, it is also worth noting that the number of complaints and reviews went up, both in terms of the information commissioner and VCAT. Both went up significantly. OVIC's reviews increased from roughly 400 to 600 – so a 50 per cent increase – over that period of time. We have seen government choose to have less staff, the timeliness go down and

the release of full information also go down, which is why the community is looking on and is upset – understandably so, because our government should be fully transparent.

More recently the information commissioner released a report, *The State of Freedom of Information in Victoria*, in April 2022, which covered the period of 2019 to 2021 – another very important document which speaks to the more recent behaviour of government when it comes to freedom of information and also to culture. The commission noted a number of trends that are worth speaking to. They are:

- increased delays in the ability and capability of agencies to process FOI requests within statutory timeframes ...

which have resulted in significant backlogs and delays,

- an increase in complaints made to OVIC about delays and issues with handling of FOI requests; and
- increasing use by agencies of the power under section 25A(5) to categorically refuse an FOI –

so just a flat refusal –

without identifying or processing any documents ...

at all – so a flat refusal. What we saw in the first work done by the independent agency was a growth over time of that flat refusal and, in the more recent analysis, a serious and notable trend in that behaviour. That is why the agency did note that:

... FOI analysis continues to show the FOI Act no longer provides an optimal legislative scheme for the timely disclosure of information held by government.

That is why the coalition will not oppose the final motion but believes that it is worth amending to note those additional points.

Before finishing I will note I have referred to section 25A(1) and (5) and their use by departments and agencies in those refusals. One finding that is worth mentioning is:

Between 2019 and 2021, agency reliance on section 25A(5) almost tripled.

It almost tripled. That is a significant increase, from 10 to 30 per cent. These are significant behavioural changes that have a profound effect on the way the government operates in secret, and we know that this government does operate in secret. When we look at the information commissioner's findings, we know that timeliness is an issue, full access to decision-making is an issue and sunlight is an issue.

The final point I will note is that effectively the government is referring these matters to a committee on which it has four members, the Liberal Party has one member, the National Party has one member and there is a Green and an independent. So it would be fair to say that the government is not in outright control but is in extremely strong control of this committee and has effectively referred the FOI process and transparency of government to a committee in a way that means the cheat will be in charge of the till. That should concern every Victorian, because it is about trust at the end of the day and we effectively are allowing a government which has caused many problems with the FOI act by not being transparent to be in charge of the review into the act. The coalition will be looking very closely at this throughout this inquiry, because it is important that Victorians have access to the information they deserve and have access to the operation of government. So the coalition will be very closely participating in this review to ensure that the cheats who are in charge of the till do the right thing in relation to freedom of information, because we should be doing better. When you look around Australia, we should be doing better, and we are not.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:55): I should just perhaps, for the purpose of this debate, say that we are moving this motion to seek a referral to the Integrity and Oversight Committee to review the Freedom of Information Act 1982. It is us that are moving this motion. Surely that lends itself to transparency and the enhancement of governance, the fact that we are proactively moving this motion. So the suggestion of secrecy or otherwise is a little questionable at best. I also want to pay homage to the lasting legacy of the late former Premier John Cain. This was certainly amongst many of the great

reforms he accomplished during his terms, and it is consistent with our Labor record on improving and also upholding integrity. In terms of supporting good governance, accountability and lawmaking, we are moving this motion, so I take objection to some of the underhanded comments that have been put with regard to that.

I also want to say that, just as an example, in 2021–22 the Victorian government agencies received 43,978 FOI requests. That is a testament to the system that enables this to occur, and this is the highest number of requests ever received in Victoria. So I think when we are also questioning the processes that are occurring in this state, that is an extraordinary number of FOI requests. Some perspective has to be put with regard to this debate concerning the sheer number of requests put forward – not that we are questioning that in any way. It is also important to reflect on the percentages in terms of the actual statistics with regard to the processing of FOI requests. Under the current act we are pleased to report that nearly 80 per cent of FOI requests are processed within the time lines required by the act. More than 96 per cent of access decisions granted access to documents in full or in part, so with greatest respect, I think the member for Brighton may have been distorting the perception of how the actual FOI process is undertaken here and the statistics as they actually exist. Less than 4 per cent of all decisions are denied access in full.

I should also note that our government introduced reforms in 2017 to improve the FOI system, making it fairer. So again you can see consistency in terms of upholding good governance, integrity and transparency when it comes to our government or to the parliamentary processes overall. The 2017 reforms also introduced faster response time frames for all FOI applications. But there is more to do, and so if I can pick up on that point, it is fair to say the FOI legislation has never been substantially reviewed, hence the referral of this motion, and has not kept pace with how contemporary governments work.

This current act was passed in a predominantly paper-based environment, and of course we are in the digital age. We know that the way that documents are stored, owing to terrific advancements in technology, has to be acknowledged, and hence there is impetus for reviewing the way in which FOI requests are processed. We now produce more documents than ever before, and this is a good thing – I am not saying that is a negative – but we are storing them in a completely different format, and hence it is good and proper and timely that we are conducting this review.

I should also say, if we are compared to other jurisdictions such as New South Wales, Queensland and the Commonwealth government, they have adopted what is known as second-generation FOI legislation, which encourages formal access –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for question time. The member will have the call when we return to the motion.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Gender equality

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:01): My question is for the Minister for Women. Today in Parliament the Premier referred to me as a ‘halfwit grub’. Under the Victorian government’s gender equality strategy, all Victorians should be ‘treated with dignity, respect and fairness’. Is the Premier’s comment appropriate towards a woman in the workplace and in line with this strategy?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, this matter has already been dealt with, and I might point out that the Premier was simply defending the strong and proudly independent member for Northcote from deeply offensive attacks by the Liberal Party in this place.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will allow the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:02): I stand by the Premier in his commitment to gender equality in this state. This Premier has done more for the

equality of women than any single Premier has done in the past. I note that he has withdrawn his comment, but he was also defending the good member for Northcote in the attack by those opposite.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:03): When challenged and asked to apologise, the Premier failed to do so. As the Minister for Women, will you apologise on behalf of the government?

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the member for Eildon to rephrase her question so that it relates to government business.

Cindy McLEISH: When challenged and asked to apologise, the Premier failed to do so. Given the Victorian government's gender equality strategy, as the Minister for Women will you apologise on behalf of the government?

The SPEAKER: Order! I will allow the supplementary question.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:04): It is my pleasure to be able to get up and talk about the gender equality strategy here in Victoria, something that this government is extremely proud of, something that those opposite have been absolutely silent on.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance. I think we have this issue again, where the minister is happy to spruik what she wants but I am asking her to apologise.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Natalie HUTCHINS: Under that gender equality strategy we have delivered training to over 700 women across this state in leadership and in mentoring, which has allowed us to hit our targets and goals under that strategy to have more women on boards, to hit the target of 50 per cent of women on paid government boards and to exceed that target in many situations.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, just on relevance, the minister was asked whether, under the terms of the gender equality strategy, she would as minister apologise on behalf of the government for the despicable comments by the Premier towards the member for Eildon. You know, employers in this state would face far harsher action if they did that –

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, obviously I would ask you, when I am on my feet, that you resume your seat. On the point of order, there is no point of order. Minister for Women, do you wish to continue?

Natalie HUTCHINS: We are very proud of our gender equality strategy, and we look forward to launching a second version of that later this year.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura is warned.

Ministers statements: healthcare workers

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:06): I am delighted to –

A member: Apologise!

Daniel ANDREWS: There is nothing to apologise for. I defended the member for Northcote, an independent, proud woman. I defended the member for Northcote, and I will not be apologising for doing that, not for a moment. I defended the member for Northcote, and I always will, from your attacks, unwarranted as they are. I rise –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the House! The house will come to order.

Daniel ANDREWS: Thank you very much, Speaker. I rise to update the house on our government's efforts to recruit additional healthcare workers and to support those dedicated women and men right across our health system, whether it be with \$270 million to push to recruit and train an extra 17,000 nurses and midwives, all the way through to providing additional support to our trainee doctors to move from hospital-based training into general practice – we know it so difficult and so challenging for families to find a bulk-billing doctor, particularly out of hours. Whether it is through \$5000 sign-on bonuses for student nurses and midwives who graduate in 2022 and 2023 who then commit to work long term in the public system or whether it is through a whole range of other programs that come from listening to our workforce, respecting our workforce, valuing our workforce – well, not going to war with our workforce, as others did; nurses, ambos, the list goes on –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Malvern is warned.

Daniel ANDREWS: They were at war with them from day one of that miserable four-year period when they occupied these Treasury benches. We stand with our health workforce. We always have and we always will.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier knows better than to debate the question, and I would ask you to bring him back to the substance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded his answer.

Parole eligibility

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. Premier, the government introduced legislation in 2018 to amend the Corrections Act 1986, naming Russell Street bomber Craig Minogue to ensure that he never gets out of prison. Why won't the government provide peace of mind to the grieving families of Paul Denyer's victims and do the same?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:08): Firstly, let me thank the honourable member for his question. Secondly, I want to make it very clear that the government takes full responsibility for the fact that throughout recent months, when the evil prisoner that the member refers to became eligible for parole, families and those who were close to the victims – so families and friends – were not appropriately supported. It is not only a matter of regret but a motivation for improvement and reform when it comes to the approach of the government. It is not acceptable to me that the family and friends who carry the very real burden of the tragic loss of –

Members interjecting.

Daniel ANDREWS: This is a serious matter, and I have been speaking for less than a minute. There is a supplementary question, and I would have thought that it is in everyone's interests if I am allowed to provide an answer without interjections. That is a matter for others, though; I cannot determine that. What I was saying was that it is not only a matter of regret but a matter of motivation for change and improvement that people who carry such a heavy and tragic burden every day because of the evil crimes of this person were not, in the lead-up to the parole hearing, appropriately supported and given information and given the support that they were absolutely owed. We will do everything we can to ensure that that does not happen again. I would refer –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, this was a very narrow question about supporting the legislation in relation to this very serious matter, and yet what the Premier is talking about is not relevant. It is on relevance. The Premier is talking about the welfare of the families. If you really cared about the welfare of the families, you would support this legislation.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Daniel ANDREWS: The welfare of these families will be our only consideration. If it does not suit the agenda of some for me to be talking about these matters, then that is a matter for them and they can be judged accordingly. I am not in any way pleased that with fully 30 years to be ready for this day, the system did not properly support those families. So we will do more and we will do better in that regard.

In terms of the broader issue, I would draw the honourable member – I am not questioning his motivations or making any sort of negative comment in any way; what I want to say, though, is it is appropriate to draw his attention and the attention of those watching and listening to the fact that the adult parole board has denied parole to that prisoner. Whilst I am limited in what I can say as to the merits or otherwise of that decision, I will say this: he is where he belongs.

Now, there are additional measures that the government has announced today. The Attorney-General and the Minister for Corrections have met with the family. I will meet with the family, I am certain of that, quite soon and we will further discuss some of the changes to this system, not for any one person but for all persons who might form part of this evil cohort.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:12): There are reports today in the media the government is considering a five-year no-parole period following an unsuccessful application for a prisoner. Premier, wouldn't this mean that families of the victims who have already suffered so much will have to go through a traumatic process every five years?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:12): Again I thank the honourable member for his question. And no, it does not mean that at all, because the government has not yet made –

A member: It was announced.

Daniel ANDREWS: No, I am sorry. I am rather uniquely placed to comment on behalf of the government, being the chair of the government. Let me just make this very clear: we will have more to say about who is eligible to even apply to the adult parole board for a hearing, let alone get a hearing. What is more –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Berwick.

Daniel ANDREWS: What is more, member for Berwick, the government has made it very clear today that we are actively exploring the notion that those who have participated in no rehabilitation may not be eligible to even petition the parole board for a hearing, let alone be granted parole.

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick!

Daniel ANDREWS: The member for Berwick can interject all he likes – all he likes – and people can judge him accordingly.

Ministers statements: medical research

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:13): I rise today to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's continued investment in state-of-the-art medical research infrastructure here in Victoria. As this house well knows, Melbourne is one of the world's leading medical research centres. Our government is working to grow that reputation further by attracting the world's best and brightest researchers and clinicians. This morning the Premier and I had the great opportunity to join with the vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne and Professor Sharon Lewin and Professor Margaret Hellard, respectively from the Doherty Institute and the Burnet Institute, to see the great plans that are ready to go for the Australian Institute for Infectious Disease. Our government is investing \$400 million into this \$650 million project. It will ensure that what is already one of the world's

greatest precincts becomes even bigger and better. It will continue Victoria's reputation as a global leader when it comes to understanding and fighting infectious diseases, not just COVID. Let us remember the other prevalent diseases that still cause great challenges here in our community: HIV, mpox of course, other mosquito-borne viruses like malaria and indeed many others. It is important that we continue to stay hepatitis and so on. This revolutionary institute will enable us to respond quickly to future pandemics and to fight infectious disease. We are investing right across our medical research space, be it in partnership for the coming global centre for pandemic therapeutics – the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery – and the \$35 million that I was delighted to announce on Sunday being invested in the Victorian Paediatric Cancer Consortium out of the Children's Hospital here in Victoria.

Public transport ticketing system

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:16): My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. The losing bidders for the Myki replacement contract, Cubic and now NTT, were asked by the government to increase their bid price and extend the rollout times for the tap-and-go system in order to make Conduent's bid more competitive. Minister, there are now two global bidders with a proven track record of delivering accusing this government of a dodgy tender process. Why did the Andrews government rig the process to ensure Conduent won the contract?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (14:17): I thank the member for his question, and at the outset I reject the premise of the question.

Daniel Andrews: So does the probity auditor.

Ben CARROLL: So does the probity auditor. It is a bit like John Roskam saying, 'Can I have a re-run of Warrantdyte?'

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I understand the humour behind the comment, but I ask members to come to order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this question related to a billion-dollar contract that has been described as dodgy. I would ask the minister to be brought back to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business's point of order referred to relevance, and I ask the minister to come back to the question that was asked.

Ben CARROLL: We have chosen the best operator to have a statewide solution for our public transport ticketing solution that will be statewide. As I said to Mrs McArthur last week, she can still keep her Myki card, but we are also making sure that you will be allowed to have the option on your phone and on your credit card. Not only has the probity adviser assured us about the request-for-proposal process but about the expression-of-interest process as well, so we have every confidence in our selection of Conduent. As the Prime Minister said on the weekend, it is just the Victorian Liberal Party looking for a conspiracy to try and find another theory. We have every confidence, and we will get on with the job. While you keep talking about the past, we are focused on the future.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:19): Minister, why is the government forcing Victorian taxpayers to pay more when there are two companies that could deliver this project cheaper and quicker?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sunbury is warned.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (14:19): There is a very simple answer to that. The new contract is no more expensive overall than the equivalent previous contract,

but the great thing is it will deliver additional benefits, whether it is your Visa card, your MasterCard or even this one, the Eurocard, so when Tim Smith comes back he can bring his Eurocard and touch on as well.

Ministers statements: mental health services

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:20): I rise today to update the house on the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to providing specialist and urgent mental health care to Victorians in need. One in five Victorians will experience a mental health condition, and we know that people with co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug issues will require specialist support. We also know that emergency department environments can often compound distress, which is why dedicated mental health and alcohol and other drug ED supports are critical. That is why we are delivering new mental health and AOD emergency department hubs across the state.

To ensure residents in Melbourne’s south-east have better access to specialised care a new hub is now open at the Monash Medical Centre, which is well known and loved by many in this chamber. I recently visited the St Vincent’s hub, and in the short time it has been open it has provided support to more than 3600 Victorians – that is 3600 people who received the integrated treatment and support they needed in a fit-for-purpose environment instead of waiting in an ED. This is part of the Andrews government’s \$32 million investment to ensure that Victorians across the state receive the care they need and deserve. Alongside the St Vincent’s hub, hubs are operating at Barwon Health’s University Hospital Geelong and Western Health’s Sunshine Hospital, and there will be additional hubs opening at the Royal Melbourne and at Frankston Hospital as well.

But that is not all. We are investing a further \$10 million to improve access to support for regional Victorians as well. This includes a hub at Latrobe Regional Hospital and planning for hubs in Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton, which I know will be welcomed by those local members. With more than \$6 billion – about \$6.5 billion – invested in our mental health system since 2020, the Andrews Labor government is rebuilding our mental health and wellbeing system from the ground up to ensure that we have a system that provides treatment, care and support for all Victorians closer to home.

Planning policy

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Planning. A huge percentage of our state’s carbon emissions come from electricity and gas usage in our buildings and homes, and given this, all state and territory governments agreed to the new National Construction Code to make sure all new buildings are built to 7 stars starting in October. New South Wales, Queensland and the ACT are still committed to this, but Victoria we understand has decided to delay the new 7-star standard, even though many builders have spent millions preparing. Why penalise them and lock people into new homes that are more expensive to run with their energy bills?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:23): I thank the member for her question and for her interest in planning and her interest in building and new homes for Victoria. Can I say from the outset that this government is completely committed to the construction of new homes, affordable homes. We are at a critical stage where we need to increase our supply of homes and housing in this state – in fact across the nation – and I think all members will be pleased to have heard the announcement on the weekend that the federal government is providing \$2 billion to support us building new homes for more Victorians.

Sam Hibbins: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, as interesting as the Greens pushing the federal government to actually invest direct money into housing is, the question was specifically about 7-star homes, and I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I cannot direct the minister how to answer a question. There is no point of order. I would ask the house to come to order.

Sonya KILKENNY: Thank you, Speaker. This government remains committed to addressing the critical shortage of housing in this state, and that means supporting the industry. That means working with communities, because ultimately we need to ensure we get the best outcomes for communities, which are more housing, more homes, more supply across Melbourne and across Victoria. That is our commitment, that is what we are working towards and that is what we will deliver.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:24): It remains to be seen why we are still not agreeing to 7-star homes. On a very related matter, three years ago an alliance of 24 councils across Victoria developed a planning scheme amendment for zero-carbon buildings, a piece of work that meant our state can actually build healthier, more comfortable homes that use much less energy and save people on their bills. The alliance submitted the proposal to the minister on 21 July last year so now, nearly a year later and two planning ministers later, the document still sits on the minister's desk. Minister, when will you approve it?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:25): I thank the member for her supplementary question. As I said, this government is absolutely committed to increasing the supply of affordable homes, of more homes – homes that are built to last, homes that are efficient and homes that are going to provide a pipeline of work and construction in the industry. The fact that the Greens –

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was about a planning scheme amendment, not about the construction of new homes. It is about the council for the built sustainable environment.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eureka! There is no point of order.

Sonya KILKENNY: Thank you. I appreciate the member's question. I think, with respect, the member needs to understand what the clear focus is and what the imperative is here at the moment, and that is ensuring that we build new homes for Victorians. We need to ensure that homes are affordable. We need to ensure there is a pipeline of work. We need to make sure that the next generation of Victorians are able to have a home in the location that they want. The fact that we have the Greens now acting in this – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: family violence

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (14:27): I am pleased to provide an update on the government's work to support victim-survivors of family violence. We know that gendered violence remains the leading cause of death, disability and illness for women under 45 and that Victoria Police respond to an incident of family violence on average every 7 minutes. This is a deeply serious matter. That is why we established the Royal Commission into Family Violence and then implemented all 227 recommendations, and it is why since 2017 we have invested more than \$3.86 billion to build a more responsive, connected and accountable family and sexual violence system.

We know that there is much more work to be done, and in the recent budget we demonstrated our continued support to those impacted by family violence. This includes a \$15 million investment to ensure victims of family violence continue to receive the support that they need to stay safe; \$23 million for perpetrator responses to keep people who use violence engaged, in view and accountable; and \$31 million for Aboriginal-led family violence and sexual assault service delivery. We are also working across the community on important projects to create lasting change, including supporting 137 individual prevention projects to help bring about the generational change that we need to see – projects like the Baby Makes 3 program, which the member for Eltham is well aware of, with

53 childbirth and parenting educators being trained to promote healthy relationships and challenge rigid gender roles through their engagement with first-time parents. Our journey to a future free from violence has come a long way, but we know there is more to do, and this government remains absolutely committed to ensuring that we see it through.

Public transport ticketing system

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:29): My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Did the minister or anyone from his department meet with Conduent officials from the US on 1 May this year?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (14:29): I thank the member for his question, because Conduent are operating 400 ticketing systems across 24 countries in the world –

John Pesutto interjected.

Ben CARROLL: ‘Will you be here after winter?’ is the question to you.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Minister.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister was asked a very direct question as to whether he had met with the company or his department had met with the company, and I would ask you to bring him back to that very important question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister was only just beginning his answer, and I think we should give him an opportunity to respond.

Ben CARROLL: I will be very clear. With the member for Albert Park, only last week, we went and saw firsthand the technology that the company is going to be rolling out and the difference it will make. Unlike them, we do not have to go through a preselection or go for Box Hill before we get recycled to Warrandyte. We have always –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I understand why the minister would choose to sledge the opposition as opposed to answering the question, but I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question: did you meet with the company on that date?

The SPEAKER: Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was referring to Conduent, and I ask him to come back to answering the question.

Ben CARROLL: It is hard not to. I thought we had done away with Dorothy Dixers, but this is a Dorothy Dixer. Of course I met with them. It is such a big contract. Not only did I meet with them, I tested the technology and saw how proven it is. Probity, auditors – everything has been done, so we are very confident of this contract, and we will get on with doing the job.

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: As I have said to you in Hawthorn, they are coming to Hawthorn, and they are going to be on the tram network in Hawthorn, while we make sure electric buses are coming your way too.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Minister. It is very disrespectful. I ask you to address your comments through the Chair.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:32): Minister, following your very busy meeting on 1 May, on 5 May this year the Conduent CEO and the Conduent CFO each bought US\$100,000 of shares in their company, the first such action that they had taken in two years. On 15 May, when the government announced that Conduent was the winning bidder for \$1.7 billion of taxpayers money, the Conduent

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share price increased 25 per cent. Minister, how can Victorians have confidence that this huge contract is a good deal for Victorians when such a blatant act of insider trading has occurred?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The members for Nepean and Eureka can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Members for Nepean and Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (14:33): As an independent probity adviser has confirmed, the process was adequately and thoroughly and independently assessed, both from the expression-of-interest process and then right through the request-for-proposal process. Everything was followed in accordance with the rules, and we stand by that. It is good to see that he can read the *Age* newspaper.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I am just concerned that the minister talked about a request-for-proposal process, and that is not procurement. That is only the start of a procurement process.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I ask members that if they are going to raise points of order, they make sure that they are points of order.

Ministers statements: sanitary products

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:34): I rise to update the house on this government's commitment to free pads and tampons in public places. The Andrews Labor government believes that all Victorians should get the support they need when they need it. As Minister for Women, I am focused on women's needs, unlike those opposite, who do not really know what women need. I know what women need. We know what women need. We know what all women need. For far too long, periods have been stigmatised, causing discomfort and embarrassment for women and girls when they get stuck without the products that they need. Since 2019 students have had access to free and accessible pads and tampons in their school environments. That was an Australian first. This initiative has been so successful that we have invested a further \$15.5 million to continue to roll out that initiative across our schools, to make sure government schools continue to be stocked with free sanitary items, just like toilet paper. Building on this highly successful initiative, this year's budget also invested \$23 million to deliver free pads and tampons across 700 public sites here in Victoria. This includes places like public hospitals, TAFEs, courts, train stations and major cultural institutions right across the state. Investing in the health and wellbeing of women and girls is essential to our nation-leading reforms to destigmatise periods, to stamp out period poverty and to ensure women and girls have the basic dignity that they deserve wherever they go. This is on top of this year's budget's focus on women's health – \$497 million to improve access to women-specific health services. What a great investment.

Constituency questions

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:37): (200) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and I ask it on behalf of the proprietors of the service station at Merton and many community members. The government has plans to build a new bus stop in the immediate vicinity of the service station in Merton on the busy Maroondah Highway. Clarity around the plans and community consultation is lacking. Will the minister ensure that proper consultation occurs, that the plans are provided to the community and that the location is one that does not impact on the business of the service station and post office? Everyone is extremely worried that the location being discussed will greatly impact driver and pedestrian safety. The fuel company have advised this location would make fuel delivery near impossible. The many B-double trucks and cars towing boats and caravans that fill up there will have

enormous difficulty navigating a stop built very close to the bowsers. There could be accidents waiting to happen, but they can be avoided. I urge the minister's immediate attention.

