

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 19 May 2009

Members

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Witnesses

Ms L. Neville, Minister for Senior Victorians,

Ms F. Thorn, Secretary,

Mr A. Hall, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services,

Dr C. Brook, Executive Director, Rural and Regional Health Aged Care Services, and

Ms J. Herington, Director, Aged Care Branch, Department of Human Services; and

Mr J. MacIsaac, Executive Director, People and Communities, Department of Planning and Community Development.

The CHAIR — I welcome Lisa Neville as Minister for Senior Victorians; Dr Chris Brook, executive director, rural and regional health aged care services, and Ms Jane Herington, director, aged care department from the Department of Human Services, and I welcome back Mr James MacIsaac, executive director, people and communities in the Department of Planning and Community Development.

I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of not more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the budget estimates for the portfolio of senior Victorians.

Overheads shown.

Ms NEVILLE — Thank you, Chair. I will run through quickly some of the achievements in this area, emerging challenges, and how through the estimates the budget addresses some of these challenges. The total budget for senior Victorians is \$1.16 billion in 2009–10; of this, \$1.15 billion is allocated through DHS to aged care services and tenure into the Office of Senior Victorians in DPCD.

A longer life expectancy is perhaps one of our greater achievements in the past century. Victorian men now have a longer life expectancy at 79.5 years compared to men in any other country: apparently Victoria is a good place for men. Life expectancy for Victorian women at 83.8 years is exceeded only by France and Japan.

Improvements to health and wellbeing have underpinned this achievement, and four out of five older Victorians rate their health as good, very good or excellent. These outcomes reflect an increasing emphasis on promoting healthy behaviours and communities, which is translated into long and healthier lives.

To prepare us for the changes that are ahead, as we do have an ageing population, we are in the process of developing and finalising an ageing policy framework that will inform Victoria's response to population ageing particularly in relation to planning and the coordination of government policy and programs to strengthen the health, wellbeing, independence and participation of older Victorians in the community.

The framework will have a long-term strategic outlook based on ensuring that the investments that we make now and in the future continue to contribute to improved good health and wellbeing, ensuring that Victoria is livable, safe and sustainable and that the economic challenges and opportunities are realised for senior Victorians.

It is vital that we establish appropriate strategies and resources for the growing numbers of senior Victorians, to ensure we meet their mental health and physical health needs and their economic wellbeing. The framework takes a structural ageing approach and addresses the key elements of our society and economy that will shape the future.

As part of this I asked my Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians to hold public consultations. In total they held 35 public meetings across the state, and in total we received over 1400 submissions from senior Victorians. We have also spoken to stakeholders and examined policy directions in other states and overseas to ensure world best practice. The framework also involves collaborative work across government reflecting all the policy areas, and will shape future activity in many areas of government.

In terms of some of the achievements, at the moment we help around 250 000 Victorians with HACC services every year. We have continued our commitment to increase HACC resources as our community ages. In community support services, over the last seven years there has been a nearly 50 per cent funding increase to the Victorian eye care services, with 74 000 people assisted in the last year.

We have also provided \$13.5 million for aged care support for the carers initiative providing respite services and support to 22 000 carers. We have also continued to invest in our positive ageing strategy which is a partnership with local government and also with COTA (Council on the Ageing). We have also continued our University of the Third Age support, and we have allocated 60 U3A growth areas which will see 70 new programs delivered across our U3A program.

We also have another very successful annual seniors festival with over 355 000 participants. We are also now in agreement with the commonwealth and rolling out the national reciprocal transport concession regime. The seniors budget initiative is \$49.8 million over four years to continue our contribution to HACC funding. This

will mean we will contribute \$11.5 million in the 2009–10 year. This will ensure an additional commonwealth growth rate of around \$17.3 million, seeing an extra \$28.8 million in this year for HACC services.

We also put in \$5.8 million over four years for an additional 4000 personal alert units. This program has grown from 8200 people having a personal alert unit in 1999–2000 to over 22 000 people now, and next year will grow to 23 000 people — a 184 per cent increase. There is further funding to roll out stage four of our aged-care land bank to help secure land in the inner city to provide residential aged care. We are also extending our men's sheds program by a further \$2 million. We have already funded 25. We have a new round currently under way and this will enable up to another 50 men's sheds to be built over a two-year period.

This budget continues to provide the commitment that we made back in 2006, which includes our denture program with 1500 extra sets of dentures to be provided in the 2009–10 year. An additional 3000 subsidised spectacles will be provided and over 1000 additional mobile eye care services will be provided to SRS clients. There is further funding for Carers Victoria for its training and education programs for carers, continuation of our dementia programs, and the continuation of our elder abuse prevention strategy — \$5.9 million — which will see the Senior Rights Victoria advocacy service continue to operate and the other initiatives that sit under the elder abuse prevention strategy.

There is also \$1 million allocated in 2008–09 for the seniors register initiative. I think all of these additional measures show our continued commitment to supporting services that make a difference to older Victorians, and I think we will continue to see the health and wellbeing of senior Victorians improve.

Mr NOONAN — I wanted to ask a question about men's sheds. I note a reference on budget paper 3, page 25, to a commitment to have people of a senior age engage in the community. It is a significant commitment to put funding up to develop up to 50 new sheds under this budget round. I am just wondering whether you can explain in greater detail why the government is committing to men's sheds in such big numbers, what the purpose of the sheds is and how they will support senior aged men?

Ms NEVILLE — Members might be aware that the Victorian government was the first government in Australia to have a specific men's sheds program. We know that as you age it is really important to continue to be engaged in communities, continue to be engaged with friends and provide spaces for people to get together to talk about health and other issues that they might face. This is particularly important for mature men over 50, and that is where the men's sheds program is targeted. It is about ensuring that we can provide lifelong opportunities for learning, that we can ensure that people have opportunities to volunteer and, importantly, for social connections. Men's sheds have been incredibly important in helping us to deliver that.

Some research that we did with ACFEB back in 2006 showed that men's sheds play a really important role in drought-affected communities as well. We have seen some of the new men's sheds invested in some of those communities. They play a role in reducing depression levels, reducing isolation and engaging men in other health, employment and education initiatives.

As you mentioned, we had a program that commenced in 2007 that committed \$2 million for infrastructure for men's sheds. So far 25 men's sheds have been established as a result of that. They are across our rural, regional and urban communities — for example, in Barwon south-west region, in the eastern metropolitan region there are 5 in the Gippsland area, in the Grampians there are 3, and in the north-west metropolitan region there are 4. These men's sheds are located in a broad spread. In fact 24 per cent are located in areas with populations of less than 1000 people. They are going into very small and often isolated communities, 44 per cent with populations of between 1000 and 10 000 people. Again there is a focus on rural and regional Victoria particularly.

They have been funded right across the state — for example, Bright, Benalla, Altona and Whittlesea. There are some great examples of the work they have been doing. Some are providing connections into adult education and some are building new facilities or toys or playgrounds for their local communities. Men are gaining something from it but also making huge contributions back out into their local community.

This \$2 million over two years will enable us to put in place we hope up to another 50 men's sheds. We have got the 25 already committed, 25 for the funding round that closes this week, and hopefully this \$2 million will enable another 50, which I think will be extremely welcomed by communities. It is an oversubscribed program. It is a very popular program because it is providing important social connections for particularly isolated and vulnerable men in communities.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 97, in relation to aged and home care. I understand that last year the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee had a review of the fabric survey. In the questioning that I undertook on 27 March 2008 — and this is on page 9 of the report — Ms Thorn in part of her response said:

The fabric survey itself takes quite a long time.

I then asked:

And when do you anticipate to have it done