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:38): (201) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, with the recent state budget committing an extra \$2.8 billion to be spent on road maintenance over the next 10 years to repair roads across the state, could you please provide an update on how the 2023–24 state budget will improve our regional roads and what this will achieve for the Bellarine? Many constituents have raised their concerns with me over the conditions of our roads in the Bellarine, and I know it is important for Bellarine constituents to have roads to get them where they need to go and that can handle the increased traffic throughout the year. The Bellarine is a popular holiday destination area, with our roads getting increasingly busy over the holiday period and many tourists also needing confidence in the roads that people are travelling on. So I ask the Minister for Roads and Road Safety how this budget will improve our regional roads and what this will achieve for the Bellarine.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:39): (202) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs on behalf of Helen Mitchell of Wangaratta. Helen recently had a motor vehicle collide with her vehicle causing very significant damage. No fault has been apportioned to Mrs Mitchell. Helen purchased the vehicle for \$55,000 and is insured with Apia Insurance. Her policy with Apia is clear: if the car is written off, she will receive a replacement vehicle or be paid an amount that will cover the purchase of a similar vehicle. Panelbeaters have quoted \$42,000 and eight months to fix the vehicle, which is extraordinary. This flies in the face of the policy of Apia, and it is outrageous. Mrs Mitchell deserves a replacement car, not a patch-up job on her now-destroyed vehicle. I seek the minister's attention and assistance to expose Apia's avoidance of paying out Mrs Mitchell and resolve this claim immediately.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:40): (203) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Minister, how many passengers have used the Tarneit North FlexiRide service since its beginning? The FlexiRide system has become a staple form of public transport into Tarneit North. With the suburb growing and more residents moving in every month, the service has become vital for my community. The FlexiRide service is a bus service that allows passengers to book a trip from anywhere within the service area to or from the Tarneit station, Tarneit Central shopping centre, Tarneit Senior College, Tarneit P–9 College, Baden Powell P–9 college and Truganina P–9 College. This service is available through a smartphone app or by calling the operator. Passengers can get real-time information about their service so that they know when their service is arriving. This service has helped increase the mobility of people in Tarneit, helping them access critical employment, education, health care and services. I thank the minister for answering this question so I can share it with my community.

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:41): (204) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister commit to reviewing road safety on Barkers Road in Kew with a view to installing additional pedestrian crossings? Nearly a quarter of the population in my electorate is under the age of 19. As the member for Kew, I am determined to listen to our younger residents and be their voice in the Parliament on the matters that are important to them. That is why I recently held a primary school leaders forum where Molly and Atrisa from Methodist Ladies College raised concerns about road safety for their fellow classmates outside MLC on Barkers Road. Indeed there are many schools and kinders along the stretch of Barkers Road between Power Street and Burke Road. Thousands of school-age children commute there daily, with cars and buses ferrying kids to and from school at peak times. It is an oversight that there are no pedestrian crossings to allow students to cross Barkers Road safely, except

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on the busy intersections of Glenferrie and Auburn roads. Given the significant traffic volume on Barkers Road and this school zone, a safety-first approach warrants a pedestrian crossing somewhere between Glenferrie Road and Auburn Road, perhaps around Rossfield Avenue or Lofts Avenue, as suggested by Molly and Atrisa. I ask the minister to review the traffic volume on Barkers Road.

Point Cook electorate

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (14:42): (205) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police, and my question is: how are you keeping the community that I represent, the electorate of Point Cook, safe? We know that on this side of the house we are committed to continuing to provide record investments in Victoria Police, \$4.5 billion at last count, to ensure that they have the resources, the powers, the technologies and the modern fit-for-purpose facilities that they need to keep our community safe. One of those announcements most recently was at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, where the minister announced \$19.8 million towards delivering a new contemporary and fit-for-purpose police station in Point Cook. We have already bought the land in Point Cook, and now we are getting on with the job of building that much-needed community facility. It is very clear that only a Labor state government will deliver this facility in the community that I represent.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:43): (206) My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Recommendations that the mental health complaints commissioner makes to public mental health services are a matter of public interest, as they show where Victoria's mental health system needs to improve. Currently, the Mental Health Complaints Commission is appealing a decision by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner which advised that they release such service improvement recommendations to my constituent who requested them. Could the minister please avoid further legal costs and delay by simply releasing this information to the public?

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:43): (207) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Education. Minister, how will the recently announced school funding boost for teachers, school staff and students support camps and excursions right across the Ringwood electorate? Victorian schools are incredible in so many ways, but when you ask students about what the highlights have been of their schooling, the answer almost certainly includes school camps, excursions and theatre productions. But these events do not run without teachers, and it is critical that these fantastic staff receive the remuneration they deserve. That is why I am thrilled to talk about this big win for school staff. Announced in this year's budget, the Andrews Labor government is providing \$299 million over four years to ensure teachers receive appropriate pay while on camps and excursions. That funding includes \$130 million of back pay to recognise overtime already worked this year, just like in any other professional workplace. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that delivers for Victorian teachers, and I look forward to hearing from the minister on this exciting funding boost.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:44): (208) My constituency question is for the Treasurer, and the information I seek is on funding for Latrobe Youth Space. Latrobe Youth Space was opened in May 2021 and has developed a reputation as a place that provides wraparound support for young people in the valley between the ages of 12 and 25. In just two years the youth space has attracted more than 500 members, and this tells us two things: (1) there is a great need in the valley for youth support services and (2) Latrobe Youth Space is a trusted, safe space. Instead of it celebrating its second birthday last month, young people were devastated to learn that Latrobe Youth Space was no longer to be funded by the state government. Many constituents are rightly concerned about what this means for the youth space and its 500-plus members. The importance of youth space should not be underestimated. For some young people it is somewhere they can hang out; for others it is a space they feel safe, a place where they can shower and eat. Treasurer, we cannot afford to lose this community

asset. Will you commit to supporting our young people by funding the Latrobe Youth Space or just sit idly by while 500 kids are pushed back onto the street?

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:45): (209) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It was a fantastic announcement in the budget that \$10 million has been committed to a business case to upgrade the Western Highway, as this is a major transport route for not only my constituents in Kororoit but also residents of Victoria. However, my constituents have literally been left in the dark as there are no operating streetlights along Leakes Road from Rockbank station to the Western Highway, including the on- and off-ramps. Can the minister please tell me when constituents in Kororoit can expect the lights to be operational.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, I was listening carefully to the member for Kew's constituency question, and it seemed to me to be calling on the minister to take action rather than seeking information. I ask that you rule it out of order.

The SPEAKER: I will review the question, member for Ringwood.

Committees

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Reference

Debate resumed.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (14:47): Just to continue where I left off – to close out, I should say, on this matter – we know that there has been an overdependence on formal access requests rather than exploring options to provide access to information proactively and informally, hence the imperative for the changes that are proposed and also the imperative for this review, in particular when we are looking at the issue of personal documents because we know that on average personal requests represented almost 70 per cent of total requests since 2014. Again, I put on the record that we do have to have perspective when it comes to the very statistics that reflect the nature of FOI processes in Victoria. Individuals using FOI as the primary mechanism for accessing their own information is an inefficient use of their time and an inefficient use of government resources. Hence we can see that it is right and proper and timely that this review be undertaken, and I wholeheartedly support it going ahead.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:48): I am pleased to speak in support of this government motion to refer an inquiry into the Freedom of Information Act 1982 to the Integrity and Oversight Committee. This is a much-needed inquiry with well drafted, comprehensive terms of reference. I am pleased because it has been a long time between drinks when it comes to implementing integrity reforms in Victoria, including anything related to FOI. It was in fact back in 2017 that the government amended the FOI act to establish the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner – OVIC – to integrate freedom of information, privacy and data protection oversight into a single body. This was a positive if somewhat belated reform in that it emulated the kind of information oversight regimes that were already operating in other Australian jurisdictions.

Along with that bill the Andrews Labor government also made some accompanying promises about their further FOI reform agenda, and I quote from the second-reading speech in 2016:

These reforms are only the first stage in improving openness and access to information. Victoria needs modern information access legislation that supports the public's right to information while ensuring public records and certain types of information remain protected. As such, the government is commissioning an independent root and branch review of Victoria's FOI and public records legislation. The review will consult broadly across the public, private and non-government sectors to develop a revised framework for FOI and public records legislation, and the review is expected to be completed in March 2017.

This second-reading speech also spoke of:

... driving the cultural shifts necessary to improve the way government manages and provides access to information.

Unfortunately this legislation, rather than being the first step, proved to be the only step the government took back then to reform FOI. Indeed I am not even sure that this promised wideranging root-and-branch review of Victoria's FOI legislation was actually ever commissioned. The parliamentary library could not find it, and OVIC themselves stated that they were not aware if it was ever conducted, so I cannot talk of any further FOI reforms under this government. What I can comment on is what has happened, because the Andrews government since 2016 has driven a cultural shift in the way government manages and provides access to information, but sadly, not in a positive way. Journalist Sumeyya Ilanbey, who covered state politics for the *Age* over much of this period, eloquently described in her final column what she witnessed under Andrews's watch as a withering of democracy – that is, rather than the government improving public access to information, since 2016 government information has been progressively centralised and tightly controlled through the Premier's office, which has itself grown exponentially.

Rather than continuing the centuries-old Westminster concept of government that is accountable to Parliament, we have seen more ministers become increasingly timid to give a frank answer to the most rudimentary questions relating to their portfolios. We have witnessed important letters from public agencies intended for all parliamentarians not being passed on. We have seen independent reports and findings from our parliamentary committees being edited by the Premier's private office. We have seen the government fighting the release of even the most prosaic of public interest documents through our highest courts at taxpayers expense. I will just remind you that the second-reading speech in 2017 from the government spoke of driving the cultural shifts necessary to improve the way government manages and provides access to information, and yet we are seeing – even in this chamber, which is empirically the least democratic of all in Australia – the ability to debate and review legislation in detail curtailed and abolished.

We have seen the government defying orders in the other place to produce documents, and we continue to see independent agencies, eminent jurists, public servants and journalists belittled and gaslit because they have the temerity to do their jobs and critique government policy. It is this culture of suppression and centralised control of information – this withering of democracy – that I believe has meant Victorians have had to turn to FOI as the only recourse for public interest information. It should be little surprise that Victorians, so starved of anything other than Premier's private office talking points, make more FOI requests than any other jurisdiction, including the federal one. But our FOI system is, to put it kindly, dysfunctional. To quote a federal Greens colleague:

It's freedom of information only for the bloody-minded, the well-resourced, or the fixated.

I suspect I am not the only current state MP that has, after multiple failed attempts, given up lodging FOI requests as an unjustifiable waste of time and money. A report from the Victorian Information Commissioner last year found, among other things, inadequate resourcing by agencies for FOI functions and a significantly greater use of section 25A(5) of the act to refuse FOI requests without identifying or processing any documents. I note funding for OVIC was also reduced in this budget, and I should comment that OVIC seems to have performed very well since its creation and has a very solid reputation in this space.

While the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing FOI issues, I agree with the commissioner that the underlying problem is that the FOI act in its current form can no longer provide for the timely disclosure of information held by government. In fact the FOI act has not been able to achieve this for many years, so the Greens are committed to a rewrite of the act with greater emphasis on timeliness and a greater weighting towards transparency as part of comprehensive integrity reform – that is, we support what the Andrews government said it would do back in 2016. We support this referral to the Integrity and Oversight Committee as we believe this committee will finally be able to publish something like the

root-and-branch review that was originally promised. As chair of that committee I look forward to this work in earnest, and again I commend the government for initiating this. And then who knows – we may even see the government actually implement some reforms to increase transparency.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:54): First and foremost, when we talk about open and honest and transparent governments and our democracy, one of the best things we have seen in a long time here at this Parliament – and it has taken a long time – is to have our galleries back open. I am sorry you had to sit through that for 15 minutes, I do apologise –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Berwick.

Brad BATTIN: but it is very important that we do have people in the galleries so we are sure that we are held to be an open and honest Parliament as well as obviously for those in government. One of the things I looked at when I looked at this FOI discussion and the debate about going to committee is that some of the issues that need to be addressed can be addressed without even the change to what is going on here, because the current legislation has time frames for FOIs to be answered. As Shadow Minister for Police one of the things that is fundamental to holding the government to account when it comes to law and order in our state is a transparency system where we can make a freedom-of-information request and get a response in a respectful time. Currently we have got letters in our office, when we have applied for FOIs, from this government where they say the delays will be 36 weeks, 38 weeks and over 40 weeks. The previous FOI commissioner, in a meeting I had with him, specifically said that you cannot hold government to account if it takes that long to get a response in relation to freedom of information. That is not just disrespectful to any opposition but disrespectful to those in the community, because we are asking these questions and putting these FOIs in for a legitimate purpose.

One of those purposes here in Victoria at the moment is an FOI request in relation to vacancies that are currently on the police roster, as we have got an increase in crime here in our state. We have seen youth crime at record highs, the highest we have had in a decade. Aggravated burglary is at the highest rate we have had in a decade. We have got domestic violence assault at the highest rates we have had in a decade. One of the things that is important for the community to know is: where are those vacancies, and why have we got those vacancies? But this government refuses to release that data. I say most of it is because the Premier of the day does not trust his ministers. Every FOI request that is going through is going through such a process that effectively the Premier and his office and his private office have to sign off on these documents. It does not just go through a standard process to trust the minister to say this is what should be released under legislation and this is what should not be released; it then goes to the Premier to cast a political eye over it to see what damage will be done to the government if a document is released around the actual statistics or the numbers or the information that people are requesting. It is not just us; there are members in the community who are also putting in applications, and they are being told they have got to be delayed continuously.

I think we do need to review what the legislation says, but more importantly than the review, we actually need to ensure that the government is going to deliver on what that legislation says, because there is no use in us changing the legislation and sticking to the 30-day requirement that you have got at the moment when every minister, the Premier and his office continually ignore it or the government departments by order from the ministers continually ignore these deadlines. Every time they are ignored it is nearly impossible to hold a government to account, when the information is being tied up or redacted – information that should be available to the public.

We have seen from this government where a public document was put through the FOI process and that document was redacted to such a state that it had page numbers only and a title. What was ridiculous from the government was that they tried to hide everything in that document yet that was a public document; it was already in the public realm. The government have gone so far now that they get so worried about what is going to get out they physically try and hide everything. That is a government that is full of secrecy. That is a government that continues to hide the facts from the

community. That is a government that in itself, by doing this, leads to corrupt behaviour in our state. When everything is now directed through one man – the Premier – and he does not trust his ministers, that will give him absolute power. That is what leads to corrupt governments.

I am very confident in the future that one day some of this information will come out, and when it does come out I am confident there are ministers who will be petrified of some of the information that will come through, because it will identify what we have been saying and confirm that there has been corruption under this government. They are so scared of putting documents out there for fear that not just us but the media will report on it and it will have a negative impact on many of them. So I say to the government, let us do a review, but make sure that you are going to abide by the outcomes of the review and abide by the legislation in place.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Chris Couzens): The Leader of the House has moved government business notice of motion 2 on the notice paper. The member for Brighton has moved an amendment to the motion, which is in the hands of members. The question is:

That such words be inserted.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Noes (57): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Question defeated.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:07): I rise today to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. As always, it is fabulous to be able to speak to the importance of Victoria's public mental health system, and I would like to acknowledge all Victorians who have a diagnosed mental illness or who have gone through periods in their life where they have faced mental ill health. I am one of those people. After I had my little girl Ella I went through a period of postnatal anxiety, and I am enormously appreciative of the support I was able to receive through that time – support from my family and support from my colleagues as well. I do encourage, particularly for my circumstance, all women who are feeling like they are just not quite right after they have had a baby to reach out for health and support, because it can make all the difference. Particularly I would like to acknowledge

the fabulous work of PANDA. They are an amazing resource, and for those sleepless nights when you really need to talk to someone or get some reassurance of where you are at or some understanding of whether you need support or not, their online resources are absolutely fabulous. I commend their fabulous work, and as I said, I really do commend all people who have the courage to reach out for support, because it can make all of the difference not just to you but to your family and to your friends.

This bill of course is related to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, which was brought through this place just under a year ago. In fact over the winter break last year I was given the additional duty over the time at home to read through the enormous and hefty act, which is the revised version of the Mental Health Act 2014, which we had been working under since 2014. At the time there were concerns that there had not been sufficient levels of consultation with the mental health sector. In fact there was nobody that I spoke to who had seen a full draft of the legislation before it was tabled in Parliament by the previous Minister for Mental Health Minister Merlino. While we understand that as part of the royal commission's recommendations there was a hefty amount of work around certain elements, there certainly was a very, very strict time frame involved, and at the time it was felt that perhaps there was not the level of input that would have been ideal to creating a fulsome bill that was free from errors. There are elements of the bill that we are speaking to today that do correct a number of simple errors in terms of cross-references being inaccurate and other things that had not been picked up through the process of the legislation going through both chambers.

I was very proud that last year we were able to make an amendment to the legislation as it came through the house specifically in relation to the drug and alcohol sector being acknowledged as a really important part of the mental health sector in Victoria. We know that there is considerable overlap between people who need mental health support and who are suffering from mental ill health or mental illness and those who are impacted by drugs and alcohol. So often that is around self-medication, because either people are not reaching out for help or when they try and reach out that support is not available to them. I am very, very proud that we were able to have that amendment put in place so that it became a key principle of the legislation. That of course ensured that funding for the drug and alcohol sector would be secured against the mental health levy into the future. This is something that is very, very important for the alcohol and other drug sector. They do an incredible job with people who are often forgotten about or pushed to the end of the queue, and so I would like to pay credit to everybody who assisted in getting that amendment to the bill through in the passage of the legislation through this place in the previous Parliament.

This legislation that we have before us today has other key aspects which I would like to go over in some detail. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – not just the commissioners but the thousands of Victorians who came forward to share their experiences within the mental health sector. They are of course people with lived experience, some of whom went through extraordinarily traumatic experiences themselves and who were willing to share those experiences to ensure that we have corrections and changes to how we build Victoria's mental health system and ensure that those sorts of traumatic experiences are not relived by others in the future.

The royal commission also had considerable input from clinicians and other practitioners who are delivering the care and know that we can do that in a much more structured way based on evidence-based practices and processes to ensure that anybody who comes forward with mental ill health or mental illness is treated in a similar way, a way which is backed by evidence and has the greatest likelihood of them having treatment or counselling sessions – whatever is best for that individual – that ensure that they can manage their mental health not just at the time of their own crisis but also into the future. So I would like to thank everybody, no matter what their efforts were in terms of developing the royal commission's reports – whether it was the interim report, which was handed down back in 2019, or the final report, which was released back in 2021. Thank you so much to everybody who made an effort to build that report.

Of course what comes after that is all the effort of the people who are trying to bring this into reality. It is a considerable tranche of reforms that need to be put in place. It is about looking at mental health with an entirely different approach, and it is going to have, no doubt, some teething issues as it goes through. However, there are also areas which are matters of urgency and priority to address, and until there are critical milestones that are achieved it is going to be very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the goals and aspirations of the royal commission and to give Victorians what they should expect when they are looking to enter the public mental health system in Victoria.

I would like to spend some time on an aspect of the royal commission's final report but also in relation to the amendments which are outlined in this legislation before the house, because I am concerned that there is a level of inconsistency between what the royal commission's aspirations were, what the sector's expectations were and what is being delivered through the legislation before the house today. This is something that has been raised through the media by various groups, and it goes to a specific section of the royal commission's report, section 9.2.4 which is 'Reliance on police to respond to mental health crises'. A lot was made of this certainly in the handing down of the royal commission's report, and that was particularly in light of what is seen as a significant shift from the first response for people who are in a mental health crisis being addressed by police and seeing this as a police-led response versus what really should be a health response. We should see that people who are experiencing mental health crisis are treated as they would be for any health condition where they need immediate and emergency support.

In fact in the royal commission's recommendations it was actually highlighted, and I note page 514, chapter 9.2, crisis and emergency responses, and I quote:

Given that most people experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, the involvement of police can be humiliating and traumatic. Many consumers, carers and service providers – including Victoria Police itself – expressed dismay about the growing involvement of police in situations where people are experiencing a mental health crisis. For example, in an anonymous submission to the Commission, one carer described the experiences of supporting her son:

When I call [the Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team], they say call the police ...

My son has threatened to kill me before when he's been psychotic and off his medication and I have had to take out an [intervention order]. While I have had some good experiences with police and ambulance, not all understand mental illness and they shouldn't be the main point of call for people who need specialised treatment for mental illness. Police have fined my son for walking close to the freeway when he was suicidal. Instead of getting him help, he spent the night in jail. But without the police my son would be dead. I am grateful that the police were there, however it is not their job.

I do believe that there was an understanding and commitment by the Labor government back in 2021 to actually take the recommendations of the royal commission on board and to move from this – what can be harmful – police-led response to emergency crises in mental health to a health-led response, and I quote former Minister for Mental Health Merlino from his Facebook page:

We wouldn't send a police officer if someone was having a heart attack or a stroke.

And mental health responses should be treated in exactly the same way. It is a health issue.

One of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission focuses on Triple Zero responses and ensuring paramedics are the first responders to callouts rather than police.

Today we announced a working group of Ambulance Victoria, Police Victoria, our Triple Zero call takers and their industrial partners to begin the complex and critical work on how this would be implemented and what protocols are needed.

We are not wasting a day getting on with delivering this vital reform.

There is no doubt that is a vital reform, and in fact it was a reform that was made through the last iteration of legislation, so it is very disappointing and I think a massive regressive step when you look through this legislation which actually removes references to Ambulance Victoria being responders to mental health crises.

I will speak in some detail about these three clauses – clause 12, clause 13 and clause 14. To be honest, I am not sure if this is an omission or whether it is deliberate, because I think that the amendments put forward in this legislation actually go a lot further than what is necessary to realise more flexibility in emergency call-outs to mental health crises.

I absolutely recognise and support what is outlined in clause 12, which really is around providing further flexibility for 000 call takers to be able to consider the situation of the person who is in mental crisis; to assess their immediate need, the risk to themselves and to others; also to take into account the demands on the Ambulance Victoria team, whether it is about the actual ambulances on the road or the paramedics and of course their skills and qualifications and ability to deliver an appropriate support to that person in mental health crisis. However, clauses 13 and 14 specifically remove reference to paramedics employed by Ambulance Victoria. The issue around this is that, if you refer back to the relevant sections in the act, the only legislated responders, if this bill passes as it is, are police officers and PSOs, and I firmly believe that that is absolutely contrary to the principles that are embedded in the existing legislation and that are further enhanced by the amending bill before the house today. In terms of my interest in amending this bill, I would like to see that clauses 13 and 14 are omitted. My perspective is that that would ensure we have a health system, an emergency response system, that is in the best interest of the individual Victorian who is in mental crisis.

There is no doubt that across all aspects our emergency services teams are facing critical shortages. We know that there are shortages with Ambulance Victoria, and we see this evidenced so often through stories of delays in 000 calls being taken, delays in ambulances being dispatched and of course ramping at hospitals as well. We also saw just yesterday a story about the amount of hours that police are spending sitting with people who are in mental crisis and in hospitals while they are waiting for a clinician to provide that enhanced care. We are seeing so many hours absorbed by Victoria Police, who are providing a service which is really away from what they are trained to do. It is not the most appropriate level of care for the individuals who need mental health support and care. Further, it is also detracting from the work that Victoria Police could do.

I would like to see in legislation a better outcome for all – more flexibility in the system to ensure that we can get the most appropriate response to individuals who are going through a mental health crisis. As I said, I strongly support clause 12, which provides greater flexibility so that those 000 call takers, who do a great job under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, can assess an individual person's needs and so that we can ensure that they are considering the resources that are available in the system at the time and making sure that in the first instance, wherever possible, a health-led response is provided to anybody who is in emergency mental health crisis in Victoria. Through this legislation before the house, by removing the ability for 000 call takers to refer a matter to Ambulance Victoria, we are really taking away a critical arm and a group of emergency service personnel who could actually provide a better solution. It is not saying they have to come to every single call-out; that is not what we are saying. What we are saying is we must leave paramedics employed under Ambulance Victoria in the legislation so at the very first instance at least that option is available.

I understand there are other aspects of these clauses which would allow the minister to prescribe at a later date – so through regulation – other health services that may be able to be first responders to mental health emergency calls, and I accept that would also provide a level of flexibility and be a step forward. However, if you are legislating that police officers can be first responders and PSOs can be first responders, I think that it would be to the detriment of every single Victorian who has the potential of facing a mental crisis if we do not retain Ambulance Victoria personnel in them. As I said, there are sufficient protections in there through the amendments in clause 12 that would allow the consideration of other matters in terms of resource allocation. We did attempt to take this bill into consideration in detail, where we could go into the specific details, go through the bill clause by clause, for this specific purpose. We would have loved to have been able to deal with this in this chamber now, to look at hearing from the government about why they are choosing to remove a health-led response from Victoria's mental health system and instead deal with it now so it has a smoother pathway through

both houses. However, because we were unable to do that, we will be putting through a reasoned amendment today, which I would like to be circulated so I can read it to the house. It is important that the government do look at this amendment very seriously. I would urge the government to certainly take this on merit and face value. This is really about strengthening the bill and making sure that we do have, wherever possible, a pathway of least restraint and least impact on people who are suffering from mental harms in Victoria and who need emergency or crisis assistance.

Now, we know paramedics are trained to a certain level to deal with difficult situations; all of our emergency services personnel are. They do an incredible job in doing so. It is likely that they may need some additional training. However, it was over two years ago that we heard from the former Minister for Mental Health that he was pulling together a task force with relevant personnel and that he was also looking to put some funding into that to provide more training to Ambulance Victoria paramedics. But given there is another 18 months until this would come into effect, I really cannot see any reason why Ambulance Victoria paramedics would not be retained in the bill through clauses 13 and 14. Therefore, in the absence of being able to take this legislation through consideration in detail, I move:

That all the words after ‘that’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to enable the delivery of a health-led response to mental health related emergencies’.

I would much prefer that we were able to deal with those two particular clauses, because I understand that some of the other corrections that this bill brings through the house are critical, really, in ensuring that we have an act that the sector can work towards, that does correct some of those key errors that were made through the original drafting of the bill. We do not want to impede the passage of this legislation in any way, shape or form, but I feel exceptionally strongly that if you are going to have mental health principles which state that we must always have a health-led response, then absolutely in that response, which is legislated, we cannot just have Victoria Police and PSOs prescribed by law. It must have at least one health service in there that, in accordance with clause 12, can be called on at any point in time.

I will flag, should relevant amendments not be made before the upper house, that we will be pursuing those amendments in the upper house. I will say that this has got wide support from the mental health sector. It does have support from the drug and alcohol sector, because of course if people who are impacted or affected by drugs in particular – and illicit drugs in particular – have any consideration or they do not want police to be there if they call 000, then they are less likely to call 000. That could have disastrous outcomes, because the greater length of time that you wait when someone is going through a mental health crisis, particularly if they are heavily drug affected or going through overdose, then the more likely it is that we will have horrific outcomes for that individual.

So my view and that of my Liberals and Nationals colleagues is we will always strive to make sure that we actually have a legislated health-led response. We will always support our emergency services personnel to be able to do their job and do it well. We strongly support clause 12; however, we object to the reference to paramedics employed under the Ambulance Services Act 1986 being removed under clause 13 and 14 of the legislation before the house today.

There are other aspects of this legislation, and I do realise that I have taken a considerable amount of time. I know my colleague the Shadow Minister for Police, the member for Berwick, has done an enormous amount of work around this and has worked very closely with the secretary for the police union, Mr Wayne Gatt. He is an incredible representative for his members, but more importantly he is a very fierce advocate for the best possible responses and outcomes for Victorian people. So I commend everybody who has given input to this, and I thank very much the member for Berwick for his input to our position on this legislation.

There are other aspects of this legislation which have led to some concerns but for which we will not be seeking an amendment to correct. There is concern within the sector, and particularly the lived experience sector, that while there are some amendments within this legislation – including clauses 6 to 10, which do include reference to having regard to the person’s view and preferences and regard to

all of the person's past experiences of trauma in regard to treatment such as ECT and other restrictive practices – there is a sense that this legislation does not go far enough to embed the principles that were very strongly iterated through the royal commission's recommendations in regard to compulsory treatment, including seclusion and restraint, and that they should be eliminated within 10 years. From my perspective, I think that that is going to be an incredible challenge unless we see huge steps taken forward to build Victoria's mental health workforce.

Without the workforce available, we simply, unfortunately, have a position where clinicians are absolutely strapped for time and they have to make sure that the individual is kept safe and that those around them are kept safe, and unfortunately the only tool that they have got available to them is seclusion or a level of restraint. Any clinician I have spoken to would like to use that as little as possible and many support total elimination of those practices, and that is what we have seen in other jurisdictions. However, that is nigh impossible unless we have a significant number of people trained up to be employed in jobs in Victoria's public mental health system. This is much, much more than just creating a number of early career positions, and that is what we have seen from the government. There have really been only two initiatives around the mental health workforce. Those have been around free TAFE – so cert III and IV – which is particularly around giving people with lived experience some credentials so that they are able to deliver enhanced mental health support, and other than that we have seen early years training places. That is important, but we also need to see more people actually being trained. We need more training positions. We need more supervisors in the system to ensure that people who are going through clinical degrees can actually go through that additional six to 12 months and sometimes longer for a higher level qualification. But if they cannot get the supervised position, if we are not paying people to supervise those positions, it is going to be basically impossible to move forward and train more people, and above what we are currently already doing.

The Liberals and Nationals took a suite of policies that would have created an additional 2 million mental health appointments within the first two years. I will take a little bit of credit. I think we did a great job in terms of working with the Australian Institute of Psychologists in looking at a pathway that would enhance the number of psychologists that would be able to be supervised across Victoria and a matching process as well, and that is something that now the federal Labor government have funded at the last budget. These are good initiatives that we are coming forward with. We are coming up with good ideas. I just urge the state Labor government to take on some of those suggestions, because it is a void that we have not seen addressed at this point in time. Back in October 2019 five of the nine interim report recommendations referred to an urgency around building Victoria's mental health workforce – more than half of the recommendations. Yet some four years later we still have not seen that investment that we need to see to train up more mental health professionals to provide the support that people desperately need.

That of course comes back to what I was speaking to earlier about a critical emergency response. So often, if people can nip in the bud those feelings of mental ill health or, when they feel like they are not quite right, they can get support early or get an early diagnosis, it results in a far better outcome and usually means that people can avoid those crisis calls and that requirement to go into an acute health setting. If we can get that workforce right, again I think the demand and the number of calls that come in to 000 for mental health crisis will actually diminish as well.

So there is a pathway forward. There is a way that we can actually make sure we get the supports in place so that when Victorians are coming forward and saying, 'I need some help and support. I'm not thinking quite right. I'm not feeling quite right' – people who feel like a dark cloud is coming upon them or people who are going through psychosis or other diagnosable mental illness and are reaching out for support – they are able to access that support.

There are other aspects of this legislation that I have not had an opportunity to go to. There are some amendments here which do look like they are kicking the can down the road in terms of some of the recommendations of the royal commission. We want to make sure that we get it right though. We understand that we have a degree of flexibility around that. However, when I hear back from the sector

that the royal commission's recommendations are being treated like a tick-the-box exercise, I do fear for the aspirations of the royal commission, for the hopes of all Victorians who were involved in the mental health sector and for everyday Victorians who have been impacted by mental ill health and mental illness, particularly those who have lost loved ones who were not able to get the support in a timely or appropriate way. We owe it to them to treat this as more than a tick-the-box exercise. We owe it to them to ensure that we have a mental health workforce that can respond to provide that care and support when people need it. We owe it to them not to revert reforms when we have gone to move to a health-led response in legislation and then we see a walk-back by the government to make it again a police-led response. We cannot do one step forward, two steps back. It is not going to get us to the place that we all want to get to.

While I support a number of the clauses within this legislation and while I have some concerns around other aspects of the legislation, I strongly urge the government to reconsider what has been included in clauses 13 and 14, to seek to withdraw those clauses and to ensure that for every Victorian, when they are at a point where they need someone around them to call 000 for an emergency crisis response, the option is available to them for 000 calls to put them through to Ambulance Victoria where it is appropriate to do so and where the resources are available. That will provide the strongest pathway forward for the people of Victoria who are in emergency mental health crisis. I urge all in this chamber to support my reasoned amendment to ensure that there is delivery of a health-led response embedded within this legislation and that police and PSOs are not left as the only first responders to emergency call-outs.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:38): It is a real privilege to rise on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. Can I firstly start by acknowledging those that have lived experience and have experienced mental ill health in their journey and continue to do so each and every day and those that are caring and supporting a loved one in our local community. It is a task and a journey that we are all on together, and we appreciate all of their work.

This reasoned amendment comes in isolation of the need of the sector. This reasoned amendment asks to delay important legislative reforms that are adaptive to the circumstances that we find ourselves in. The third year of a reform journey tells a different story to the words put forward by the member for Lowan. Delaying some of these important reforms is actually detrimental to the sector and I think removed from some of the incredible and important feedback. The notion that we are not responding to some of these challenges is a bit fraught when we think of the journey of the coalition at this point. Of course it was the then member for Bulleen and opposition leader who staunchly opposed the mental health and wellbeing levy, so when you talk about fronting up and supporting those with lived experience and those that have sadly lost someone to mental ill health, when you oppose the very funding reforms that are so transformational and that will deliver the changes that we all desire as Victorians, you have to be honest and front up to some of those legacy challenges.

We have 74 recommendations that are underway; 60 are implemented and 90 per cent are well and truly underway and commenced. When I sit around and have the opportunity to work with the incredible team in the Department of Health and the Minister for Mental Health and see the absolute purpose, the millions of hours that are going into the sector to make this better than it was yesterday, it does not stack up that we are simply ticking the box of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommendations. That is really insulting to the people that have dedicated their lives to lead the transformation and those recommendations. It is insulting to the people that each and every day strive for a better outcome and to those that have underpinned the changes to this bill. I mean, when you undertake such landmark reform that is so transformational, so innovative and nation leading, you are going to have certain challenges along that journey. So these changes respond to some of those issues. We looked at the regional board changes as well, the impacts of the pandemic and being able to embed some of those practices before we turn them into statutory regions as well.

I wanted to take up a couple of points, because if you listened to the member for Lowan, you would have thought that Ambulance Victoria and paramedics were being removed from the mental health

and wellbeing sector and in the response, but let us be clear: Ambulance Victoria already responds to more than 60,000 mental health related cases per year. They provide a vital service in the sector to support people experiencing mental health crisis, and you cannot look at this clause and look at things in isolation of recommendations. They all interrelate. We do not want people to be at the acute end – we want to actually intervene sooner. You see those people in critical need who need that support all the way through, to preventative health measures and mental health measures and that \$9.29 return for \$1 invested. So it is upstreaming and supporting all the way through and making sure that we do not have people enter that critical and acute care. And when they do, it is making sure that they have the support in the mental health and wellbeing space and in emergency departments that are specialised, with the mental health settings that we are establishing, all the way through to the mental health locals that we are establishing, some 55 across the state.

We should never forget this telling and harrowing stat: that one in two people who we lose to mental ill health are never connected into mental health and wellbeing sector services. We lose them blind to any services that we have, and that goes to the stigmatisation and challenges that we face in mental ill health and the need to bring all of our community up – water rising will lift everyone's boat in mental wellbeing and support for the future. We will see that in the wellbeing plan that is going to be established later on this year and released, the suicide prevention and response strategy and diverse communities – these are all the pieces and building blocks that go together to lift community aspiration and make sure that we destigmatise mental ill health and make sure every single community organisation, every single individual, every business and sector has a mental health and wellbeing journey and inputs to that support as well.

It is also important to note that these changes are in consultation and ongoing engagement with Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria. It builds on the 2023–24 budget and the \$7.8 million funding that starts the planning and design activities to improve Victoria's mental health crisis and emergency response system. That includes reforming existing mental health triage services, developing a range of new safe spaces for adults and young people and developing a new crisis outreach team, a team that will be available 24/7 for people to receive that immediate support in their home environment. The investment also includes funding for Ambulance Victoria to continue responding to recommendation 10, which relates to supporting emergency services to respond mental health crises.

In acknowledging that, how could you put a reasoned amendment forward that then bins this bill and the recommendations, going through clause by clause the needs and outcomes and the clarifications? I mean, the royal commission set a cracking pace and rightly so – we cannot waste a moment in reform, because every day that passes, the impact on mental health and wellbeing increases. I will tell you again: one in two people who we lose to mental ill health have never interacted with a mental health and wellbeing service. So that is the really critical element here: we need to lift the standard, destigmatise the sector and empower our workforce like never before.

I want to take up another point as well. We have hundreds of millions of dollars being invested into mental health and wellbeing in the workforce, and I give a big shout-out to the Health and Community Services Union and their incredible leadership as well under Paul Healey. When you meet people in the mental health and wellbeing workforce, they are truly extraordinary people. Some have worked under difficult circumstances for decades to improve the lives and outcomes of Victorians. They have been part of that reform agenda, and they see the hope and aspiration. Jeez, they are keen that we go even further and harder as well, and when you have spent that amount of time in the sector, of course you would. We give a big shout-out to the workforce and HACSU for their representation of an incredible workforce.

The stories of those with lived experience were so telling in the royal commission, and the purpose that we have each and every day is to make their experience so much more valued and empowered and then to make sure that people in the future are supported – that is very critical as well. We have got \$6 billion that has been invested over our previous budgets – \$6 billion. It leads the nation. It leads the Commonwealth in that regard. To be so flippant and say that we are just ticking boxes on the royal

commission does a disservice to people with lived experience, who are giving millions of hours to reform our sector. It cheapens those recommendations. I challenge the member for Lowan and others to be more bipartisan. I know that there is a lot of shame and a lot of concern that they opposed a key tenet of the recommendations, and that was the mental health and wellbeing levy. With some of the commentary around that time around budgets and deficits and some of the cuts that would have been made to mental health and wellbeing, it is harrowing to think of what the impact would have been if we did not have that additional resource in place. We have got to front up and be honest. It is okay to say that you got it wrong. Be honest with Victorians, though.

These recommendations, these reforms and the amendments in this bill are part of our constant journey of improvement and sector-wide reform, and we do not shy away from our work in this area. I love this part of the bill – the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and the commissioners who will evaluate and be accountable to the Victorian government for the performance, quality and safety of Victoria’s mental health system. We are not just funding, as the member for Lowan says, and then forgetting about it. We have embedded commissioners who will audit the Victorian government and the recommendations year after year. That is a government that is absolutely striving with purpose around funding and accountability like we have never seen before in mental health and wellbeing. These proposed amendments are to correct and clarify some of the ways that the commission’s procedures will be regulated, the validity of decisions by the commissioners and the appropriate protections, and to think that we would put that work off for an indefinite period is really concerning and really disappointing after all the work that has been done.

I really love the best practice notion of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing. If anyone has come across this best practice of celebrating our workforce, our people with lived experience, our clinicians, who do such incredible work – to think that we would be delaying some of the changes to their work and their important role as part of this legislation really concerns me as well. We are on a massive reform journey in Victoria, and it is not just Victorians that are looking on, it is the nation that is seeing us front up to the challenges of the past and create a fairer, better and more inclusive mental health and wellbeing treatment system into the future. It is funded with \$6 billion in additional funding that we have put forward to Victorians. It comes with such meaning and purpose, from workforce, from lived experience, from clinicians and communities all across Victoria who are plugging in and know how vital and important this is, because every Victorian knows someone who has been affected by mental ill health and, sadly, all of us know someone who has been lost to mental ill health before. With this bill, the recommendations and amendments are so very critical. Let us not waste a moment. Let us get on with the critical work and reform agenda.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (15:48): I rise to speak in relation to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. Whilst I will be focusing on some specific areas around my portfolios, I first want to put on record not just for myself but I know for the coalition and I would probably say for most members in this chamber, when we talk about mental health, the impact on our communities, the impact on individuals, the impact on families and probably even more so the impact on emergency services – and emergency services in a very broad sense of the term – in different ways. I know I and the member for Bayswater at different times would have been called out in our previous occupations – and the member for Benambra – to people who were in a mental health crisis. Turning up in a police uniform, armed, is not a great way to confront any person, let alone someone who is in the middle of a mental health crisis. I would dare to say, and I know the member for Frankston – and I think you are also a firefighter, member for South Barwon –

Darren Cheeseman: Not quite.

Brad BATTIN: Not quite – well, you can take the credit for that one. But the member for Frankston definitely would have gone out at different times, and it would have impacted firefighters in a different capacity. As a rule, firefighters would have gone out to someone who had actually taken their life, and I think that is something that – and I know the member for Frankston would be open about this –

would stick with you forever. Ambulances would get called out at various stages, obviously depending on the circumstances at the time. I can tell you personally the impact on you lasts forever.

When we look at Victoria Police responding – and that is one of the areas I do have an issue with and why I support the reasoned amendment from the member for Lowan – police should only ever be called to respond when there is an immediate danger. Police are not trained to be the respondents for mental health issues. They do minimal mental health training. They do an amazing job when they go. Each police officer will act and react differently. We said before and I know the member Mordialloc mentioned, and quite rightly, that the ideal scenario is that we can address people who have mental health illnesses and connect them to services as early as possible. By doing that you are preventing and reducing the amount of call-outs from any emergency responders. If we can get to that circumstance, I think everyone in this chamber would say that is the best outcome we can have – if we can get to a stage where they are all connected to services, therefore the response at the medical crisis section is already planned out so we do not have to have our police respond to those. That is the gold standard. Now, we also acknowledge that is very difficult to get to. That is not a comment about the government, that is a comment about the whole of the country and probably the whole of the world. It would be very difficult to get to that situation, because there is always going to be a circumstance that comes up where police are expected to respond.

One of the issues which I have spoken to Victoria Police about, and particularly with Wayne Gatt on behalf of his members, is after the response – because the police are being called out to more responses, and they have been in this position due to the shortage of ambulance officers and paramedics, and now this legislation will effectively say police and PSOs will be the first responders – where the time goes for those Victoria police then. We know there are crime issues. We have seen an increase in crime in the state. We have seen the crime statistics. One of the reasons that we have a challenge of getting police to respond where and when they can is because of the amount of hours they are spending when it comes to a mental health response.

We have seen statistics come through after the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week which were released this week which highlight the fact that police in the 12 months prior – or if you go back even as far as 2018 – for about 120 shifts a year or 120 times a year were spending 6½ hours in hospital waiting areas with a person who was in a mental health crisis. They would be effectively – we can use the word – guarding, sitting with them, protecting them, but ensuring that they are safe, ensuring that the hospital is safe, before they can hand them over, and that is sometimes just due to delays that are happening in the hospital. So 6½ hours is, you may as well say, the shift. It is a 7½-hour shift; you may as well say the whole shift is gone with that 6½ hours. By the time they travel to and from, often overtime would go into it. It is 120 times that has happened, so therefore it is 240 police shifts that are gone just in that area alone, 6½ hours and above. That has tripled. That has gone up to over 320 now, so there are more than 330-odd now which, again, is talking about nearly 700 shifts that we are taking off the road.

That is just those at 6½ hours and above. Where I have a concern around that is the 6 hours has increased, the 5½ hours has increased, 4, 4½ – they have all gone up double and triple from what they were in 2018. When you get to the lower end of it, the half an hour ones – where the police would go in and within half an hour be able to hand across a person to the care that they deserve and need – are the only ones that are coming down. If that was going down and we were having less presentations with Victoria Police at the hospitals, we would all look at that as a positive. But the problem is those half an hour ones are turning into an hour and working their way up to 6½ hours because of the shortage that we have. Victoria Police have been saying now that it is a huge challenge for them, because this is on top of 800 vacancies they have already got. These vacancies are causing issues throughout Victoria Police, and now you are going to bring in this legislation that is going to be asking more of the Victoria Police, who are already under pressure and are already under strain.

As we said before when we were talking about someone who wants to call in for a response, if a person who is in a mental health crisis thinks that when they dial 000 to get the help they need that the Victoria Police may turn up, they may be more reluctant to call. They may go, 'No, I don't want the police response.' If they can guarantee an ambulance response, yes, they may go, 'Yep, I'm going to call 000,' fairly comfortable in getting the ambulance response. However, if they are going to get a police response, they may be reluctant to call. That in itself is an issue. That in itself is sending a message to some in the community when they do get to the stage that they desperately need help. If they are reluctant to call and do not call, there is potential for their illness at the time getting worse, increasing the anxiety, increasing anger, increasing the danger to themselves, increasing the danger to the community or, as we know, leading to the worst possible outcomes. We need to make sure that the message is quite strong, and that is why it is important in the legislation that it does specifically say that paramedics can respond.

Before, as I was listening to the member for Lowan, we heard about why we should have a health response and not a police response to it. James Merlino, a former member for Monbulk, was very, very clear on 4 March 2021 when he said, 'We wouldn't send a police officer if someone was having a heart attack or a stroke.' He went on to say, 'Mental health responses should be treated in exactly the same way. It is a health issue.' I say to the government: you need to read this over and over again and understand that the changes you are now making are going against exactly what was said on 4 March 2021 by the member for Monbulk at the time. It is going back to a police-led response. Again, Mr Merlino was exactly right; you do not send a police officer if someone is having a heart attack or a stroke. Why? Because they would have no concept of what to do; they are not trained for that.

With mental health, whilst they do get some training on it, and I am sure it has well and truly changed since I was there, the training is really around how to contain, ensure safety of the person, ensure safety of the people around them and then find the process to take them to the care they need – not necessarily how to engage, counsel and assist to point that person in the right direction. I said at the time that one of my biggest fears when I went out to any of these jobs was to have someone in a mental health crisis, with a high level of anxiety. To turn around and say 'We're going to put you in the back of a divisional van' is something that would send shivers down most people's spines anyway, but for a person who is already at the highest level of anxiety, we just should not do it. I know that Victoria Police on many occasions will do their best to ensure that an ambulance can arrive, but if that ambulance cannot arrive, because of the way this is written now, it will mean we could end up with more police sitting on the side of the road, at a residence or in the community with people in a mental health crisis rather than actually transporting them.

Whilst the government want to pass this legislation – and as I said, we do support part of it – I wanted to raise that today on behalf of those police officers. It is really important that the government do listen to this and ensure that the paramedics are put back into the legislation. We ask you to do it in the lower house, but if not, we will support the reasoned amendment and in the upper house we will make those amendments to ensure that the paramedics are there and the government deliver on what they have said they are going to deliver and what the community expects, and that is a health response for mental health issues in Victoria.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (15:58): I too am proud to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 today. Like almost all of us in this place, I have struggled with mental health issues at points in my life and have known so many people who have suffered far worse than me. Growing up in a small town in country Victoria, I was never far from mental illness. I remember distinctly the silence that swept over my high school for days when a 14-year-old girl in year 8 died by suicide. I was in year 7 at the time and remember being so confused at how such a vibrant, beautiful, popular girl could take her own life. I also remember suicides in sheds during weekend parties, murder-suicides that shook the whole town, friends who had been sexually assaulted with no access to mental health supports in the aftermath and others who had to travel all the way down to Melbourne for any treatment. More recently I remember the fear in my voice as I called the Perinatal Anxiety and

Depression Australia hotline for support when someone dear to me was suffering from severe postnatal depression. I agree wholeheartedly with the member for Lowan, who said that PANDA is a fantastic service. It truly is. My own experience with struggling to find local mental health supports in country Victoria in my 20s has also really stuck with me. These stories are, tragically, not unique; they have defined so many of our lives, and they are in part why I am here today and why I am so proud of the strides that we have made to reform our state's broken mental health system.

The need for reform was given greater urgency and clarity during the recent Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. We heard so many individuals' and groups' stories, whose interactions with the mental health system had left them isolated, abandoned and at risk. For too long it was a system that put too many people in terrible situations and left them behind. Their harrowing personal stories were crucial to understanding the bigger picture – that the system needed reform – and it took a state Labor government to get it done.

We are already starting to deliver on our promises with the creation of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria. We are well on the path to reforming the whole system, embodied through a new framework and underpinned by rights-based principles and objectives to redesign service development and delivery. This bill today acknowledges that there is always more to be done. It clarifies and extends on previous work done in this space, and it will make it easier and better for people navigating the system, because ultimately the people that are most impacted are those living with mental illness, and they are the people that are driving this change. Since the act was passed and our system reform and implementation have progressed, some key amendments have been identified to ensure the act is fit for purpose. This means that when the act commences on 1 September 2023, we will be best placed to make sure we are doing the best for all Victorians.

It is important to note that the bill includes a number of new provisions aimed at improving the rights of people experiencing a mental health crisis in the community and responses by police. They include greater protection of privacy and dignity during a search, the ability to release a person from care and control where they no longer pose serious and imminent risk and the requirement for the use of powers to be health informed – key words, 'health informed'. We are doing that whenever reasonably practicable and for the least restrictive approach to be taken to emergency responses and transport.

We are delivering every single recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and we have made a historic investment of more than \$6 billion, because when we look after those in our society most in need, we are sending a message – a message that mental health is a priority for this government, that no-one should be left behind, that our community is connected and we care for each other and that we take our responsibility for each other and for our community seriously. This issue is simply too important, and we know what happens when we get it wrong.

The royal commission's recommendations set out a 10-year vision for a mental health system where Victorians can access treatment close to their homes and in their communities. People with lived experience of mental ill health are at the heart of these changes, and they have led the design and delivery of programs. They have shaped the four main themes of reform: (1) a responsive and integrated system with community at its heart, (2) a system attuned to promoting inclusion and addressing inequities, (3) re-established public confidence through prioritisation and collaboration and (4) contemporary and adaptable services.

I am also so proud that we are reforming mental health supports in schools. Growing up, many of my friends with learning difficulties and mental ill health were not supported at school. They were also often not supported by their families and the broader community, and there was endless stigma around talking about their issues. This was 15, 20 years ago. We had such a poorer understanding of the impacts of mental ill health. Our rural and regional schools had extremely limited resources or ability to tailor support to individual kids' needs. This was made even worse by the lack of apprenticeship and employment pathways and the lack of community facilities for young people in country towns.

Doors were shut and opportunities were lost because access to mental health support simply was not there. There was nothing for young people to do except hang out down the street, and there were no safe public spaces for them to be in or adults that they could rely on to offer them support. I always wish we had a youth space in my country town and more fun things to do. It would have made a world of difference.

These experiences have lit a fire inside of me to do more for young country kids across Ripon into the future. Changes are already evident, with even more great things to come. The Central Goldfields Youth Council are advocating for more supports for young people in Maryborough, and they are a superstar crew of local advocates. The Hope Assistance Local Tradies, or HALT for short, do incredible work for locals at risk of suicide in Carisbrook, Maryborough, Talbot, Creswick, Clunes – so many areas of Ripon. I was so rapt to see planning for a new mental health and wellbeing local in Castlemaine in our recent state budget. Although it is not in my electorate, it will absolutely benefit Carisbrook, Maryborough and other nearby areas in Central Goldfields shire.

Further west in my electorate, the mighty One Red Tree Resource Centre is boosting provisional psychologists into our local schools and communities. Their organisation is led by the indomitable Carly McKinnis and Tammie Meehan in partnership with Megan Jenkins from Federation University. They provide mental health services and training in Ararat and across the Grampians region and are now working with a huge 19 local schools, with even bigger plans for the future. Ararat is better off for them being there, and I will always back them. Soon they will be supported by a new mental health and wellbeing local in Ararat, as well as a brand new one we are delivering in Ballarat. By the end of 2026 this government will set up 50 new mental health services across the state for all adults and older adults. They will provide walk-in services for free, easy to access care and support for adults who are experiencing mental health concerns or psychological distress as well as treatment for alcohol and drug addiction. It will save lives and boost supports in our rural and regional communities.

Over the last two years more than \$600 million has also been invested in the mental health workforce, creating over 2500 new roles as well as hundreds of scholarships and training grants. We also invested a record \$842 million in the 2021–22 budget for more mental health support for young people, and we are building social housing as part of the Big Housing Build that is specific to the needs of people living with mental illness on the waiting list.

There is a long road to walk towards making the system reflect the needs and desires of those living with mental illness, but we are recognising that on this side of the chamber. We are walking the walk, and we are not wasting a minute getting on with the necessary changes, including through this bill. I will always stand for those living with mental illness in Ripon, and I am proud of the government that is dedicated to improving the mental health and wellbeing of all Victorians, no matter where you live. I commend this bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (16:07): I rise to make a contribution to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. This bill is pretty well hot, quickly on the notice paper, after the actual Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 was brought into being. So we have got this coming up fairly quickly, which means that there are a few issues that need to be resolved because it was not quite right in the first instance. There are two bills that are being amended as a result. We have got the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, as I have referred to, but then there are also a number of consequential amendments made to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. That is going back a while, isn't it?

We know the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was incredibly important. The system was broken, and it certainly remains broken today. It is in a very sorry state, and we have workforce issues. I think there is no denying in this sector – it is pretty rugged work – that the people that are involved in it can burn out because it is fairly tough. But at the same time, we need to make sure, with the rise of a number of different types of mental health issues, that we manage it properly, and I am not convinced that that is happening at the moment.

I know that in country areas, certainly in my area, the resources are pretty light on the ground. If you need some mental health support, in a lot of the country towns you cannot actually get that mental health support, particularly for a crisis moment. We know that there are different elements within mental illness and mental health. Some of them are full-blown psychoses with paranoid schizophrenia or others, and there are others that are much more mild. But when somebody is in the midst of a major psychotic episode and does need some help in my area, north of the divide, they need to head to the Goulburn Valley hospital in Shepparton, and that is quite a distance away. So depending how they get there – if it is by ambulance, sometimes it has been by police car – then the officers, whether it is the paramedics or the police, have to stay there or they go off, depending on what is happening. I have seen constituents who have been released from the hospital because there have been no mental health beds, no psychiatric beds, overnight. They have been released at 2 or 3 am and have had to get taxis back to their home. I know some instances where families have then actually driven an hour and a half to go and collect them. We know that there is a lot going on in mental health, and it needs to be fixed. I think the government has been a bit slow in this.

The royal commission's interim report was handed down in 2019, and five of the nine recommendations highlighted the desperate need to build the mental health workforce to ensure sufficient personnel to effectively deliver the mental health services under a reformed system. The final report was handed out in 2021, this legislation was in 2022 and now further we have got the bill before us. While some of these errors need to be fixed up and consequential amendments made – and the sector is very keen for those things to go ahead – there are a couple of areas that I am going to touch on that cause concern. In fact the concern is such that the member for Lowan, the Shadow Minister for Mental Health, has put forward a reasoned amendment, which I support. She is looking for the bill to be withdrawn and redrafted to enable the delivery of a health-led response to mental health related emergencies, which is different from a police-led response, and that is what I am going to spend some time talking about.

Within the existing bill I am going to talk about clauses 12, 13 and 14. Clause 12 is about the provision of the health-led response principle. So far as it is reasonably practicable in the circumstances it is to be exercised by an authorised health professional. This is being altered to say that if it is not reasonably practicable to have the authorised health professional there, then the authorised person needs to be informed by somebody who is authorised in that area. I imagine that being informed by means a phone call. If somebody is dealing with that response and they are not somebody who is an authorised health professional, then there will be someone at the end of the line. I suspect that is exactly what it means. I was unable to attend the bill briefing at the time, though.

Clause 13 removes the express reference to paramedics to allow a suitable class to be prescribed in regulations at a later time – and this is the important bit, because at the moment, with a health-led response, the paramedics are those that are driving it.

Clause 14 is also interesting because it provides for the transfer of a person by an authorised person to the care and control of another authorised person, but that can be to a police officer, a protective services officer or a member of a prescribed class of authorised health professional. What this bill does very explicitly is alter the health-led response, which is what everyone was expecting and what I think is the best outcome, to a police-led response. If you have a health-led response, you have authorised officers – people who are attending a mental health related emergency – who know what to do and who have had the appropriate training. But we know that police do not have that training across the board. There may be some in some areas that have that expertise and have had that type of training, but again, also with the protective services officers, they will not have had the level of training required here. So we are walking back what was a health-led response to a police-led response. The Police Association Victoria have particular concerns about this, as do we. You have to ask why the government is doing this, because at the time the minister, former member for Monbulk James Merlino, was very clear about having a health-led response, because health practitioners are those that are skilled and have the expertise to be able to attend to and deal with these matters.

Why is this happening? Is it the resources within Ambulance Victoria? They are light on the ground. We know that, absolutely. They are not all being replaced as they are leaving. There is quite a bit of leave that is being taken as well. During the bill briefing it was not clear whether it was the workforce shortages, as I have mentioned, or whether it was training deficiencies, enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations or a combination of these things. We are not quite sure. The information I was given from the briefing addresses the questions that we had put forward. The police association have raised concerns about what this means for them, because we know also that there is a shortage of police. There are issues in recruiting, and as they are retiring or leaving the police force they are not being replaced quickly enough and there are gaps. We know that when people are on leave, stations are left with gaping holes in their rosters. This is something that is a big concern, because the police association believe, and I think all of us would know, that there are not the resources out there within the police force to deal with this. This is quite a concern: that we are moving back to that police-led response from a health-led response, where the intent was clearly the opposite in the first instance.

There are a couple of other points that I do want to mention. There is no indication about the intention to end restrictive practices within 10 years. Restrictive practices are done as a last resort to try and calm somebody who is having an absolute psychotic episode, and the practices have been condemned in a lot of instances. The intent also is to reduce those and to phase them out. When you have not got enough officers, whether it is paramedics or police, on the ground to be able to do this and the resources are really limited, you really have to think about how much the government is doing in this area to solve some of these workforce issues.

At the time the police and Ambulance Victoria said that this response that the government had put forward was not going to work, and I think we know now that things have not worked, which is why we have got a bill before us so quickly and so hot on the heels of the original legislation that was introduced. As I said, the opposition have put forward a reasoned amendment, but there are parts of this bill that really need to get moving so that they can fix up some of the errors and things that did not quite work properly.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (16:17): I think we find ourselves in furious agreement that there ought to be a health-led response to mental health related emergencies. That is a point of agreement across the chamber today, and I am very pleased that that is in fact the case. But it would be irresponsible to proceed with introducing new crisis-response powers for Ambulance Victoria paramedics to take on additional work without the necessary service supports in place. That is not just for their own safety, that is for the safety of healthcare workers right across the system and it is for the safety of our community. It is critical that if these responsibilities are going to be handed over to a different agency of government, that if these crises are going to be dealt with in a different way – a better way – that that way is in fact ready and able to deliver on those new responsibilities. It would be wildly inappropriate – and I am sure there would be plenty of criticism from those opposite – if we were to get ahead of ourselves here in implementing that kind of response and did it too quickly.

I think implicit in the reasoned amendment is a criticism that there is no anticipation of health-led responses in what we have already put to the Parliament, and nothing could be further from the truth. I see the Minister for Health entering the chamber, and I am sure she would agree that the principle here is a very, very sound one: that we want mental health crises to be dealt with in a health-led way, not in a police-led or a presumption-of-criminality kind of way. We know also, though, that of course acute mental health crises can present in a way that either does involve criminal behaviour or might involve the appearance of criminal behaviour. This is why we have got to be very, very careful to get these responses absolutely right. It is a function of time and energy and resources to make sure that we have a system that is properly responsive to the needs of those patients and to community expectations and absolutely protects the workers right across the health system who are dealing with these often very challenging circumstances.

This bill will amend the act to ensure that there are clear powers to detain and transport security or forensic patients who are absent without leave from a designated mental health service. It will also

clarify the definition of a mental health and wellbeing service provider and importantly make changes, as I have outlined, to the provisions establishing a health-led response to mental health crises in the community to allow registered paramedics and other authorised health professionals to be prescribed by regulation to exercise crisis-response powers. But that only happens when they are adequately supported by the system. When the system is ready, that is when the regulations will be prescribed. At that point in time we will see a more fulsome changeover of these responsibilities.

The principle I think, broadly speaking, is agreed, or at least that is what one might reasonably infer from the contributions of those opposite. What perhaps is not properly acknowledged by those opposite – and I say this respectfully – is the degree of resource intensiveness, complexity, training and support required to make sure that all of that responsibility change happens in a way that is safe and effective and in line with community standards.

I want to talk a little bit about the detention component of this bill. I want to say that one of the great strengths of Labor's approach to mental health reform and indeed the building of a new mental health system in this state has been putting lived experience right at the heart of those changes. Lived experience is how we will better inform the changes that are needed to this system. Lived experience is how we make sure that the safeguards and mechanisms around the delivery of the more controversial elements of this system will be adequate and fit for purpose. Indeed lived experience informs a whole range of matters, including a matter of course of national debate at the moment, the establishment of the Voice to the federal Parliament. I think it is a principle that is a very, very sound principle, a very good principle and something we should see adopted right across government, local, state and federal, and in various domains, including mental health and indeed matters affecting First Nations people.

The principal act promotes good health and wellbeing and establishes a whole range of things that came out of the royal commission, a royal commission I note that only Labor was happy to stand up and say we would implement every single recommendation of – every single recommendation. I know there have been some weasel words here today – there has been a bit of obfuscation, a bit of an attempt to recast the narrative around that – but it is absolutely the case that Labor has said consistently from the start that we will accept all these reforms, and we will accept the recommendation that provides a funding mechanism for those reforms, because you cannot just say we want the reforms, and we want the magic pudding funding to provide it. You have to actually be substantial. You have to be serious when you take on those things and accept that there is going to be a cost, and you need an offsetting revenue measure to be able to deliver on those reforms.

Indeed the most recent state budget invested nearly \$50 million in establishing a whole range of entities that are outlined in the substantive act – the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, the eight interim regional bodies and the office of the chief psychiatrist. There is additionally the Mental Health Tribunal and the mental health statewide trauma service. That is over and above the \$30 million that came in the previous budget. These are all important bodies. They all have a very specific role. They are the sorts of things you would expect to see in a modern mental health system, and they all respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

There are changes, as I have outlined, to the definitions of a mental health and wellbeing service and a service provider, and that is to expand them to include those services that employ or engage a mental health and wellbeing professional for the purposes of providing a mental health and wellbeing service and in addition receive funding from the state. That sounds technical and it probably is, but it is very important that all of the providers within our mental health system are of course correctly categorised and are of course appropriately authorised to conduct their mental health service and to do so in a way that is safe and effective – those principles that I have already outlined in this contribution.

There are a whole bunch of regional boards contemplated. The first of these have had their chairs appointed already, and it is great to see those interim regional bodies up and about. I think it is important that we understand that when you are building seriously complicated and large new

infrastructure, new architecture, there is going to be an iterative element to it. There are going to be some interim bodies that get us from where we are today – which is a mental health system with an enormous gap in between primary care and acute care – to a mental health system that is better integrated, that delivers at the community level and that provides for a whole range of specialist services, such as for LGBTIQ+ Victorians or for First Nations people. These are all very, very important aims that have been canvassed in this place on countless occasions, including by me.

These are all very, very important aims, and we just have to accept the lived reality that you cannot click your fingers and make this all happen overnight. You do require substantial resources and substantial training. We frankly have to build a massive pipeline of mental health professionals to staff the services that we are delivering under these reforms. There is no money tree, if you like. There is no magic place to go and just suddenly find hundreds of psychiatric nurses or dozens and dozens of psych-trained paramedics or dozens and dozens of psychiatrists. These are highly specialised professions, and we accept that it is going to take some time to get all of this up. For that reason no-one should be surprised that, one, there are going to be some tweaks to the model and some tweaks to the legislation on the way through but also that, notwithstanding that risk, we are nonetheless pushing on to make sure that these reforms are delivered as expeditiously and as economically and effectively as possible in the shortest possible time frame. For all of those reasons, I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:27): I rise to talk on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. I would also like to reiterate how both sides of the chamber are working together, hopefully, to make sure that we have the best practices and the best outcomes for people dealing with mental health and their families. I would like to say how proud we are of our paramedics and our police services, who have to deal with this on a daily basis, and also our health workers.

The purposes of this bill are to make minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and to make consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 was implemented following recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The royal commission interim report was handed down in 2019, and five of nine recommendations highlighted the desperate need to build a mental health workforce to ensure sufficient personnel to effectively deliver mental health services under the reformed system. That is what we are all striving for. The final report was handed down in early 2021. It is important to emphasise that the Liberals and Nationals fully support all recommendations of the royal commission.

This amending bill has been introduced to fix a number of errors contained in the act, including incorrect cross-reference and typos. However, it also pushes back a number of recommendations outside the time frames for implementation set by the royal commission and substantially changes the recommendations for a mental health crisis response to be health-led rather than police-led. This bill seeks to substantially walk back the legislated approach to the mental health crisis to a police-led rather than a health-led response, as I said, with health providers to be prescribed through regulation at a later date, and that is not yet specified. In its final report the royal commission stated:

Given that most people experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, the involvement of police can be humiliating and traumatic ...

for those people that are experiencing these mental health episodes. Those experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, and the involvement of police, as I said before, can be humiliating.

Much was made of the government's intention to move a health-led response last year. As stated in the 2022 bill report, the shift from a police-led response to a health-led response is supported by the majority of the sector as a more appropriate approach to dealing with Victorians in crisis; however, it is not yet clear how this will be applied in practice and what additional resources will be allocated to enable this to occur. It appears that a lack of government resourcing to implement this change in approach will result in an ongoing inappropriate response to people with mental crisis. The

government has reasoned the walk-back to a police-led response is due to the lack of resources within Ambulance Victoria. During the briefing it was not clearly defined whether this was due to workforce shortages, training deficiencies, enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations or a combination of these matters.

The Police Association Victoria have raised their concerns that this legislative walk-back will provide unreasonable additional pressures on their limited resources, including extreme workforce shortages, and that it will not be in line with the recommendations of the royal commission. Under the least restrictive principle, Ambulance Victoria should remain as a legislated option to respond to mental crisis emergencies. This allows for flexibility in providing a health-led response wherever possible as soon as the legislation commences. The Liberals and Nationals therefore support clause 12, but as we said, we have a reasoned amendment to oppose clauses 13 and 14.

I know we have mental health issues right across the state, but for the services down in the Latrobe Valley our first port of call is Lifeline Gippsland. They are also feeling the strain of being underfunded. The Nats and the Libs pledged \$1 million over four years for Lifeline Gippsland for the magnificent work they do down there. We called for Labor to match the pledge, but unfortunately that did not come through in the budget. Lifeline Gippsland experienced about a 45 per cent increase in calls during the pandemic, and those services and numbers have not declined as they have moved forward. Lifeline Gippsland receives about \$150,000 annually from the state government, which is not nearly enough to cover the 11,000 calls it receives annually, which comes to an estimated cost of about \$450,000. The financial shortfall must be recouped through fundraising. I must say I did take part in the Push-up Challenge with Lifeline on Saturday. I actually pumped out 450 push-ups, and I am paying the price. I have had trouble getting into bed and also getting my collar pushed down. Well done to Lifeline, but we should not need to do these functions for them to get their money, as in a crisis Lifeline is the one that is really needed across our community.

Our timber workers, as we know, have had their world turned upside down in the last month or so, with the sustainable logging industry going to be shut down at the end of the year. They need mental health support going forward. A lot of these people live in towns outside the bigger regional cities, and for them to have hands-on services they rely on being able to pick up the phone and actually make a call to hopefully get someone that can help them out in their time of need. The workers, as I said, are facing uncertain futures. It is not only the workers but the families that need access to these services going forward.

There is no concrete support in place at the moment to help these hardworking people and their families. Workers are expected to refer themselves to Victoria's already overwhelmed mental health system. There is no tailored or targeted support available for these people. Many of the people, as I said, live in tiny towns that were established by logging for the timber logging industry. They have been maintained by its sustainable practices, and they now have nowhere to go for that face-to-face reporting. If they need to see someone, they need to see someone then and there on the spot and not have to book in and wait to go and see someone a week later. It takes a long time to actually get in to talk to mental health services.

The Latrobe Youth Space is another one which I spoke about earlier today. They have got 500 members. They like to call them members, but they are 500 children and young adults aged between 12 and 25 years of age. They have had their funding pulled as well. Their concern is for the mental health support for the youth space. It allows these children to come in and actually engage with the people that run the youth space, and they can be directed to services that they need. Many of these young people are transient and rely on the youth space for a hot shower and food. In this big space of mental health, which we are looking at fixing up, we need to make sure that everybody is covered. The youth space also acts as a referral service, as I said, for these young people. Without the help of the staff members going forward, it is going to be interesting to see where it all ends up.

While there is a strong opposition across the sector, and particularly from the Police Association Victoria, to shifting back to a police-led response to the mental health crisis from the health-led response, there is also strong support from the mental health sector to amend areas within the bill so that it is effective at the commencement. As per the member for Lowan's reasoned amendment, the position that we oppose clauses 13 and 14 – either directly or via reasoned amendment – addresses the concerns of the TPAV and representatives of the lived-experience sector.

With mental health and wellbeing being one of the hot topics in the Latrobe Valley, we need to get the system right so our most vulnerable have a safe and respected path forward when they actually call on the services.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:37): I did want to explore firstly the matter of a health-led response to mental health crises. Certainly this is critical and very much acknowledged, particularly as a flow-on from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The final report of the royal commission noted that:

- the current mental health system is not equipped to handle mental health emergencies
- police are often the first responders to mental health crises
- police-led responses can lead to poor outcomes for people in crisis
- police are not clinicians –

granted –

Their involvement can increase trauma and stigma. Victoria Police has recognised this.

- we need to create better processes to support people having mental health emergencies.

We certainly have committed to implementing every single recommendation from the royal commission, including improving how people access mental health crisis treatment, care and support. Now, I am coming to a point here. The royal commission proposed that responses to people experiencing a mental health crisis in the community should be led, wherever possible:

... by health professionals rather than police.

Granted. But I do want to make an important clarification to make sure that there is a nuanced element to this discussion in light of some of the commentary that has been made in the chamber by the opposition. The royal commission noted that:

While the Commission's recommendations call for less police involvement in mental health crisis situations, it is inevitable that police will need to attend some situations in which people are experiencing mental illness or psychological distress. These situations are mainly where there is a considerable risk of harm to the person or others.

Wherever reasonably practicable, the use of care and control powers by Police and Protective Services will be informed by health advice.

So you can see there the nuance that is critical when we are discussing something as delicate and fragile as it can be in a particularly potent situation that members of the community and police can find themselves in.

There are, and will continue to be, protocols in place that help guide police and Protective Services Officers in their interactions with people in mental health crisis, including information on who to contact for support, to help guide those responses.

Further:

To support attendance where a person is experiencing a mental health crisis in the community, Victoria Police is continuing to roll out two-day mandatory face to face mental health training to all police. The training has also been built into foundational training which means that all recruits are now receiving this training prior to becoming police officers. This training was developed in consultation with people with lived experience –

I know we have had some discussion in the chamber about how important it is to have that lived experience taken into account, and I will come back to that point –

of mental health issues and carers. It is co-facilitated by a senior police officer and a mental health clinician.

The training focuses on communication, de-escalation, stigma and bias, other options available that don't require the need for care and control powers.

Police are trained to use care and control powers as a last resort, once all other less restrictive means have been trialled and failed.

I think in a discussion as important as this, particularly when we are talking about a health-led response and the nuance of police intervention when it is appropriate, factoring in significant changes that have been taken on board as a result of the reforms from the royal commission into mental health should be integral to a discussion on this in the chamber. I think it is important also out of respect for those members of Victoria Police who may be attending any given situation, noting how strenuous and delicate these situations can be. I just thought it was important to have that nuance introduced to the discussion so as not to have a blunt instrument and a sort of right-wrong approach when we are talking about human beings and some fairly delicate situations that can arise that we would all want to be sensitive to.

I also do want to – from the point of view of transparency as well – let the community know, and this is a good forum to do so, just how much progress is underway with regard to the implementation of the 74 recommendation of the royal commission, because sometimes there is a risk that when the opposition downplay what is actually going on, that could unnecessarily alarm members of the community. They have a right to know what is actually happening and what is actually being rolled out, because there is a power of work already underway, and it is important to give credit for that work, that incredible work, that is going on already in the community.

I know that the 2023–24 budget builds on this investment, committing more than \$776.3 million to progress implementation of the royal commission recommendations and meet the urgent needs for people accessing mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment, rehabilitation and harm reduction services. I should note that there is huge impetus and an incredible amount of work driving this change in a very assertive and proactive way, and I think we take on board the fact that some modifications are being made as we speak in the chamber, with this legislation, I should say, being passed in due course. That is all to be factored in in what is an evolution in our mental health system for the betterment of Victorians. In the two years since the historic delivery of the final report we have implemented – and this is also to give the community confidence in the very important changes taking place – 60 per cent of the recommendations and work has commenced on over 90 per cent of the recommendations. Broadly what this looks like: we have opened new services, appointed lead service providers, signed new national agreements and amended legislation to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Something I do want to speak to is with regard to the commitment to deliver 50 mental health and wellbeing locals by 2026, ensuring all Victorians have access to free, easy-to-access mental health care and support close to home whenever they need it without making them jump through hoops, like with a GP referral, or having to meet eligibility criteria. I think having that local community-based care is really one of the incredible reforms that is being driven through as a result of the royal commission. Just to be a little bit more specific about what that looks like, we know that in 2021–22 we invested \$263.8 million to establish our first 27 mental health and wellbeing locals. That is no mean feat, and again I am also giving confidence to the community that that incredible work is already underway, that it is already making a difference. Our first six local services across the state commenced operations late last year and have supported over a thousand local community members.

Our next tranche of local services – Dandenong, Shepparton, Melton, Mildura, Lilydale, Bendigo, Echuca, Orbost and Bairnsdale – will come online by the end of the year. The 2023–24 budget commits a further \$77 million to establish three local services in Narre Warren, Northcote and Leongatha, and – I am just going to factor in the seat of Albert Park as well – to commence planning for a further 20 local services, including one for St Kilda, so I am very pleased about that. I know people in my community are very passionate about the mental health of Victorians, so seeing those localised services is really, really positive. I did want to note some other changes that impact not only

across the state but also the seat of Albert Park. We have expanded the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement, HOPE, program statewide –

Steve Dimopoulos: A great program.

Nina TAYLOR: There we go – absolutely.

Steve Dimopoulos: I had something to do with it.

Nina TAYLOR: Brilliant. This is really great. I am really inspired by these kinds of really proactive changes that truly make a difference in what is an incredibly distressing –

Steve Dimopoulos: Difficult circumstances.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, very traumatic circumstances. That includes four child and youth HOPE services: at Orygen, Alfred Health – Alfred Health being very close to the seat of Albert Park – Monash Children’s Hospital and the Royal Children’s Hospital. So you can see that there is some incredible work and there are some incredible programs making a real difference for so many Victorians. Of course there is a lot more to do.

I will just conclude with another point – that we are delivering the \$801 million mental health beds expansion program, creating 260 new mental health inpatient beds across the state. Why does this matter? It is reducing wait times and pressure on our emergency departments and providing additional support for people experiencing mental illness who require immediate treatment in a contemporary, safe and high-quality setting.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (16:47): I rise to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. I thank the member for Lowan for putting together a briefing for members of the opposition, and I note that she has moved a reasoned amendment to this bill. Of course the purpose of the bill is to make minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and to make consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 implemented recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. The royal commission interim report was handed down in 2019, as we have heard many times. Five of the nine recommendations highlighted the desperate need to build the mental health workforce to ensure sufficient personnel to effectively deliver mental health services under the reformed system. The final report was handed down in 2021. As many have done on this side of the chamber, I emphasise once again that the coalition – the Liberals and the Nationals – fully support all recommendations from the royal commission.

This amended bill has been introduced to fix a number of errors contained in the act, including incorrect cross-references and some typos, but it also pushes back a number of recommendations outside the time frames for implementation set by the royal commission and substantially changes the recommendation for a mental health crisis response to be health led rather than police led.

David Hodgett: It is an important point.

Sam GROTH: It is a very important point. I note the member for Albert Park said some situations would require it, but some situations should not become all situations out of a matter of convenience. If I think about my community locally in Nepean, like many across this state, a lot of my community members share mental health related issues and require ongoing support related to their mental health. I do feel there is a concern, though, that if you change back to a police-led response, this actually could become traumatic for some of those vulnerable members of the community suffering from mental health issues. The vast majority of Victorians who suffer from some sort of a mental health related illness would never have contact with police. So why all of a sudden are we going to put them into the care of a police officer unnecessarily and, I guess, add that added stress for them with police intervention? I will say that everyone in this chamber would acknowledge and respect the terrific work that Victoria Police do, but in an ideal situation we would want to have more mental health workers

and more ambulances. Part of this has stemmed from not having enough ambulance workers on the road able to take care of this situation, where they have had to hand it back to police. I also note that Victoria Police is suffering a shortage of police officers. We want Victoria Police to be able to do their job. We want healthcare workers to be able to do their job. In an ideal world I think they would both be doing the bits that they need to do. In the final report the royal commission stated:

Given that most people experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, the involvement of police can –

actually –

be humiliating and traumatic.

The government actively promoted its intention to move to a health-led response last year, and as stated in their 2022 bill report, the shift from a police-led response to a health-led response is supported by the majority in the sector as a more appropriate approach to deal with Victorians in crisis. However, at the time they were not clear how that would be applied in practice and what additional resources would be allocated to enabling this to occur. A lack of appropriate government resourcing to implement this change in approach will seemingly result in an ongoing inappropriate response to people in mental crisis, and now the government has reasoned the walk-back to a police-led response, as I mentioned, due to a lack of resources in Ambulance Victoria. During the briefing it was not clear to us whether this was due to workforce shortages, training deficiencies, enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations or a combination of all of the above, so some clarity around why Ambulance Victoria is not being used more widely when that was the recommendation, I think, is probably needed. As I mentioned, the Police Association have raised their concern that the walk-back will unreasonably add pressure to their limited resources. It also is not in line with what was recommended in the royal commission, and under least restrictive principles Ambulance Victoria should remain as the legislated option to respond to mental crisis emergencies.

As the member for Morwell and others said, we support the majority of this bill. We have moved a reasoned amendment because of clauses 13 and 14, which do change that response from a health-led response to a police-led response.

I will touch a little bit on Nepean. As much as everyone wants to think it is all Sorrento–Portsea and hilltop mansions and cliffs, we actually have some of the most vulnerable people in Victoria and some of the lowest socio-economic postcodes as well as a community of around 1000 people sleeping rough on the foreshore in Rosebud every single night. There are some terrific organisations, and I have mentioned many of them in this place before – the likes of Vinnies Kitchen – but, for example, that homeless or rough-sleeping cohort does deal with a lot of mental health challenges. Vinnies Kitchen in the last week or so have actually stopped their service of hot meals to people on the foreshore – those rough sleepers – from six nights a week and seven lunches a week back to six lunch services only, because of safety concerns, and that is mainly due to the inability or lack of capacity for law enforcement to actually police the safety of Vinnies Kitchen and because of the mental health issues that come with some of those people who do sleep rough.

If we are going to go and put that cohort of people with the inability for services already to, in my area, be able to deal with it and put a police-led response back onto that – I know many of the members in this chamber would have spent time in my area, especially over summer periods; they know how busy it gets and how stretched resources are during that time of year, and while it is a fantastic time to be down there, there have been times where Rosebud police station is open, Rye is closed and Sorrento is closed because those officers are out on the road dealing with the extra 80,000 to 100,000 people that are on the peninsula during summer – I just wonder how, in a mental health emergency, with ambulances heading from Rosebud to Frankston if needed, we are going to manage such a response on the peninsula. I encourage the government to keep working on what they are doing but also to try to find a way to deal with that.

I am really excited about by the Southern Peninsula Youth Hub being opened up as a place for young people, which services like Headspace in Rosebud, which operates out of a small building, will be able to move into. That is going to open shortly and provide more mental health support as well as other services for younger people. But also private organisations like Jimmy's wellbeing hub, which I have had the pleasure to walk through a couple of times – they have made a very unique space for young people to come into after school. They have got bunk rooms where, with the consent of the parents, kids are able to come in and stay the night, sometimes to give the child or the younger person a break from the pressures and the stress at home – to try to get some of that relief – but also sometimes to give the parents a bit of relief in their situation. The people that operate Jimmy's take these kids in, they do yoga, they have massage, they have reiki and all sorts of wellbeing services, but they do it in conjunction with the families to make sure that it is a response that helps the families and the kids. In mental health there are organisations that are doing terrific work in my area, but at the same time I still think more needs to be done.

I will make a couple more points just on the bill. Ideally the government would have consulted a little more widely when they drafted this back in 2022. The mental health sector did not see a full exposure draft of the original bill. The first time they saw the full piece of legislation was when it was actually tabled in the Parliament, which resulted in many errors which should be corrected through amendments now. The government has also known that there was a mental health workforce crisis for quite some time, and as stated, the 2019 royal commission urged the government to immediately address those workforce shortages. We are getting there, but I think things need to be done more quickly. The reality is that the mental health system cannot be reformed without skilled and qualified people to deliver mental health support, care and services. The pushback on the time frame for the regional health and wellbeing boards to be appointed indicates the government is slipping behind on implementing the royal commission's recommendations within prescribed time frames.

I know there is a reasoned amendment. There are a couple of clauses there that we would like to take into committee to go through in detail. I think overall the bill addresses a lot of the concerns that the industry has, but as we said, we will move that reasoned amendment. We do support a health-led response rather than a police-led response. I will support the member for Lowan's position on the bill.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:57): I rise to speak in support of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. This bill will amend the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 to ensure the act operates as intended and is fit for purpose when it commences on 1 September, which is a massive milestone in this reform journey undertaken by our government. I am proud to speak in support of that and proud to speak in support of these changes, because you have got to get it right. You have to continually listen. You have to be humble. You have to be agile. We have heard some hubris this morning from those opposite, but there is no honour in hubris. It is only right that we have a sense of urgency about getting moving on this system-shaking reform. We have not been sluggards in getting moving. If you are not open to improvement, if you are not open to corrections and tweaking, then you are effectively saying that you have stopped listening and that you have reached a state of perfection. This bill demonstrates that this is a government that listens and that puts outcomes ahead of lines. We want to get this right. This reform to the mental health system is too important to be not done well. There are too many people's lives depending on us getting this right – on us listening. We can see this approach across government policy that we have been discussing in this house recently: women's pain clinics, after-school care for special developmental schools – these are policies that have come about because we are government that listens, that values lived experience and that values the life of each and every Victorian.

As I said earlier, the act will commence on 1 September, the start of spring, the season that symbolises the start of something new, the season of hope and the season that marks the end of darkness and of cold. For too long people with mental health issues were subjected to the darkness and cold of a system that was not built for them and that did not respond to their needs in all the ways they needed it to. I recall all too well my experience working in a homeless women's shelter, where women with mental

health issues were shunted back and forth between us and the hospital. The system did not serve them. The season of hope has come through the conviction of a government committing to all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The season of hope is made possible by the tireless dedication of mental health workers across the state, by the courage of people experiencing mental health issues and the family and friends who love them. Some may think my language is a bit dramatic. Well, I guess they have never seen how dark it can get for some people. We have seen under this change to the mental health system the introduction of mental health and wellbeing locals in response to recommendation 3 of the royal commission. We have committed to delivering 50 of these by 2026 to ensure that people have easy access to mental health services – preventative mental health services to stop people getting to the pointy end of the stick where we debate about who should be there in the time of crisis. This is about making sure we support people before it gets to that. Our first six locals opened late last year, including one in the City of Whittlesea, and I am really proud about that.

We have other new supports in our area, like the new mental health beds at the Northern Hospital. We know that acute mental health facilities are really important, and we want to make sure that Victorians are not waiting too long to access the services they need when they need them most. We listened and we completed the new state-of-the-art 30-bed facility at the Northern Hospital, the hospital that services my electorate, and there will be another nine new facilities across the state. It is going to provide 10,900 days of care to over 650 people a year, multipurpose rooms, staff and family lounges – it is part of the great work that we are doing to implement the recommendations of the royal commission into mental health, as is this bill.

We also have the regional governance of mental health services initiative underway in response to the royal commission. We know that local communities know what works for them. Local communities know what does not work for them. It is right that the voice of local communities is elevated. It is right that governance sits at that level as well. We know that communities have differing needs. In the northern parts of Yan Yean we still carry the weight of Black Saturday. The governance and management of mental health services for our area needs to understand that, to have experienced that and to be responsive to that. These will increase local community engagement and accountability. They will provide an opportunity for people in the community to discuss with locals what they want to see in their mental health services. The interim regional bodies which have been established are progressing their work towards becoming statutory bodies, and we look forward to that day coming when the groundwork has been adequately prepared.

There has been quite a bit of talk in the chamber about the health-led response to mental health emergencies. We know that the royal commission health-led response to emergencies is something that we have been working towards. We need to create better processes to support people having mental health emergencies, and just as we have committed to every recommendation of the royal commission, we have committed to this. I recall being at an incident at that same homeless shelter where a person was having a mental health emergency and was a danger to themselves, and there was a moment of who would respond in that situation. It was the police that responded, and they did so with great care and compassion for the person involved. We know that there are different roles for different people, and there is absolutely no shame in saying that the police in our state do a fabulous job caring for those in need.

We also know that we do want a health-led response for those experiencing crisis, but to push that outcome now before people are ready to care for those in crisis would welcome potentially devastating outcomes. We cannot stand back and watch that happen. We take careful steps to ensure that the reform that we are undertaking is for the benefit of all – and it is the reforming of a whole system. You cannot just pick out one part and say, 'You should do this now.' The whole system works together as a whole, and that is what we are working on. The member for Nepean recognised this to an extent with his comments about the mental health workforce, and that is something that I am really proud of this government's investment in. We know that the Labor government has invested more than

\$600 million since 2020–21 for workforce initiatives, contributing to 2100 more jobs in the mental health sector. That has been more than 400 mental health nurses, more than 300 psychologists, 100 psychiatrists and over 900 extra allied health clinicians. The wideranging reforms that are coming about as a result of the royal commission, as a result of our dedication to implementing the recommendations of the royal commission, are well underway. We are taking a careful and considered approach, but we do have a sense of urgency, we do want this bill to pass and we do ask for the support of those in the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:07): I am pleased to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 on behalf of the Greens. This bill amends the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, which comes into effect later this year, and I thank the minister's office for arranging a briefing on the bill. The bill makes a number of mostly minor corrections and clarifications to the act, and the Greens will support the bill. But I would like to speak to one aspect of the bill in particular. Part of what this bill does is delay the implementation of recommendation 10 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which is the recommendation to have health professionals rather than police become the first responders to people experiencing mental health crises. I say 'delay', but it actually just removes it from the act, and we will come back to that later. This is an important recommendation designed to make mental health responses more compassionate and health led rather than part of a law-and-order response that has the potential to cause further harm. But the amendment bill removes the reference to paramedics as first responders in these cases, which the government tells us is to allow our health and ambulance systems time to prepare.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was a valuable undertaking, and it has been good to see a number of the resulting recommendations implemented, in particular the mental health and wellbeing surcharge, which has increased funding to mental health services, maintaining the momentum of the royal commission. Momentum is important in government and can all too easily be lost among the many pressing issues jostling for attention. Unfortunately the recommendations of the royal commission were published in February 2021 at the height of the pandemic and a series of lockdowns and restrictions. The pandemic had the doubly concerning effect of requiring resources and attention to be diverted towards the pandemic response, obviously, but at the same time as it negatively impacted mental health on a wide scale and increased the need for urgent mental health reform. We know our health system in Victoria has been hanging on by a thread recently and we need to do all we can to support and bolster it so that healthcare workers and patients alike are properly cared for. Our hospitals are still treating hundreds of COVID patients each week, with effects still being felt throughout the health system as healthcare workers struggle to keep up with demand under this burden and when most people understandably want to believe that the crisis is over. So mental health can seem less important even though the need for mental health resourcing is clearer than ever. So while we appreciate the rationale behind the delay in implementing this recommendation around paramedics and instead keeping the responsibility of first responders with the police for now, we are concerned that the delay is still open-ended. We want to make sure we do not lose that momentum and that the delay does not turn into a cancellation.

On that note, I note the success of a program in Geelong: the Prehospital Response of Mental Health and Paramedic Team, or PROMPT. This program, a partnership between Barwon Health and Ambulance Victoria, won the Minister for Mental Health's Award in 2019 for its work supporting the mental health of Victorians. In this program paramedics and mental health nurses worked together to attend local call-outs as a team, and during its pilot phase the program was successful in diverting 80 per cent of patients from emergency admissions. I am not clear on the status of this program right now. I understood from a briefing from the government that it is still running, but I have also heard that its funding has been cut. It may be running in a reduced form elsewhere with mental health clinicians on the phone. Whatever the actual state of affairs, this sort of program could well be a way to train paramedics on the job. If they could see and learn from experienced mental health clinicians, this could be a way forward. It is also important to look at ways of relieving the pressure on the ambulance service so that they can take up their role in responding to psychiatric emergencies.

We are also concerned that our health and ambulance system might not actually catch up any time soon. COVID is still with us – a fact that many people seem to want to ignore, and I get that. But this virus is still wreaking havoc on our health system. It is increasing the burden on paramedics and other healthcare workers. It is negatively impacting the mental health of immunocompromised and vulnerable individuals, who are still essentially living in lockdown because it is not safe for them to be around people. Just last week there were more than 300 people in Victorian public hospitals with COVID. That has the same effect on the health system as closing Maroondah Hospital, which has about that many beds. It is not politically popular, but the government needs to take some responsibility here. I have spoken with a number of people who are not aware that they can get a booster every six months or that masking in crowded areas and isolating when you are sick can still save lives. The government can bolster mental health by doing more for public health. Fewer COVID patients will mean less work for ambulances and emergency departments. The government needs to look at boosting immunisation and the use of masks in crowded indoor environments to reduce the COVID burden on the ambulance and hospital system. COVID is the main reason that our ambulance service is not able to prepare for an increased load of mental health work.

We are at a stage in the third term of the Andrews Labor government where money is short and a great many programs in public health and mental health are being defunded. One small example is the Partnership and Linkage Service, or PALS, a social and recreational program run by Mind Australia which matches volunteers with people living with mental illness aiming to reduce their isolation. It costs very little and it achieves a lot. However, despite the positive benefits of this program stretching back nearly 30 years, Mind Australia tells me that the funding for PALS will be significantly cut from July this year.

Returning to this bill, it is also worth remembering why we want health workers taking on more of the load in responding to mental health crises in the community. It is because too many people experiencing those crises have experienced violence or abuse at the hands of police and others after they or their families called for help. Families of mentally ill Victorians have said that they worry about calling the police when their family member is in crisis because of fear of what the police might do.

On that note, I will mention the *Not Before Time* report recently released, which documents some of the harms experienced by Victorians at the hands of the mental health system. We have heard that the government commissioned this report and then tried to stop it being released. I argue that reports of this nature should always be released, even if the government disagrees with them. It is much better to have the debate in public than to have to defend governments' attempts to suppress information. To conclude, I hope that the change in the bill is just a delay, and a short one at that, and that we will soon see more health workers involved in responding to urgent mental health crises.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (17:14): It is with some pleasure that I rise this afternoon to make my contribution on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. In reflecting on this bill, of course my mind turned back to the very profound journey that the Andrews Labor government has been on. The reality is that for many, many decades the mental health system in the state of Victoria was absolutely failing those that were experiencing mental health challenges. It was broken. The system was underfunded. We had an inadequate set of mental health arrangements in this state. Sadly and tragically, that saw very, very poor outcomes for Victorians. For inextricable reasons, Victorians in so many ways and certainly parliamentarians in so many ways did not have the bravery to stand up and fight for change and reform. I think very, very pleasingly the Andrews Labor government recognised the problem, and a very strong minister in James Merlino was prepared to take on the challenge of reform.

What we recognised was that given the state of the mental health system in Victoria, what was absolutely required was the power of a royal commission to shine a very powerful spotlight on our mental health system, and that is the journey that we went on. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System reported only a number of years ago now to the Victorian government. That royal commission took evidence from those that had mental health challenges themselves, it took

evidence from clinicians and experts around the legislative architecture that was in place and it made a number of reports and ultimately a huge number of recommendations to our government paving the way for reform, setting the scene and setting out what the Andrews Labor government should do to rebuild a mental health system in this state that is indeed fit for purpose. The Andrews Labor government accepted all of those recommendations, and we have commenced in earnest that reform agenda. To build a new fit-for-purpose mental health system we need to do so in a gradual way, building up the institutions, the mechanisms and the legal structures and indeed recruiting and training those that are required to staff a fit-for-purpose mental health system. I think, if my memory serves me correctly, there were 70-odd recommendations, and we accepted as a government all of those recommendations and are going about building a fit-for-purpose mental health system.

One of the things that I have noticed – in the way we have gone about this reform agenda through the powerful spotlight that was shone originally on the mental health system through the royal commission and the way that we have gone about engagement with the sector and engagement with the clinicians, the nurses, the unions that represent them and other professionals in the field – is that people are now far more willing to talk about their own circumstances and the journey that they have been on themselves. I think that is actually a very important change that I have seen here in Victoria.

The mental health system will need billions of dollars to be invested in it to give it the resources and the capacity to treat Victorians who experience mental ill health. We have commenced that funding journey, but also we of course need to rebuild the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and the other legislation that needs to sit alongside this. Over the years that I have been a member of Parliament we have had that privilege of hearing from our constituents often those firsthand stories that are told to us of when the mental health system fails – the response that their loved one or they themselves experienced at the hands of the mental health system historically. We get to hear those stories, and we get the opportunity and I say privilege to take those stories forward as legislators to help shape public policy going forward. Again, I think that is an important obligation on all of us as legislators.

The simple reality is that a huge percentage of Victorians experience mental ill health in their lives – a very significant proportion of Victorians. I would say every single family in Victoria in one way or another is touched by mental ill health in their immediate families, in their immediate workplaces and in their footy clubs or netball clubs. It is hugely important that we get this reform right, and of course this bill is a part of the reform journey.

One of the great challenges in rebuilding a mental health system that is fit for purpose in this state is that practically at the same time that we are starting that reform journey we know that not only in Victoria but across the globe COVID-19 has been putting huge pressure on our health and hospital systems. I think we have to respond to that, we have to recognise that and we have to make sure that we put in place the appropriate strategies to deal with that. My personal view – and I know that this is the view of clinicians and experts and indeed patients – is it is not ideal in most circumstances that when someone is experiencing a severe mental health set of circumstances a police officer is the first person that responds. That is not an ideal circumstance. Sometimes it is required, but it is not the ideal circumstance. The ideal set of circumstances is that a health professional responds in the first place – they do so and they have the appropriate level of training to be able to respond appropriately to provide the care that that person needs to be able to stabilise their mental health and to be able to access, from that point, from that crisis, from that moment of intervention, the right mental health support to put in place the plan that they need to get back to where they would like to be. That is the journey that we need to go on. We need to make sure that we continue this journey and continue to make this investment.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:24): I rise today to weigh in on this debate about the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, and I would like to start by acknowledging those that we have lost through mental health challenges and suicide. I have been to far too many funerals. The fact that we are here today discussing mental health reform is really significant for people in my community. For want of a better phrase, really particularly over the last 20–30 years and before that, before the terms ‘mental health’ and ‘mental illness’ were things that we spoke about as openly as we are right

now – which is a good thing – small rural communities have really been through the wringer. It has been an epidemic until recent times. It is something that my family and I have very extensive lived experience in, which is why I am such a passionate advocate for and within the mental health space. I am going to take you on a journey while I speak about this bill, which might illustrate why I am of the opinion that it should not be either a health response or a police-led response. It cannot be either – it needs to be a case-by-case response. Everyone is different: we know that. Everyone's challenges are very, very different. They might have the same broad diagnoses, if you like, but everyone is so, so very different, and the responses should be different and based on what the experts – if there is the luxury of having experts involved in the case – determine.

Like I said, my lived experience is extensive and some might say traumatic, but I will continue to talk about it. I will continue to advocate for those who have had challenges and for those who care for those who have challenges. I see you; I hear you. It is a really tough gig, and my experience is on both sides of the coin, as a carer and as a patient that went through the system in a previous life, but again in a very different sort of case after a physiological response to chemical poisoning. It can be polarising to talk about, but some of the feedback that I get on a regular basis is that especially young people – young people at school, young people in their early 20s in particular, particularly men – want to hear leaders talk more openly about their lived experience in this space. I am happy to talk. I am an open book when it comes to all of this, but I have only got 6 minutes left. If you want to talk more about it, I have an open-door policy.

I have no reservations in talking about this, and this comes from my husband, who very publicly in 2020 started speaking about his struggles with depression, which had been a chronic condition since he was a teenager, and he wanted to do something about it because the response in our part of the world was not adequate for his experience. He decided that he would actually do something about it and put in place a project that led to him running a marathon – during COVID, so he had to do it alone – but he was very, very brave and raised \$50,000. That was to establish a walk-in clinic that did not need an appointment, did not need a referral and did not need Medicare. It was just somewhere that people that were having a crisis could go then when they needed it, not six weeks down the track when everything had changed. That is where my bravery came from, and that walk-in clinic is still there at Robinvale District Health Services (RDHS), so it has led to drastic change. He is one of the reasons I will forever advocate for mental health reform, so I am very grateful actually to be able to speak on this bill today. We have come a long way for me to be able to stand here today and for him to be able to speak about it three years ago.

My first experience was in year 10 in the early 1990s. It was then that a classmate took his own life, and the silence around that event was deafening. It was, 'This has happened.' There was an assembly, and the silence post it was deafening. Then a few years down the track, and I am not going to go into it in too much detail, there was a former partner of mine. With the gift of 20/20 hindsight – but in the late 90s Beyond Blue did not exist, we did not use the terms 'mental health' or 'mental illness' in the way we do now, we did not even use the word 'bipolar'; you were 'manic' or you were 'depressed' – clearly there was a need for a response then and that led to a police response in the end, which was very different to some of the other experiences that I have had.

These stories go on and on, and I could talk about the whole journey for hours. I have been to too many funerals to remain silent about this. It does come down to mental health reform, obviously, and we support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. But the response cannot be exclusively police and it cannot be exclusively a health-led response, because they are very, very different. For example, with my former partner, absolutely in the end it needed to be that. Maybe previous to that, if there had been experts involved, it could have been a health-led response. In the end it needed to be a police-led response because of what it ended up being.

We have come a long way, and I think it is important now when we are debating bills such as this and mental health reform that we can take it and consider these things in detail. We have come a long way, but we need to make sure we are getting it right and approach it with a very broad lens. It does not

matter how flat you make a pancake, there are always two sides, so we need to be able to be respectful in these debates and consider all of these clauses in detail and make sure that one clause or two clauses do not cancel out one that would be more appropriate. Is it a case of removing two clauses and letting it be a response one way or the other?

Like I said, locally now we have come a long way. We have the drop-in clinic which is still running at RDHS, which is fantastic. We do struggle with qualified staff, though; especially in rural and regional areas it is hard to find the right staff. The stigma is becoming less and less, and I am often asked to keep talking about it to remove that stigma that still does exist. Currently, my team and I are raising money for Lifeline Loddon Mallee and more specifically the Sunraysia Lifeline project, which Stephen Hegedus and his amazing team have worked on for a long, long time, to get a local Lifeline call centre up and running at the Irymple library. It is the final week; I have done 2500 push-ups since the beginning of June. If you see me on the floor, it is not – well, it might be – because I am tired, it is because I am doing push-ups. Feel free to make a donation. I am about a hundred bucks short of my target, but I am happy to go above and beyond that. It is for a really good cause. I mean, feel free to jump down and do some push-ups with me. That would be great. I could take care of them all in a split. In fact our leader the member for Murray Plains – I did not even ask him in advance, but I did see him in the passageway before and said, ‘How about it? Get down and give me 10,’ and he did. That is leadership for you, folks.

Look, it has been a journey. I appreciate being able to discuss this in here, and I appreciate being able to talk about these experiences and being able to, in this place, hopefully contribute to legislation from a lived experience perspective. I think it is really important and it is the best way forward. I hope it is something that we continue to talk about. Make sure that you donate to the push-up challenge. It has got one week to go. You can find QR codes and things on my office door.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (17:34): I am very happy to rise and speak to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. My head is spinning from listening to all of the wonderful debates and contributions that people have made today. This bill makes minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and makes consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. This amendment bill has a total of 53 clauses. Many of these amendments are minor or technical in nature, correcting errors, spelling mistakes and other things. It is nonetheless important that these changes are made before the commencement of the act in September 2023.

I was not going to talk about recommendation 10 and like the member for South Barwon I think I certainly would prefer to be working from a health perspective, but I do note that the member for Nepean spoke about how in his electorate the charity could not serve meals at night because of violence being committed upon them. In that instance it sounds like we need a police-led response. It is a very complex dichotomy. I do support the member for Yan Yean’s affirmation that we need to get things right, and sometimes that takes longer than we want, and sometimes we have to continue working on things. I know this government will continue to work on things.

I also note that the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System set out a 10-year vision to reform Victoria’s mental health and wellbeing system underpinned by a new mental health and wellbeing act, which passed last year. This 10-year vision, importantly, needed to be brought into action as soon as possible, and so the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 was put together with some urgency. I recognise the dedication, perseverance and important work of the mental health and wellbeing workforce as the mental health and wellbeing system develops. I also recognise and thank those people with lived and living experiences of mental illness and psychological distress and their commitment to working in partnership to achieve the vision of the royal commission. But due to the urgency of bringing this legislation about, there were some issues, as mentioned previously, around clarity and technical references and some bigger issues. They are part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, and they need to be addressed, and they will be addressed with this amendment bill of 2023.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended the Labor government replace the Mental Health Act 2014 with a new mental health and wellbeing act. The Andrews Labor government delivered on that recommendation last year. The 2022 act sets out rights-based objectives and principles for responsive services to make sure people seeking care are involved in decisions about their treatment and support, as well as incorporating a statement of recognition and acknowledgement of treaty process. It also supports a transformed mental health system that is integrated, contemporary and adaptable and places lived experience at its heart. I have heard many people in this chamber talk about lived experience and living experience. I never get sick of hearing that, and I cannot hear it enough. Placing people with lived experience at the heart of not only the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act but the mental health system is a key theme of the royal commission – that this system will be guided by people with lived experience of mental illness. And lived experience will be at the centre of the new regional mental health and wellbeing boards, Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. It sounds health led to me. It means that people with lived and living experience will be on the ground floor, being involved in writing policy, developing programs, delivering outcomes and, importantly, dealing with those that walk through the door needing help. This is fantastic. It is timely, it is much needed and, guess what, it is now being delivered.

Over the last couple of years, the Andrews Labor government has invested \$5.7 billion into mental health and delivering on the recommendations of the royal commission. I had the opportunity to read through some of the 2022 Mental Health and Wellbeing Act just to familiarise myself with it, as I was not here last year when it was debated. It is 688 pages long, with 885 separate line items. It is very complex, complicated and very in depth. I am not going to claim I understood every bit of it, but one of the things that I came across which impressed me a lot and made me feel very happy about the direction that the legislation was taking was part 1.5, which includes the mental health and wellbeing principles. There are 14 principles outlined, and it seemed to me that the rest of the act was determined by them or shaped by them. I felt in reading about these principles that the community was being looked after, the community was at the heart of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act of 2022. This amendment bill of 2023 will continue to place the community at the heart of the act. I thank the many, many people that worked on the royal commission into mental health and all those that actioned the recommendations and wrote the 2022 act – an amazing piece of work, an important piece of work, and it is now being implemented.

I just want to talk a little bit about some of the principles, because when I read them it was a pretty dry read in a way, but somehow they warmed my heart. As I have spoken about in this chamber before, hope lives rent free in my heart, and when I read the principles that gave me greater hope with the way we are working. Just a couple of the principles:

Diversity of care principle

A person living with mental illness or psychological distress is to be provided with access to a diverse mix of care and support services. This is to be determined, as much as possible, by the needs and preferences of the person living with mental illness or psychological distress ...

...

Lived experience principle

The lived experience of a person with mental illness or psychological distress and their carers, families and supporters is to be recognised and valued as experience that makes them valuable leaders and active partners in the mental health and wellbeing service system ...

Wellbeing of young people principle

The health, wellbeing and autonomy of children and young people receiving mental health and wellbeing services are to be promoted and supported, including by providing treatment and support in age and developmentally appropriate settings and ways. It is recognised that their lived experience makes them valuable leaders and active partners in the mental health and wellbeing service system.

I think all these points are health led. I found something very comforting in all of those words, and I think the community would too. I would also like to mention recommendation 3 of the royal commission, which is to:

establish a responsive and integrated mental health and wellbeing system, in which people receive most services locally and in the community throughout Victoria, close to their families, carers, supporters and networks.

The commission also recommended the establishment of up to 60 local adult and older adult mental health and wellbeing services across Victoria. These have become known as locals, as the member for Frankston called them recently. Presently six have been opened, a further nine will be opened by the end of 2023 and there are another 12 hoping to be started on next year. I recently visited the Frankston mental health and wellbeing local with the member for Frankston and also the Minister for Mental Health, who announced the beginning of walk-in services in the coming weeks and a weekend service to kick off in the coming months. Locals are designed to deliver integrated mental health and wellbeing treatment, care and support for people aged 26 years and over. They will also provide integrated treatment, care and support for people with a mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse or addiction, coexisting disability and trauma. Local services are free, voluntary and easy to access; no referral is required; and they are delivered with a philosophy of 'How can we help?' and a no-wrong-door approach. I only wish that 23 years ago this service had been available to my brother, because if it was he still might be with us today.

Lived experience will also be a central pillar and be embedded in new entities, including regional mental health and wellbeing boards through a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, and the member for Mordialloc talked about this. The commission will provide statewide oversight of the mental health and wellbeing system, including through a new complaints resolution investigation process, and will hold government to account for the performance of the system and the implementation of the royal commission recommendations – health led. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 has been passed, and now we need to pass this amendment bill of 2023 so we can continue to do the work that this government has been doing, will be doing and is committed to doing. I commend this bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:44): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 and follow on from some wonderful contributions, certainly none more so than the member for Lowan and her outstanding contribution. Her passion and knowledge in this space are exceptional and second to none. If only the government shared the same passion in my electorate, because after all the spin and all the discussion that we hear about the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and supporting the recommendations and supporting people with mental health concerns, this government has certainly turned its back on an accommodation centre for mental health in my electorate in Cobram. It is called Merriwa Grove, and the way these people have been treated is absolutely appalling. When I listened to the contributions on the other side from those that have got the notes from the minister's office, they go through and talk the talk and read out what has been put on the paper in front of them, but there are opportunities for them to do something right now and actually make some changes for people.

In Cobram there is a 30-bed accommodation centre, Merriwa Grove, and 19 men call that home. They have got sociopsychological mental health issues, and these men call it home. Some have been there for 19 years. It is not a facility, it is a home. Just over a month ago these 19 men were given their marching orders, and they have to move on. Fifteen of these 19 men have lived in Cobram or surrounding areas – Berrigan, Katamatite, Barooga – all their lives. Some of these will be moving to Shepparton, about an hour away, and some of them are moving to Bendigo, which is 2 hours drive away. And when you think about that – these people with mental health issues being moved 2 hours away from their family and their support and their carers – it is frightening.

They came to me about a month ago when they got their marching orders and asked me what we could do. Well, after speaking with the minister's office, the minister's office told me that the person in

charge of Merriwa Grove is on leave at the moment and is not available to speak to me. We have tried many different angles to try and get the minister's office to talk to us and help these men, because the government owns the building. The Victorian government own Merriwa Grove, and they could extend the lease, change the lease or give the lease to somebody else if somebody actually put their hand up saying, 'We'll take this lease on. We'll manage these 19 men. We'll do it happily.' But we are not getting any response from the government, and my concerns are there are rumours that the building will be used by the government or get sold off to the highest bidder, which really is a disgrace.

We talk about mental health and what we can do about it. Again, those on the other side say there is no silver bullet – this does not happen overnight. But it was back in 2019 when the royal commission was already saying, 'Start upskilling the workforce. We know there are going to be concerns here; we don't have to wait for the final report.' Certainly it really is frustrating, and for the family members that have come to me to talk about the dire situation these men are in it is really disheartening. As I say, people in this place can go and talk all they like about mental health, but when there is an opportunity to do something, we cannot even get the minister's office to talk to us.

In fact what the minister's office did say to the men is that they are prepared to extend the eviction notice if that helps. If they cannot find accommodation by 30 June, they are happy to extend the eviction notice. Now, I would not have thought that is the answer we should be looking for. I think if anybody in this place was told they had 60 days to get out of their place that they had lived in for 15, 20 years or more, they would find it quite confronting, let alone if they had a mental health disorder and, as I say, family members that lived locally and could support them as well. I really do believe it is disgraceful behaviour as we talk about mental health in this place, when there are opportunities to deal with it immediately. Again, it is one thing to talk the talk, but they are certainly not walking the walk in my electorate. We have got significant homelessness in the Ovens Valley, and this is just going to put more and more pressure on. These 19 men have to take places, take spaces, somewhere else – as I say, whether it is in Shepparton, whether it is locally or whether it is in Bendigo – and that is taking up a bed that somebody else could be using.

So again I ask: if this was happening in Melbourne, what would the situation be? I know Cobram is just a dot on the map to many, on the Murray River 3 hours north of here, but if it was happening in Melbourne and you could get the responses from the *Herald Sun* or the *Age*, all of a sudden we would find different reactions and we might get something done. We will work with these 19 men and help them to try and transition, but it will not be easy for them. I feel very, very sorry for these gentlemen. I have heard it said once or twice in my life that the government should be judged on how they cater for their most vulnerable, and I think if you asked these 19 men, they would say this government deserve a massive fail on how they are managing the most vulnerable in Cobram at the moment.

The amendment bill before the house, as we know, will make minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022. It will make some changes to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. As I said before, the royal commission handed down the interim report in 2019 and the final report in 2021, and others have said that the Liberal–Nationals fully support all the recommendations of the royal commission. This bill has been introduced to amend and fix up some of the errors that have come about because of it but most importantly the government's backflip on the recommendations – back to the police-led recovery rather than a health-led response.

My concerns around that, as others have spoken about in this place, are that, given that most people experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, the involvement of the police can be humiliating or traumatic, because it is a mental health issue. I think the member for Mildura spoke about it being case by case whether it is led by police or whether it is led by the health sector. To change and do a backflip is not surprising, but it is concerning.

You would have heard from the member for Lowan that we support clause 12 but we oppose clauses 13 and 14. Again, this government has been in power for nine years, and they have failed to act in this time. As I mentioned before, back in 2019 it was alerted by the royal commission to get on

and start addressing some of the workforce shortages. So when we hear those on the other side saying, you know, 'There's no silver bullet' and 'This won't happen overnight', I say to them, 'You've been sitting on your hands for four years, member for Mordialloc, and you've done absolutely nothing. Now you come into this place and talk about mental health, saying you support all the recommendations and you're just going to do what you can do.' I am offering you an opportunity to do something now – today, this week. You could help us in Cobram in Merriwa Grove. But you are happy to sit there in the cheap seats and throw what you like –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Jackson Taylor): Order! Through the Chair.

Tim McCURDY: But there is an opportunity to help now, or you can sit in those seats and just throw barbs like you do, which is really disappointing. And when you get your chance – you have had your chance – to have your say, you will go on and roll out the same lines that everybody has rolled out.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Jackson Taylor): Through the Chair. Order! The member will be mindful of the reflections on the Chair.

Tim McCURDY: Thank you, Acting Chair. But as I say, there are opportunities to deal with this today – this week, next week. The accommodation centre does not close until 30 June. How many members of the government will step up? How many members of the government will give me a call or come around and see me this afternoon and say, 'We've heard what's going on in Cobram. What can we do? How can we help these 19 men?' Or will they sit here in this place and keep rolling out the same old lines: 'There's no silver bullet', 'We'll do what we can', 'There's a royal commission'. We have heard it time and time again. I asked those on the other side, anyone who is serious about dealing and helping with mental health, to give us a call. Let us see what we can do about helping these 19 men today, because on 30 June they are out of a house. As I said before, if I told you you were out of a house in 60 days, I am not sure you would be that happy about it. They are not happy about it, nor are their families and nor is half the community of Cobram, because these people belong in Cobram. They have lived there nearly all their lives most of them, and they deserve to stay in their own home. Let us see how many actually pick up the phone and come and see what they can do to help.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (17:54): It is my pleasure to rise this evening to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. We on this side of the house know and understand that to hold the keys to government and to do nothing is indeed the greatest waste of public office that you could imagine. To have the honour of sitting in this place, representing Victorians right across our great state, and to not tackle the biggest issues, the biggest challenges – those challenges that confront all of us, whether you are in the city, whether you are in the suburbs or whether you are in the country or the regions – and to do nothing is simply the greatest waste. We know and understand that to lean in, to invest, to be creative, to be dynamic and to be at each and every opportunity making sure that we are working hard each and every day to support Victorians right across health, right across education, transport and the environment, this government has since day one – since we had the opportunity to form government in November 2014 – not wasted a day in tackling those issues that have of course confronted Victoria.

Our community collective mental health was identified as one of our biggest challenges, and that was the basis for this government's decision to form a royal commission into mental health within this state. We know that what the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System did was find a fragmented, disjointed, not-fit-for-purpose system that was failing those within our community who needed support the most. Critically, at the time they needed support they were simply not receiving such support. I am not going to spend long speaking about some of the contributions that we have heard from the other side other than to say that what we on this side of the house are committed to doing each and every day we have the great privilege and the great responsibility of being in government is supporting those who need it the most, not being driven by some mythical ideology but working with the experts in the field, working with those people who spend their lives supporting those within our community that have challenges, but also, as other members have said in their

contributions, making sure that we are listening to those with lived experience. We know that this generates outcomes, policy and investment in the right places, in places where we know it is going to make a fundamental shift and a huge difference.

I do want to thank all of those that work in our healthcare system: broadly, our doctors, our nurses, our paramedics, our specialists, our admin staff, all of those who support each and every day those within our local communities to ensure that we are making the health system and the mental health system the best that it can be. We know that in March 2021 the final report of the royal commission into the mental health system was released, a once-in-a-generation report that comprised 3995 pages, 12,500 contributions and 65 recommendations. These recommendations fundamentally went to addressing the barriers Victorians face in accessing mental health treatment, outlining a framework of a contemporary system that supports the diverse needs of our community and putting people with lived experience at the centre of the system which we are rebuilding.

We committed to implementing all of these recommendations from the report, and we got to work as quickly as we could to establish supporting legislation to set out a foundation for a 10-year mental health reform program. We know a major step in this work was repealing the Mental Health Act 2014 and introducing a new mental health and wellbeing act. With the new act having passed last year, this bill will make a broad range of amendments to ensure the commencement of the act in September and that it will operate according to its intended purpose.

I did say I was not going to speak much about some contributions from those opposite, but the significant allocation from this government through successive budgets – a once-in-a-generation investment, massive amounts of money, billions of dollars to support those with mental health challenges within our community – is something that as a local member I am incredibly proud of, as I am to be part of a team that is delivering this. But most importantly I am incredibly proud to know that those people who are working within the system and those people who need the system will get additional support thanks to this investment. That is why in 2021 we backed the overhaul of the mental health system – \$3.8 billion to kickstart the 10-year reform – and in 2022 we committed \$29.3 million to support the implementation of the act. This year we are investing \$47.8 million to support the establishment of entities as outlined in the act. These include the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, the eight interim regional bodies, the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist, the Mental Health Tribunal and the mental health statewide trauma service, and as others have discussed, the amendments in this act are wideranging but of course of equal importance.

With the remaining time that I have I just want to speak briefly to some of the amendments. With regard to the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing we are clarifying that this will not be a designated health service, as the centre has not been established to provide assessments of the treatment. Further, we are ensuring that we attract the best people for the role, making sure that we are working closely to support those with qualifications and experience outside Victoria to be able to apply. As we move forward on this journey – as we get on and deliver the more than 60 recommendations made by the royal commission and of course put to the very best use those billions of dollars that have been allocated in previous budgets – we know and understand that practical amendments such as those that are contained in this piece of legislation are important to making sure that we are getting the very best system for those who need it the most.

I do want to give a shout-out to a number of members not by name but collectively. Over the journey thus far of the debate a number of members have made, I think, some very important contributions, speaking of lived experience, of family, of friends, of loved ones and of those that have suffered mental health challenges within their life. I do think that this is not just one of the most important, one of the most serious, conversations that we can have as a community, but it is a conversation and it is an issue that affects us all. When we speak of collective community mental health and when our family and our friends, those that we love and we ourselves, of course, are facing challenges of mental health, we

know and understand the importance of getting local care when and where we need it and of making sure that those with training, those with support, are there.

We know and understand as a government – and indeed I would argue we should know and understand as a Parliament – the importance of investing and supporting but also treating this issue as a top-line issue of health, an issue of importance that goes to who we are as a community. Not just through the work of the royal commission but through decades and decades of a system that was broken, a system that was smashed, a system that was under pressure, we know and understand that investment within all of the initiatives, all of the policies and the broader framework that has formed through the royal commission is important. This is work that, as I mentioned, will take more than a decade. It is work that we know and understand as a government should be passed through all of those within the system to make sure that we are supporting every single person within our community to be their very best, to get a great education, to have a great public transport system and to know and understand that collective community mental health is supported. That is why I commend the bill to the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (18:04): I too rise to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. As our colleagues here in this place have talked about this afternoon, this bill really does continue our government's work on implementing the reforms and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. I still remember many years ago when the royal commission was actually underway – and I think I was running for election, which would have been in 2018 or 2019 – and it struck me just how important this work was for all Victorians.

I have talked briefly about this story in this place, but I will mention it again just briefly this evening. I remember being approached, of all places, at an information session for a level crossing removal in Wyndham – for removal of the Hoppers Crossing level crossing. It was a young man, probably in his late 20s. I thought, 'Oh, wow, he's going to talk to me about how we should have fast-tracked this level crossing and how he's been waiting for many years and how happy he is to see it.' But in fact he wanted to come and talk to me with his mother. He lived with his mother, and he approached me to talk about how proud and how happy he was that our government had initiated this royal commission. He talked to me about some of the struggles that he had experienced in his life and was continuing to experience, and I suggested to him that he make a submission at one of the hearings. Whether he actually did or not I am not quite sure, but all I can hope is that the assistance and the help and the support that he required to get back on his feet and live a whole and fulfilling life and the work of this royal commission and the recommendations that we have been rolling out across this state have made an impact on him and his life.

As we have talked about here, the purpose of this bill is to build upon the incredible amount of work that our government has undertaken to reform and importantly rebuild Victoria's mental health system into one that works for all Victorians. This is not an easy thing to do, but this work can be seen right across our state. As the Minister for Health noted in her second-reading speech, six of our mental health and wellbeing locals have actually opened, a full tenth of the 60 that we are going to be opening, and one of them happens to be in my electorate, right in the heart of Sunshine, which I have had a couple of opportunities of late to go and visit. I can stand here and tell you wholeheartedly that there is a true impact that these hubs will make and certainly that the one in Sunshine will make an impact to locals in my community. Whether it is simply by accessibility or the types of services that are offered, I have no doubt that the support and services that are being run through the hub will be absolutely life-changing for Victorians seeking to access mental health services.

Certainly I was there at the launch recently and was able to tell quite a personal story, actually, about the mental health struggles not only I but my husband experienced about 14 years ago after the loss of our first child. One of the things that we received, which was an absolute game changer for us at a time in which we were suffering absolute despair after the tragedy of losing our daughter, was a recommendation from family that this was actually too big a tragedy for us to be able to navigate alone and that in the interest of us being able to wade through our grief and go through what we went through and come out the other side and be okay we were actually going to need assistance from professionals.

This was at a time when if you went and saw a counsellor or a psychologist or a psychiatrist, you were considered to have something wrong with you. It was a time when there was a real stigma attached. Indeed I know today there is still that kind of stigma that people feel is attached when it comes to tackling issues around their own mental health or their loved ones' mental health.

My husband Scott and I both went to counselling sessions with a psychologist. We went to those sessions as a couple, and then we had separate sessions alone because there were certain things that we needed to talk about that maybe we did not really want the other to hear. I remember that the psychologist was able to talk to me about different tips and tricks and give me a whole heap of tools that would enable me to try to re-enter society – go back to work, be at family functions and be able to walk down the street and see other families and other women that were pregnant or had had their babies – and be able to make it back home and for that to be okay. I will never forget that. They were really tangible, practical tools to help me function through the day. That was something that enabled me to go back to work and try to get on with my life and learn how to live with what was a really tragic thing that happened to us. I reflect on that – it has been about 14 years – and I have to say that the counselling that we received back then was really important, instrumental, in our healing and being able to get back to mental health. So when I talk to people in my local community and they talk to me about despair and feeling that days for them can feel like they are in a black hole and they cannot get out, I can reflect back to what it was like for us in those early days. I certainly understand what some of those really dark thoughts and moments are. But the advice I find myself always giving to people is that it is okay to reach out for help. It is okay to say, literally, 'I'm not okay and I can't deal with this. I can't tackle these challenges alone. I need help.' And there is help available and people that will specialise their whole lives in helping people deal with their mental health.

So it was with absolute pride that I was able to stand there and launch a Cohealth local mental health clinic in the heart of Sunshine, which I think is going to service the greater Brimbank area and which I know will be accessed by people from all walks of life and people of all ages. They do not need a medical referral to go there. Quite often they are people that can go and receive assistance for their mental health and problems they may be suffering from then and there in the immediate moment. But we also know that people quite often have underlying medical issues as well, and with a GP located on site it means that those people can come in, have their mental health dealt with and the services provided that they need to try to tackle and get better in their mental health but also deal with their underlying physical health problems. This would also help stop people from having to go to the hospital and take up hospital beds, take up seats in emergency and clog up our emergency departments, when they can be seen locally, closer to home in a less hospital-like environment. So this is certainly a very important initiative of this government. Like I said, this is one of six local mental health and wellbeing hubs that have opened, and we are opening 60 across this state.

In the time I have got left I could talk about many things to do with this bill, but I also want to share a story that I have not shared here. Maybe it is the time of day to share stories, when this bill is being talked about and the importance of this bill. I do think about my grandmother, who I think suffered probably a period of depression in her life. I know that she was on valium because her children used to see her on that. She was very, very unhappy in her marriage. I often wonder how Grandma would have gone and about the connections she could have made with friends and family and her own children if she had been able to access mental health support for a period of time in her life when she was really struggling and very, very unhappy. Back in those days I am not sure what kind of help you would have received, but it was sort of a bit of a stigma that housewives that were unhappy at home would be on valium. That was very much the sort of stigma that my father growing up had of his mother, so that stigma was passed on to him. I know that period of time I just talked about when we lost our child, my father found it really difficult to understand that mental health was and is a very serious problem in our community and that help is available instead of it being something that is confected or does not really exist.

I wholeheartedly commend this bill to the house. It is incredibly important, the work that we have done. I understand that not only on a personal level but from the many, many conversations that I have had with people in our local community. Sometimes it is just a wave to people that I see when I am out on the hustings doing street stalls. I know those people struggle with mental health and mental health problems, and I often wonder and hope that they are receiving the help that they need to try and get better. Indeed I do know that in the heart of Sunshine right now there is a place they can go to try and get better and receive the help that they need and deserve. So I wholeheartedly commend this bill to the house.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (18:14): I also rise today in support of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, and I would like to begin by acknowledging the previous contributions of many of the speakers. If we read the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System report, it has a lot of statistics about the prevalence of mental health issues within our community, but I think we have heard through today's debate the way in which it has touched upon a lot of us here. We have had experiences of both the acute and less acute forms of mental ill health, and I do acknowledge the very personal stories from the member for Lowan; the member for Yan Yean; the member for Laverton just now, speaking about both herself and her grandmother; and in particular perhaps the members for Mildura and Ripon, who talked about that silence that followed suicides in their regional communities. I think that is something that resonates with many of us who grew up in regional areas, and I am grateful for their contributions.

I would also like to acknowledge that our understanding of mental health has changed a lot over the years. It continues to change. There has been a long-running move away from dedicated psychiatric institutions, there have been profound and very positive changes in the attitudes of the community towards mental health and importantly there have been changes in the way practitioners have seen mental health. Back when I was born, in 1978, the very infamous *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – DSM-II* – was still in force. For those who know about it, it was a very discriminatory and not a very scientific document. We have fortunately moved a long way in that 45-year period, and we can see that in the transition from the old Mental Health Act 1986, then the 2014 version and then to the act that we are discussing today and indeed to the bill that we are discussing today.

Finally, I do just want to begin by acknowledging that mental health is difficult and complex, and that is in part because it is at once often psychological and biological and environmental. I think the biological component is important to recognise. There may come a day when we do not call it 'mental health' because a lot of people involved in the sector understand that it is not just your brain – it often affects your heart, it affects your nervous system and it can affect the digestive system. There is a lot of interplay back and forth. Ultimately mental health is health. I think that is something that we must keep in mind.

Those sorts of general factors bring us to the public policy task that has been before this government now for some time. Of course we are not a government that shies from difficult reform tasks, and we have not shied from this one. We inherited a system that needed reform. There were Victorian Auditor-General's Office reports and other reports that clearly documented the gap between demand and supply for these services and indeed the gap between our changed understanding of mental health and the understanding that was embedded in our previous systems.

I think it is worth noting that there was a lot of great work done before the royal commission, but of course the royal commission initiated by former member Martin Foley was a very critical piece, and it had its interim report, as we know, in 2019 and then its final report in 2021. As others have done, I will thank the commissioners and the staff for their work. As the Minister for Mental Health said earlier today, it does constitute a very comprehensive rebuilding of our system.

For the act that we are amending here today, as I think the member for Hastings mentioned – he read through all 688 pages and a great deal of credit to him; I am not sure I quite did the same – there is a lot in there to get through. It is not easily summarised. But I suppose the key thrust of our reform has

been that need to have a more phased response where you have the support provided by families and carers and then you have the support people are getting in their workplaces and their schools. I think on schools in particular this government has implemented some major initiatives. We will see mental health and wellbeing teams in every school by 2026, and of course they will also have access to the \$200 million Schools Mental Health Fund and our other initiatives. You have then got primary care, you have then got the mental health local services, which a number of the speakers have touched upon, and then finally at the top of the pyramid, if you like, you have got those mental health area services and those statewide services. I think a real key point of our reform is the way in which those different levels work together – the fact that it is easier to get in at the lower levels and there are clear triage paths as you work your way up. Importantly, they are going to be free. You will not need a referral from a GP; you will not even need a mental health plan. You can get straight in the door.

I think really importantly the royal commission and indeed our act built in integration with housing, with the justice system and in particular with addiction support, and all of us heard the Minister for Mental Health speak about that earlier today. There are also measures in there related to the mental health workforce and to new funding models. In short there is a great deal in the act, but it really does all matter, and it interfaces with work that is happening right across the state. It interfaces with work that is happening in Preston and Reservoir and our local area when we go out and talk to schools and when we talk to people at Your Community Health, at the Fitzroy Legal Service and at our multicultural community groups – we are talking about mental health and this reform all of the time. It has a huge footprint. I suppose the specific thing that the act does not do, if you like, is implement all of the service delivery, but it deals with some of the really complex challenges that do come up when you are implementing that service delivery in this area.

As other speakers have touched upon, the act that we are discussing today really pushes towards that approach where the person involved is more centred, is more listened to. They and their carers are central to the way the services are delivered. They have greater advocacy services. They have access to better oversight bodies. There is that shift towards a health-led response, which has been picked up in a lot of the debate, and of course the explicit intention to overturn the longstanding and now outdated focus on compulsory treatment, seclusion and restraint and that sort of stuff.

Turning, then, to the specifics of the bill, I want to pick up on a bit of the debate. We have not got many opposition leaders – opposition members, I should say – left –

Members interjecting.

Nathan LAMBERT: We have not got either of them here.

But the key bit we have debated is the changes related to the health-led response to mental health crises. I do note the comments earlier from the member for Pakenham. He has left now, but his comments on police waiting times and the impacts on their operations are something that all of us who work with our local police are aware of. Sorry, the member for Berwick – I will correct myself there. Sorry, member for Pakenham, who no doubt is also familiar with those issues. I think, to be honest, there is certainly some misinterpreting of the bill going on by non-government members. I do not know if they are deliberate misinterpretations, but I think the thrust for those of us, like the member for Hastings, who have read it carefully is that we are providing greater flexibility in order to achieve a health-led response rather than in any way walking back from that commitment.

If we want to get really specific about it, the member for Nepean was complaining that we were not meeting some time line in recommendation 10. Well, I have read recommendation 10. I do not think it set out a time line. I do believe if the commissioners were here, they would say the important thing is to get this right, and that is certainly what this government intends to do. I thought the member for Yan Yean made a very important point on that debate, that the broad thrust of what we are trying to do is to avoid those mental health crises, but should they happen we are certainly committed to a health-led response.

In addition to that, there are, as others have touched on, a lot of further, smaller details, if you like, to this particular bill. They are small but they are important, and I know that the team in the department have worked very hard to make sure that we have something that is in place for that September deadline that of course was in the original act. There are clarifications to the definition of ‘mental health and wellbeing service provider’ and clarifications to the definition of parent. There are some changes to the administration of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. There are changes to the operation of regional mental health and wellbeing boards, and as the member for Ringwood said, it is very good to see them up and running at the moment in their interim form. There are some changes to the functions of various officials, transfer orders, treatment orders and so on. All of these things are important. I think there were some slightly dismissive comments earlier suggesting that we were just picking up typos, but in fairness to all of those who drafted it, there were two typos in that 688-page bit of legislation. I reckon that is probably below average, but it is good that we are fixing them up.

In conclusion, it is important work. As a government we have not shied away from it. We have invested over \$6 billion since 2019, as others have mentioned, including an important expansion of mental health beds at the Northern Hospital, which for those of us up that way is very important. We are investing much more than the previous government in real terms and in real per capita terms. There is basically an extra billion dollars a year now in mental health because of the changes that we have made – that is getting the workforce on the ground. Most importantly, it is not just an increase in spending for its own sake; it is an increase in spending that comes hand in hand with a very comprehensive plan that we have just outlined. I would like to thank Minister Williams and her team. The team in her office have done fantastic work on this. A shout-out also to deputy secretary Katherine Whetton and her team in the department. As we have touched upon, there is a great deal of complexity to work through in this piece. It is important work that we will get done, and I commend this bill to the house.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (18:24): It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. From the outset I will say I have got so much to say, and 10 minutes just is not going to cut it. I have had to sit here this afternoon and listen, as a captive audience, to some of what we have heard. As the previous speaker said, it is misinterpretations, laziness or just politicising, but it has been pretty hard to listen to.

Can I start with a positive. Can I start by acknowledging the mental health workforce, who care for consumers, the carers and their families in my electorate of Frankston, and their representatives as well: the unions, the main one being the Health and Community Services Union. Can I specifically thank some healthcare workers that the Minister for Mental Health and I met only about a month ago when the minister, Gabrielle Williams, came down to Frankston to announce a walk-in service at the Frankston mental health and wellbeing local. Those people were Mel, who is a bit of a legend – I have met Mel quite a few times – who is a lived experience worker; Helen, a mental health nurse; Timothy, who is the social worker of the Peninsula Health workforce working at 2 West, which is the mental health care unit; also Carinya; Frankston and Rosebud crisis assessment and treatment teams; the Peninsula mobile support team; Mornington mobile support and treatment; Frankston community care unit, which we visited not so long ago; the Frankston Early in Life Mental Health Service; youth prevention and recovery care; and adult prevention and recovery care. And that includes the mental health nurses, the occupational therapists, the social workers, lived and living experience workers, clinicians, alcohol and other drug workers, the consumer and family carers and the admin staff in the inpatient units and the community settings as well. These people all opened up their hearts and indeed pulled the stitches off old wounds. During the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System they came forward, and they made sure in no uncertain terms that when they were asked by this government what was wrong, they said the system is broken. And we knew that. That is why we had a royal commission. But further to that, we asked them what we needed to do to ensure that this system could be repaired – and repaired with a vision for the future. These people came forward and they told us their honest-to-God truth about that.

We have the recommendations, of which 72 are being completed or being acted upon at the moment. But right now in this house, with \$6 billion invested so far by this government in the mental health area, in my opinion we have people in this house really disrespecting that workforce; disrespecting those lived experience people; and disrespecting clients and patients and representatives, whether they be employer or industrial, because they are saying that this is the wrong thing essentially – that the government should not be doing this. We have got the opinions of those people who are using this service, who work in this service, who are the professionals. But no, those opposite say, ‘No, no, we’ve got to hold it up. We don’t care about those courageous people that came forward. We think you should be doing something different.’ I think this government did the right thing. I think we came to our community and said what do we need to do and, as I said, they told us in no uncertain terms.

To suggest that we should support the proposed amendments, which put a pause on all this work, is preposterous and it is damaging, because while they stand here and say ‘Let’s press pause on all this work’, which is life-saving work, people are losing their lives. That is the black-and-white fact. To prognosticate that the recommendations based on the thoughts of our community are wrong, even though they were so articulate in what they said and so honest in what they said and so brutal in what they said, really is an affront. We know that for every dollar invested we are returning about \$9.29 in savings in this area. That is because we are creating a system that – if you read the royal commission recommendations and what we are doing at the moment in rolling them out – is really making sure that we are doing our best to meet people with mental health issues at the top of the cliff instead of in the ambulance at the bottom. We are looking at a move to a health response in the community, which is a positive collaboration I think between the mental health workforce and the emergency service sectors, and this legislation is also building on that.

When I hear those opposite talking down all the moves that we are making, all the evolution in this sector that is happening, all the life-saving work, I cannot help but think back to early 2022, when it seemed those opposite were really, really confused about whether they would support a levy to fund the royal commission recommendations to roll these moves out. In turn, now we are hearing those opposite saying we are not doing enough or we are not doing it right. In a lot of ways it is actually not the government’s work. In a lot of ways it is the people who came forward bravely and courageously to the royal commission – it is their work, and they should own it.

Most people in this house know I have got a fairly personal connection to the mental health workforce. I know some people personally that work at 2 West, because they have looked after my sibling, who on Thursday last week I flew up to Queensland to visit. She is involuntarily in a mental health unit in Brisbane, and she needed some help. It is so sad that someone from Victoria, an MP in Victoria, is standing here right now and telling people, ‘Yes, we do need to move on this. Yes, we do need to keep on rolling out the Andrews Labor government’s mental health plan for the future to repair a broken system.’ It is so sad that I am standing here having to say that. On Thursday I did my best to make sure my sibling stayed in Queensland, because at the moment their mental health services for her – and specifically for her, not generally for everyone, but in her situation at the moment – are better than what she can get down here. And that will change soon. I have got a lot of confidence in that. That will change soon, and I know people on this side of the house are being part of that change.

Like the member for Hastings, I read the royal commission. It became a hobby to listen to some of the hearings, to attend some of the hearings, to know what was going on, to educate myself on what we needed to do, what the real problems were, not just from my perspective, not just from what I saw on TV, not just from what I heard on the news. I wanted to know from the people that dealt with this if they were having the same issues as I had – and they were, and it saddened me. But there is, I guess, hope, and it is very inspiring to hear people on this side of the house, talking about this bill today, talking about how much is being done, talking about the amount of effort, the amount of investment, the amount of passion, the amount of commitment there is on this side of the house to ensure that mental health issues are no longer something that we shy away from.

It is also setting an example for our community that mental health issues are not something strange, are not something that we should hide from. We should fully own mental health issues, and that is what this government is doing. To do that, we are making sure that people who are consumers, who do need these services, have the services and they are informed by people that have used these services. They are informed by professionals, not by people in this chamber who think they know what they are doing. We could have easily done that. We could have said, 'Look, we're going to be a bit lazy with this one. We don't want to know what people think.' It would be easier just to get one or two people and say, 'Right, you need to tick a box here and put some investment there.' What we have done is – well, it is the first time in the nation – we have actually asked these consumers what they need, and we are going to deliver what they need, just as they asked. But to stand here today and hear the absolute rubbish from those opposite, guessing, not reading, not educating themselves about this very, very serious issue, is disgusting.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a serious matter, and I think that the member for Frankston is doing himself a disservice by taking an opportunity to have pot shots at the opposition on such a serious matter. The Liberals and Nationals fully support all recommendations of the royal commission. Mental health impacts all of us, and yet he is taking an opportunity to attack the mental health of those on this side in the debate on this bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Member for Evelyn, can we just be clear on your point of order, please?

Bridget Vallence: To bring him back to the bill and stop attacking the opposition.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member for Frankston to continue his contribution about the bill.

Paul EDBROOKE: The opposition has told us everything we need to know in that, and I commend the bill to the house.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (18:34): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 today. In I suppose a very quick summary, in starting my contribution today, this bill will amend the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 to ensure that this act does operate as intended and can be implemented when it does commence.

Being a new member here in this place, obviously I was not here when the government introduced the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 last year, but I would like to say how proud I am to be part of a government that acknowledged that there was an issue in our mental health system. We acknowledged and said we needed to do better, and with that a royal commission was implemented and started into Victoria's mental health system. And we did not shy away from that challenge; we did not shy away from acknowledging that we could do better and we would do better, and we have committed to delivering that real change that Victorians need. We did also commit to every recommendation in that royal commission, and then we got to work. We did not waste any time in doing that.

I would also like to acknowledge, though, there was a challenge in that time frame for the new legislation set by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The royal commission rightly saw it as an imperative to get that new legislation passed last year and really to establish that architecture that we needed to be guiding this 10-year reform. But let us be clear too: the government agreed that no time should be wasted, and we did not have time to waste, and last year's act marked that incredible milestone to build our system from the ground up again and tailor it so Victorians got the care that they needed and deserved.

Something that was really clear to me was that they got that care close to their home and in their communities, which is really important, as regional MP, to me as well, to make sure that that care is part of the community and that residents or local families of the Bellarine are not having to travel

kilometres to get their care, that they can have it in their region. I would like to just take this opportunity to thank all the contributions, the valuable contributions, that we have had from many people among our key stakeholders and sector and partners and, importantly, those who made presentations and submissions at the royal commission. The foundation of a better future mental health system in Victoria has been guided by people with that lived experience, and that is so important. It is one where that lived experience is at the centre, as it should be, of reform. That is what makes this reform so world leading and so important, and I am very proud that that is the course that we have taken as a government.

These reforms, though, are huge. They are a transformation for our system. There is a lot of work to do, and they will create this fundamental shift in our mental health system. Across the time before I arrived at this place there had been work done already across many state budgets. Since the release of the royal commission we have seen record investment in getting on with that work. I would like to at least note at this point that we have commenced over 90 per cent of the royal commission's recommendations. This has generated that real momentum that we have started and a real hope and a real sense of hope for the reimagining of our mental health system and wellbeing system. But we know there is more to do. This reform will not happen overnight. It is going to take change, but significant changes are well underway, and that is exactly what this government is renowned for doing. We get on with it. We get on with the job and we do the things that are going to make a difference.

There are already a range of activities and projects that are currently underway, and I would like to speak a little bit more about those that are either in my electorate or around the region of the Geelong region that the Bellarine residents would use. I will go through a few lists, but I am really proud the Geelong region has seen a huge investment and seeing regional Victoria have a huge investment in this space, which is absolutely fantastic. As a state we said we would commit to delivering 50 mental health and wellbeing local services by 2026, and this was to ensure that Victorians had that free accessible mental health care close to home, as I have spoken about, when they needed it, without having to jump through all those hoops of GPs and meeting eligibility criteria. We wanted to make sure that people got easy access. One of those is in the Geelong region – they call it the Geelong and Queenscliff region – and it is terrific to have one that we know that local families and residents in my area can use. This service, though, is free. You do not need to have a Medicare card or healthcare plan. You do not need referrals. It is for people aged 26 years or older and anyone with a mental health concern or substance use issue. It is a consortium of four partners – Barwon Health, ermha365, Wellways and the Wathaurong traditional owners – and they came together to deliver this service, the mental health and wellbeing local service. It is one of the flagships recommended by the royal commission, and it will care for people who need that support.

I just want to note that at the time of developing this, Barwon Health clinical director of mental health and drug and alcohol services Professor Steven Moylan said that:

... the partnership model was underpinned by positivity, hope and inclusion.

And:

This is a great example of building something new from the ground up that will cater to a new way of doing things. People will be able to find the support they need, when they need it.

Wellways CEO Laura Collister said that:

This is what Wellways was set up to do: develop and deliver lived-experience-led support so people can live life to their full potential in the community of their choice ...

We know that this has a positive outcome when people are connected in their community and recovery can happen. I congratulate all those that are involved in that service. It has improved our access in delivering that tailored mental health in the Geelong region. These proposed amendments, though, will ensure that this consortium situation and members and partnership within the scope of the act will be required to comply with obligations in respect of the mental health and wellbeing principles, information sharing and the use of electronic health information systems.

Another service that has been delivered in the Geelong region and can also be used by Bellarine families is a 16-bed acute mental health facility at Barwon Health, the McKellar Centre. I got to tour this facility with the Premier and the minister last year. It is an absolutely beautiful, state-of-the-art, world-class – and all the rest of it – facility in the Geelong region. It is incredible not only in terms of its design but in that it is going to provide an opportunity to deliver mental health support in a different manner. It was designed in consultation with people who have lived experience in the mental health system, including patients, carers and staff. It is a safe environment. But it is not just about the beds, it is a team being led by Barwon Health to do things differently, and that is exactly what the royal commission asked us to do.

We also have a youth mental health facility being planned at the moment for the region. We also have under construction an early years parenting centre which will help parents with new babies and up to four-year-old children with the health and wellbeing development of their children, which is absolutely fantastic. For the sleepless nights I have had with my children that service would have been absolutely phenomenal. We are also going to open up a new mental health hub right in the CBD of Geelong.

This government has invested so much into our region. It is so important for the wellness of our communities. Coming into Parliament, mental health was such a priority for me and my community. Every day I am having conversations around these issues. Whether it be residents, schools, businesses, local clubs or sporting clubs, they are all doing their very best to support those young people and families that maybe are having mental health concerns, and as a community the Bellarine community should be very proud. We do very well at looking after each other. I am really proud to be able to talk about the investments, but we know there is still work to do, and that is what this is all about. This reform is actually going to change our system for the better so those who are seeking care get the care they need in a timely manner but get it in their community, close to home. I commend this bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:44): It is a pleasure to speak on this bill, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, because I think mental health is something that we have all got to do a lot better with. We are experiencing a mental health crisis in this state. It is a mental health crisis that started before the pandemic and was certainly extended during the pandemic, and unfortunately we are seeing cases of mental health incidents growing, whether it be on our streets, in our communities or in aged care, all the way through to our young kids in schools. So we need to look at how we are going to address this particular problem.

The government has got a whole lot of recommendations that it has put forward in this bill, some of which we agree with and others that we do not. The key element that we do not agree with is having a police-led response, because a number of my colleagues on this side of the chamber have given really important examples in their electorates of people that are experiencing a mental health episode or are undergoing real issues in their life, and the last thing they need is a police response.

I want to draw the house's attention to a bit of work that I had an intern do back in 2020, and this was done by Amelia Morris, a Monash University parliamentary intern. Amelia Morris was actually used as one of the speakers for the royal commission when the report was tabled, and this report I believe won an award in terms of a parliamentary prize. I am very proud that she did this work with me, but this report is so timely in terms of this bill and what we are talking about today. The headline of this report is 'There were no ambulances available, so they decided to use a divvy van'.

If you go back to between 2010 and 2014, when I was first elected to Parliament and we were in government, one of the things that we introduced was the PACER program, which had police and allied health workers working together to be able to provide that supportive response, so when a police vehicle turned up you had a health worker in the police car as well that supported them. It was something that was –

Martin Cameron: It's still happening.

David SOUTHWICK: It is still happening, but I draw the member's attention to this report. It has not changed in terms of the report, because one of the things that this report alludes to is that:

Co-responder teams provide a number of benefits when compared to a police-alone response ...

This is during the government's term. So suddenly we have started, and we are now assessing what the government has been doing with this PACER-type program. It says the main findings were:

More efficient use of first responder police units;

Reduced emergency department referrals and wait times ...

It talks about the benefits, but it says:

Data shows that the number of mental health incidents responded to by Victoria Police is steadily increasing each year –

police alone –

with police becoming the 'front line' of mental health crisis response due to a lack of available mental health services.

So this is pretty much saying that the model works – the model of actually having police and health working side by side works. The health response first – certainly if they need transportation support when it comes to police, let us do that. But we should not be walking it back, which are some of the issues particularly with clause 13 and clause 14 of this bill.

The recommendations in Amelia Morris's report, which are so timely even today, talk about:

- 1) Conducting a full and comprehensive evaluation of state-wide co-responder teams, including a cost-effectiveness analysis.
- 2) Expanding co-responder teams to operate in all parts of the state, and on a 24/7 basis where needed ...

right across the state – because we have heard the member for Ovens Valley and a number of others mention today that this is not a problem just in metro Melbourne, this is a problem right across Victoria. Also:

- 3) Embedding mental health clinicians in police and emergency services operations centres.
- 4) Involving people with lived experience in the delivery and evaluation of the project PRIME police training package.
- 5) Integrating co-responder teams with community support services to address the drivers of poor mental health.

It is a great report, timely even today, a few years later, and probably more needed now than it first was. So what is the solution? We had a royal commission. We had a number of recommendations, which we all support. We have got a mental health levy to be able to provide funding, which is great. So we have got the money and we have got the recommendations.

What are we actually going to do to make it all work? Because money alone does not fix things. What we need to do is, like Amelia said, get people with lived experience. Let us get people at the coalface. We have got the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which is out here doing a fantastic exhibition at the moment, working at the coalface, doing some great programs looking at issues around poverty and homelessness, a lot of the issues that we are talking about with mental health. They have got comorbidity issues – they are not in isolation. Someone experiencing mental ill health may also have a drug and alcohol problem, may experience family violence – there is a whole range of things which, when you are dealing with mental health, you cannot look at in isolation. If you have a look at many of the young people that went through a horrific time during the lockdowns with what they experienced, many of those kids have still not recovered from those lockdowns and did not get the support that we as governments should have provided. I think we will never know how much damage the lockdowns did to kids and their families. I hear of it every day. I hear of so many instances of

young kids that were so positive, so active, but those lockdowns really took so much out of them. So we owe them, when we are in Parliament, in terms of ensuring that there are laws, there is support, there is funding, there are resources and there are programs.

But the secret that I always talk very strongly about is early intervention. We have got to be looking at what we do right from the very beginning. We have a report which was done out of an inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. This was an inquiry that was done in 2021. It has 51 recommendations – 51 recommendations – about how to address homelessness. A lot of it is around early intervention. As part of the Youth Homelessness Matters Day I went to Uniting St Kilda, which provides fantastic relief. They provide food programs and housing, but it is all about wraparound services. It is not one size fits all – wraparound services. We have so many people in need of that support. If you go and visit down my way, you only have to go down to Elsternwick Coles, Glen Huntly Woolworths – when you can get there, at the moment, with the level crossing removals; it is very hard to get there at any time – and you have got people sleeping rough outside the front. They are really, really struggling.

I have conversations all the time in terms of support, in terms of what they do. There is a gentleman who, with his daughter, sleeps in his car, and they will not take any services because they are worried about safety. They are safer in their car than they are in terms of a government service. So we have got to be able to do more; we have got to be able to provide more housing. The Big Housing Build was meant to provide housing as part of all of that. We have not seen the result. \$1.9 million was made selling off three public housing units in Surrey Hills. We have got a shortage; 67,000 Victorians cannot get a home. Instead of building more, the government is flogging off these three houses in Surrey Hills for \$1.9 million. The member for Polwarth and I took a guy that has been sleeping rough and looking for a home to that auction, and we could not believe that this place was just going to be sold off to the private sector and not replaced.

If you look at the Big Housing Build, promising all kinds of housing, what we have had in the last period was a net of 74 homes built. By the time you look at what has been built and what has been sold off, we have got a net positive of 74. We need more housing, we need more support, we need more mental health counselling services, we need more work in schools and we need more programs. I know we have got the Scouts Venturers here tonight. They do fantastic work in terms of activities, real experience, life skills, teaching kids at early ages. Robert Hain and the team do a wonderful job locally and have been doing it for years. That is the kind of thing – positivity. We have got to connect people to these services. We have got to do more. That is why this bill does not quite hit the mark, and that is why we are suggesting a number of recommendations for this bill.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (18:54): It is a pleasure to rise this evening and speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. In August last year the Andrews Labor government passed what was an absolutely historic bill to replace the Mental Health Act 2014, based on the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and we did so because the plain fact of the matter is that when this government was first elected in 2014 it inherited a mental health system that was fundamentally broken. For that reason the government conducted a royal commission into that system. I am incredibly proud to stand here and say that this government is accepting and will act on every single recommendation of that royal commission, because when you have a royal commission into a system that is fundamentally broken, you do it for a reason, so it is absolutely appropriate that we pick up and act on every single recommendation of that royal commission.

We have heard some fantastic contributions this afternoon and this evening on this bill, and I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Mildura. I too have been to far too many funerals of friends and loved ones and loved people in my community that have succumbed to mental health. The bill that we are discussing today seeks to amend the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, as I said, which was passed last year, to ensure that it operates in the way that is intended, because it is such an incredibly important bill.

Before I get to the substantive matters addressed in this bill, I think it is incredibly appropriate to acknowledge the mental health workforce who care for consumers, carers and their families in my electorate of Tarneit and across Tarneit, Mount Cottrell and Hoppers Crossing. I would specifically like to thank those mental health nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, administrative staff, lived experience workers, consumer and family carers, alcohol and other drugs workers and of course clinicians who staff the Werribee Mercy inpatient units and community health services both on site and out into the community.

I would also like to give a special acknowledgement to the Hoppers Crossing Youth Resource Centre, which does some absolutely amazing work in my community of Hoppers Crossing, providing the wraparound mental health services that are so incredibly important to young people in Hoppers Crossing and indeed in Tarneit and across Wyndham, whether that is drug and alcohol work or whether that is specialist counselling. I paid that particular youth resource centre a visit only about a month ago after the Andrews Labor government provided it with money to do a major refurbishment of the facility. It coincided with a time when there were some horrible comments being made about our LGBTIQ community in Victoria, and the youth resource centre took it upon itself to hold an event where Wyndham's young LGBTI community could come in, could have morning tea, could interact with each other and could access the services and the mental health services that they needed at that time. Having a facility like that that provides those services in Hoppers Crossing is invaluable. Once again, I would like to acknowledge the amazing work that they do.

The act is a complex and in-depth piece of legislation, which was developed as quickly as possible to meet the time frames recommended by that incredibly important royal commission.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The time has come under sessional orders to interrupt business. The member may continue his speech when we return to the bill.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Seville Recreation Reserve pavilion

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:00): (221) Seville Football Netball Club, Seville Cricket Club and the entire Seville and Yarra Valley community want to know when the government will deliver its promised upgrades to the pavilion at Seville Recreation Reserve. Only months after a \$5 million promise was made to our community for these facility upgrades, the state budget handed down just one month ago had no provision of funds expressly for this project, not a single cent allocated and no certainty that the \$5 million was even set aside for Seville. In fact Seville did not even rate a mention in the Andrews Labor government's state budget. No wonder local residents think that this is yet another broken promise by this tired Labor government. The action I seek is for the Minister for Community Sport to detail: where – in what budget paper and on what page – the commitment is for Seville Recreation Reserve with upgrades to the pavilion, including the female-friendly change rooms, and in what year of this term these works will be completed.

The dedicated volunteers at Seville sporting clubs, such as Mick Shore, Kane Shore, Paul Bailey, Wayne Baker, Rod Pearse and so many others – sorry to those that I have missed out mentioning – have done a wonderful job over many years to advocate for these facility upgrades for Seville, and they deserve certainty and details. The Yarra Ranges council also deserves details and to be engaged in this process for their asset, because it is not even included as a priority project by the Yarra Ranges council in their advocacy agenda, and no-one has any details from this Labor government about this commitment or when they will see any of the \$5 million promised.

The Seville community is long overdue for investment by the Andrews Labor government, and I will keep working hard with the residents of Seville and the entire Yarra Valley to ensure that this is not another broken promise by this government and that these pavilion upgrades will be delivered for the Seville community.

Energy policy

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:02): (222) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission. I deliberately refer to all of the minister's portfolios, because the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree to meet with relevant stakeholders and local organisations about how the Andrews Labor government is supporting households with their energy bills, bringing back the SEC, accelerating clean energy investment in Victoria's economy and reducing emissions.

I wish to thank the minister for her support of Wendouree households through the latest round of the power saving bonus. The \$250 energy payment is providing important financial relief for Wendouree constituents and has been very much appreciated by the nearly 30,000 residents across Ballarat who have applied for the power saving bonus. I am pleased that we are encouraging households to review their current energy provider and check if they are getting the best offer. This is significant, because through the Victorian Energy Compare website energy consumers can compare offers and information in order to make informed choices about their household energy costs and potentially make real savings. After logging on, I found a cheaper deal and have recently switched energy providers to save money – a change worth making after being with the same company for 15 years.

We are a strong and progressive government, and I am proud that the Victorian government has set one of the most ambitious emission-reduction targets in the world – to cut Victoria's emissions by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035. Further, we are decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, and we have been doing this since 2014. Another important initiative being undertaken by the Andrews Labor government is ensuring all government operations are powered with 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2025. We have a lot to talk about, because the Andrews Labor government is doing so much to transform Victoria's energy sector, supply and sustainability. This includes the Victorian Solar Homes program, another way we are continuing to drive Victorians' transition to more affordable household energy, with the installation of solar PV, solar hot water and solar batteries.

I look forward to joining with the minister to talk to stakeholders and community organisations about how our government, the Andrews Labor government, is laying the foundation for more long-lasting change to our reliance on fossil fuels through significant investments in renewable energy across Victoria and bringing back the SEC.

Regional health services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:05): (223) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is a substantial increase in funding for regional health services so my community can get the health care they need when they need it. Regional Victorians, including those in Mitchell, Benalla, Strathbogie and Greater Bendigo, are bearing the brunt of the heartbreaking mismanagement of our health services by the minister. Our healthcare system is not just failing, it is people's families, loved ones and children suffering. When I say loved ones, I also include my two-year-old daughter Quinn, who last week was hospitalised with severe respiratory issues. Despite best efforts, our local hospital could not afford to stock the critical dexamethasone she urgently needed. We went by ambulance to the Northern Hospital, where she was in one of nearly 20 ambulances ramped at a hospital that had a queue to the emergency department that overflowed outside and in the rain. Minister, your inaction and incompetent management of our health system is failing our children, our families and our community, turning heartbreaking stories into a harsh healthcare reality.

I want to use this opportunity to thank from the bottom of our hearts our local healthcare heroes like Sarah, Chris and Harmony but also to apologise for the lack of adequate support they receive from

this government. But we cannot keep relying on these life savers to mask the management failings of this Labor government. Our health care, once a beacon, is crippled under the weight of this government's incompetence. The category 1 surgery waitlist for critical cases has spiked by over 45 per cent in three months, with a disturbing 147 per cent rise at Bendigo Hospital. Every person on these waitlists has painful reminders of our failing system.

One of these is Heathcote business owner Tracie, who in the past three months has attended Bendigo Health's emergency department three times and was told to wait 45 minutes for an ambulance while experiencing heart attack and abdominal pain symptoms. During one visit Tracie waited 9 hours before she was told the hospital was unable to provide a bed or CT or MRI scan. The crippling pain forced Tracie to go to a private hospital in Melbourne, where she was diagnosed with nerve damage from a fractured spine. Tracie had to pay \$2000 to receive the care that is being denied to regional Victorians. Both Tracie and Quinn reflect thousands of people in regional Victoria who are suffering from the disparity in healthcare investment between Melbourne and the country by this government. The ongoing neglect of our health system is perpetually deferring essential surgeries and undermining preventative health care. Today it was hard to hear the minister gloat about Melbourne being the centre for state-of-the-art medical research when I know there are people struggling to receive even the most basic of care in our regional communities. I call on the minister to act urgently. Pull your head out of the sand and confront the healthcare crisis. Every Victorian, irrespective of where they live, deserves quality health care. This is a fundamental right and not a luxury. Regional Victorians are struggling under the weight of your complacency and are paying an unfair price.

Banksia Gardens public housing estate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:08): (224) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me on a visit to Banksia Gardens housing estate in Broadmeadows. I am so proud of this government's investment in social and affordable housing with our landmark \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which will deliver more than 12,000 homes. In just two years more than 7600 of these homes have been completed or are in construction, and 2000 of those have households living in them or are ready to be tenanted. After 11 years of complete neglect from the federal Liberal government we finally have a Labor federal government who know the importance of making sure everyone has the security and comfort of a roof over their head and a safe place to call home. I was very pleased to be in the room with our Premier, colleagues, comrades and Prime Minister Albanese on the weekend when he announced the \$2 billion in funding for social housing to be delivered to states and territories within two weeks to get even more social housing happening quickly.

I am so grateful for the work Minister Brooks is putting in to improve social and public housing in this state. We visited the Broadmeadows housing office together some weeks ago, and he has been very supportive of the local multi-agency Banksia Now working group, which I have been chairing, to address some of the issues on the estate that have been detracting from people's enjoyment of their homes. I would like to thank the office of housing, Homes Victoria, the office for suburban development, Banksia Gardens Community Services, Victoria Police, Hume City Council, Broadmeadows Central shopping centre, DPV Health, the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Broadmeadows Valley Primary School, who have all come together regularly in the spirit of goodwill and cooperation to work collectively and achieve some positive outcomes for the residents of the estate. We have been able to achieve so much. Residents are feeling heard and responded to. We have had a reduction in dumped rubbish, vandalism and crime, improved lighting and maintenance and increased feelings of safety and community wellbeing. And in exciting news, we have been able to pull together funding to resurface the well-loved futsal pitch, which was damaged during COVID, and upgrade the basketball half court, improve paths and lighting and install a shelter for the community to come together. This well-loved facility was a focal point for youth of the estate to engage in positive recreation and provided a space for Banksia Gardens Community Services to run after-school activities.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the co-contributors for supporting this important project, with \$60,000 from Hume City Council, \$15,000 from Banksia Gardens Community Services, \$117,000 from Homes Victoria and \$107,000 from the office for suburban development. I would also like to thank Minister Spence for her support of place-based projects, an investment that makes a real difference to the lives of communities, and for her support of this work and the wonderful team from OSD, particularly Justin, Jordon and Andrea, who have helped pull everything together. Through the Broadmeadows revitalisation project there has also been other projects at Banksia Gardens, including the establishment of the Common Bean cafe, social enterprises at Kangan TAFE and DPV Health and funding for murals, greening, activation and the community connections project.

Non-emergency patient transfer services

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (19:11): (225) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for the minister to commit to opening up the tendering process for non-emergency patient transport as administered by HealthShare Victoria, which falls under the Minister for Health's responsibility. For those that are unaware, the NEPT sector are the ambulance transports you need when you do not really need an ambulance. The operators are medically trained, and the vehicles are for all intents and purposes an ambulance, but the primary responsibility here is to act as a pressure valve on 000 ambulances – the lights and bells 'save your life' sort of ambulance. Non-emergency patient transfers shuffle low-acuity patients to and from hospitals, to rehab and recovery centres. They free up hospital beds and the bed blockage by taking patients home and most importantly save the lights and bells ambulances for saving lives.

On 14 April this year the Minister for Ambulance Services talked up the NEPT as a critical feature of the health system. So it seems almost unbelievable that since 2015, HealthShare Victoria has not seen fit to tender these services – just the same contracts rolled over and over and now extending through to 2028. That is 13 years without testing the market. HealthShare Victoria's policy talks about procurement processes needing to support fairness, transparency, probity, security, confidentiality and value for money. How could they possibly know when the market has not been tested for almost a decade? You do not have to be Sherlock Holmes when you see where the market has not been tested, and certainly there are games afoot here in these circumstances.

Those in the industry fear the stalling is part of larger plot. They believe the current review is a sham with a predetermined outcome, one that has already seen the Premier drop sound bites badmouthing the sector as not value for money – remember that has not been tested since 2015 – and one that is following the blueprint of a hostile takeover not unlike the CFA. They want to get it out of the private sector and put it under the banner of Ambulance Victoria. This is just another example of the socialist paradigm – the tarring and feathering of small business as a pariah on society and the contest between ideology and reality.

Regional areas will be the hardest hit, and I am hearing the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which provides NEPT services in the Benambra district, is likely to withdraw next month. The bush telegraph tells me that the writing is on the wall and the review is just a paper trail to getting rid of private providers. In the interim, without exploring what other opportunities exist, Ambulance Victoria paramedics will be taken off life-threatening emergency responses and onto the shuffling of non-urgent patients. This is in a climate where we have two shires in Benambra district among the worst for ambulance wait times in the state.

Pascoe Vale electorate veterans

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:14): (226) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Veterans. The action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the steps the Andrews Labor government is taking to provide opportunities and support to veterans across the suburbs of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West.

I was very pleased to have welcomed Minister Natalie Suleyman to visit my electorate on 4 April in her capacity as the Minister for Veterans but also in her capacity as the Minister for Small Business and Minister for Youth. Beginning at the Coburg RSL sub-branch on Sydney Road, the minister was warmly welcomed by sub-branch president Michael Pianta and around 100 other local veterans and sub-branch community members. Originally formed in 1918 the Coburg RSL sub-branch is Melbourne's oldest continually operating sub-branch and is older even than the Shrine of Remembrance, which was not opened until 1934. For over 105 years to this very day the Coburg RSL continues to represent, remember and embody the service and the sacrifices that have been made by generations of local men and women.

Whether it be through the Boer War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan or various other confrontations and peacekeeping operations that Australians have taken part in, residents from my community and Melbourne's northern suburbs have always been there to answer the call. Along with many of their names being immortalised on the walls of the Coburg RSL, others have also been remembered through numerous war memorials and honour boards situated throughout my electorate, including at the Coburg Lake Avenue of Honour, Rogers Memorial Reserve cenotaph, out the front of the Coburg town hall on the cenotaph and also the Pascoe Vale RSL. With over 1200 local residents identifying as veterans as per the 2021 ABS census, and as the minister would have been aware through her visit, Coburg RSL members are very keen to hear more about the state Labor government's various initiatives to further assist local veterans through the rollout of a new veterans welfare card, veterans employment program, the work of the Victorian Veterans Council and much, much more. In doing so I commend the work of president Michael Pianta and all of the wonderful executive and previous executive members and volunteers who over the years have helped make Coburg RSL the best RSL in Victoria potentially. They have done an outstanding job in revitalising the RSL through the introduction of craft beers, food, live music, family events and so much more.

Following the Coburg RSL visit I was pleased to take the minister on a walking tour of Sydney Road in her capacity as small business minister to enjoy the sights, flavours and authenticity of central Coburg, which is the cultural heartbeat of Melbourne's north. Our first stop at the iconic Zaatar cafe on the corner of Munro Street gave us the chance to meet long-time owners and brothers Jeff and Charlie and to enjoy wonderful coffee and some of their delicious Lebanese and Middle Eastern inspired breads and share plates. Our second stop took us to Pictures and Pages, a local bookshop, to meet with owner Leeann Berger, whose gorgeous little store is nestled in Foleys Mall. Our third stop was the Pie Place, an institution in Coburg that has recently celebrated its 37th birthday and is situated in Walkers Arcade. Meeting with Justin, the Pie Place has the biggest and best variety of freshly handmade pies anyone could ever ask for in the northern suburbs. The final part of our tour allowed us to take a visit through the rest of Sydney Road, pointing out the new Pentridge visitor precinct and other places.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Shepparton I remind all members to refer to other members by their correct titles.

Shepparton bypass

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:17): (227) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and the action that I seek is that the minister demand that the federal minister for infrastructure and transport ensures that the Shepparton bypass project remains an active and ongoing project. We do not want to see the Shepparton bypass scrapped by a federal Labor government's independent infrastructure review. The minister must protect the millions of taxpayer dollars already committed to this vital project. The former federal coalition government contributed \$208 million after an initial \$10.2 million – Victorian taxpayer dollars – were enshrined in the 2017–18 budget for early works and finalisation of the business case, plus a further \$1.107 million and \$1 million in the 2023–24 budget for planning the bypass and improving links in Shepparton.

The urgency of this long-overdue project can be seen just in stage 1, which includes a second river crossing to remove the endless convoy of heavy vehicles from the CBDs of Shepparton and Mooroopna. The Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway, the only river crossing between Shepparton and Mooroopna, already carries 30,000-plus vehicles daily, and counting. When the October 2022 flood shut down the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway the impact was utter chaos, and delaying our first responders from being where they needed to be was potentially life-threatening. Shepparton remains the state's only major regional city without a bypass. This is astounding, considering more than 25 per cent of the state's trucks are registered in the Goulburn Valley and Shepparton remains a significant transport hub in both north-south and east-west traffic.

If the minister would care to stand anywhere in the main street of Shepparton or Mooroopna to experience firsthand the constant convoy of trucks belting through the heart of these towns, the excessive noise, the exhaust pollution and the heightened risk factor to pedestrians, road users or vulnerable tourists not familiar with local conditions, and also to take the time to speak to the many industries and small business owners and listen to the detrimental impact they are experiencing, she would be forced to agree this must be started now.

We are a progressive, productive region, one of Australia's most successful, and a food bowl for Victoria and Australia as well as international exports, all of which contribute so much to the economy's bottom line. We deserve to progress and to have an efficient and safe movement of transport. Minister, you are well aware of the long history and the critical need for this project. We need this bypass, and the future of this is in your hands now. Failure to save the Shepparton bypass from further delays or abandonment will have a significant detrimental impact on our region. I ask you to ensure that the Shepparton bypass remains a priority project.

Preston electorate homelessness

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (19:20): (228) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek is for the minister to facilitate a meeting between the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Launch Housing and Darebin City Council to discuss homelessness in Preston and Reservoir. Rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness are always important issues, but they are very much at the top of our local agenda at the moment. We are hearing about them from a lot of people. We are hearing about them from people who are facing real pressures finding rentals. We are hearing about them from our neighbourhood houses, who provide cost-of-living support and other services. We are hearing about them from some of our schools who support vulnerable families, and we are hearing about them from the police in some of the work that they do.

It is not easy to get hard numbers on rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness, but we are worried that there is a current upswing in our area, and with that in mind we would like to initiate a conversation specifically about the Melbourne Zero approach to ending homelessness, which is currently led by Launch Housing. It does build in some respects on the great work done by the Victorian Labor government during the pandemic, but the general idea of their program is that if you work quickly enough, you can ensure that more people are exiting homelessness than are coming into it, and that takes you to what people in the sector call 'functional zero'. It is not quite the same as zero zero because you can never have nobody entering homelessness, but the idea is you have the smallest number, and as soon as people are homeless, you are supporting them to get into housing.

I understand that the current CEO of Darebin City Council Peter Smith has some very extensive experience in this area. He was at the City of Port Phillip when they undertook their Port Phillip Zero project, also with Launch Housing, and I understand he was also CEO at Adelaide City Council when they implemented their Adelaide Zero Project, from which the Melbourne projects take some inspiration. So we hope that if we get Peter, his officials, the mayor, the departments and Launch Housing – I suppose all of them – together, they can look at ways in which an expanded homelessness program at Darebin can do a number of important things. It can build on the current Darebin assertive community outreach program, which is run with the great teams at Merri Outreach Support Service.

It could bring together a number of local organisations to coordinate their resources and support services, and it could establish some important tools that would ensure an evidenced-based approach to tracking and improving the effectiveness of services offered to those at risk of homelessness and those already homeless. Ultimately of course there will be questions of funding, but we think it is worth having the conversation to start with.

I know the minister is very passionate about addressing homelessness. The member for Broadmeadows already talked about some of his great work. We thank him for his consideration of this matter, which would help us greatly up in Preston and Reservoir, the cultural capitals of the north.

COVID-19 vaccination

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (19:23): (229) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to abolish remaining vaccine mandates in Victoria for all and to better support those with vaccine injuries. During the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria and across Australia, mandatory vaccine policies intruded into most aspects of our personal, family, social and economic lives, meaning exclusion as well as job losses.

To start with, I support vaccinations. I believe that they have generally done a great job globally in saving lives while reducing the risk of serious illness. However, as I said in my inaugural speech, people should not be forced, coerced or pressured on vaccinations through mandates, job losses, financial losses or exclusion. Vaccination uptake should only be based on education, persuasion and positive incentives. Mandates show a complete disregard for individuals' moral integrity and bodily autonomy and for the ability of individuals to make good decisions.

On 24 June 2022 the Victorian government largely finished the imposed vaccine mandates, yet employers can still insist that you get vaccinated, and nurses, firefighters, aged care workers, allied health professionals and others who refuse to take the vaccine are still shut out of working. This means less firefighters protecting Victorians, less aged care workers taking care of the elderly and less nurses and health professionals looking after the sick and vulnerable.

I have recently been approached by firefighters that currently cannot be employed due to personal medical conditions preventing them from being vaccinated or being further vaccinated for COVID-19 along with firefighters who have made the personal choice not to be vaccinated. Bizarrely, these same people can volunteer as firefighters at the same fire station, doing the same work, but cannot be paid.

I have also been contacted by many locals concerned about vaccine injury, including a lady I met with last week who tragically lost her husband, who suffered from an adverse reaction after taking the AstraZeneca shot. Further, today, just after 2:30, I was contacted by a Mornington constituent suffering from acute pericarditis linked to the Pfizer vaccine. I also have a family member who is no longer able to work due to a COVID-19 vaccine injury, but fortunately they have had good insurance coverage. Let me state it clearly: vaccine injuries are real across all vaccines, not just COVID-19, and those who talk about COVID-19 vaccine safety concerns or injuries should not all be silenced and branded as conspiracy theorists or anti-vaxxers. While vaccines are generally safe for most, vaccine injury is real and affecting many Australians. Mandates were wrong during the pandemic, and they are wrong now. I call again on the state minister to end mandates, including for firefighters, nurses, doctors and others in our system, and also to support those who have been injured taking any vaccine, including COVID-19.

Footscray Youth Advisory Committee

Katie HALL (Footscray) (19:26): (230) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at a meeting of the Footscray Youth Advisory Committee and meet with the students and speak to the members of that committee about the issues that matter to them. My electorate is one of the youngest in the state, and there are so many young people in Footscray who are ready to make a big contribution to Melbourne's inner west and to Victoria as a whole. Over the last few years I have been working with students from Footscray High's civic action

and politics class to answer their questions about government and bring their policy proposals that they work on as projects to ministers and to the Parliament. Let me assure you, I have had to take some of their questions on notice – they are a very bright bunch.

This year I have also created the Footscray Youth Advisory Committee, made up of students from a range of schools across the inner west. FYAC, as it has become better known, has met twice a month to discuss issues that matter most to young people in the inner west. I would like to assure the entire chamber that, in the words of a band from long before they were born, the kids are all right. They are more than all right. They are bright, they are caring, they are community-minded and they are ready to be brought into the tent of government and given a chance to lend their expertise to policy decisions that affect them. FYAC and my time with Footscray High's civic action and politics class has been a wonderful experience for me and hopefully for the students. I am very proud to acknowledge Bridget, Raysid, Imogen, Oliver, Taihan, Wallace, Mohamed, Angela, and Amal from FYAC and thank them for their contribution so far. I am very excited to see where they take the committee and what projects they decide to undertake for the betterment of our community, and I look forward to the Minister for Youth visiting and meeting with them.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:28): We will kick off with the member for Evelyn, who sought action from the Minister for Community Sport regarding the Seville and Yarra community upgrades at the Seville Recreation Reserve and where those commitments to the Seville Recreation Reserve upgrades are in the budget. The member for Wendouree asked for action from the Minister for Climate Action to visit the mighty electorate of Wendouree to meet with stakeholders about how the Andrews government is helping locals with the power saving bonus and other energy and cost-of-living measures, plus other climate change and sustainability initiatives that are significant policies of the Andrews Labor government. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Health in relation to action seeking a substantial increase in health funding for local health services. She particularly spoke to matters relating to her two-year-old Quinn, and the house certainly wishes Quinn well in her recovery as the member for Euroa seeks action on funding increases for local health services across Benalla, Strathbogie and other areas in her electorate.

The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Housing and sought action from him to visit the Banksia Gardens housing estate in Broadmeadows, particularly off the back of the announcement on the weekend from the Prime Minister of \$2 billion in social and affordable housing. The Minister for Housing here in Victoria has laid claim to some nearly half a billion dollars of that funding, which will benefit Victorian public, social and affordable housing projects. So the action there is to visit the Banksia Gardens housing estate in Broadmeadows and is from the member for Broadmeadows.

The member from Benambra raised a matter for the Minister for Health to commit to opening the tender process for non-emergency patient transport under HealthShare Victoria – I am not sure it is Health Purchasing Victoria. Those non-emergency patient transport services do of course take a lot of pressure off our first responders in relation to patient transports, particularly in rural and regional Victoria. They are the actions sought by the member for Benambra.

The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans, and the action that he sought was an update on matters to support veterans across Pascoe Vale and Brunswick West and the Coburg RSL sub-branch. I think that is the one that is set back from Sydney Road and was featured in a few CUB ads in the old days, and others – a particularly significant RSL sub-branch. He would know these matters well as a former adviser to the former member for Lara on matters relating to veterans affairs, so he is keen to have a conversation on those matters and see some actions locally in relation to the veterans card and other services that the Minister for Veterans is engaged in.

The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure seeking action to demand that the Shepparton bypass project remains and is actioned during the review that is being conducted by the Commonwealth into infrastructure projects. She is seeking action from the transport and infrastructure minister to ensure that that project remains on the agenda and on the list of projects to be continued during that Commonwealth infrastructure review.

The member for Preston raised a matter for the Minister for Housing in relation to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and in relation to convening a meeting of the minister's department with Launch Housing and Darebin City Council to discuss homelessness in his electorate, particularly across the Preston and Reservoir areas. I was pleased to catch up with the member for Preston across several of his local police stations just last week – both in Preston and Reservoir – and homelessness was one of the matters that was raised. I am sure that the Minister for Housing will pursue action on convening that meeting with Launch Housing, DFFH and Darebin City Council.

The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking action to abolish the remaining vaccination mandates in Victoria. The member also assured us of his support for vaccinations generally, but the action he sought was about those mandatory vaccinations here in Victoria.

The member for Footscray raised a matter for the Minister for Youth with regard to an action to see that she meets with the Footscray Youth Advisory Committee to understand what issues are important to them and those they seek to see advocated by the government and advanced by the government, given she represents one of the youngest electorates in the state.

I will commend these action items from members to the ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Correct weight from the Minister for Racing. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:33 pm.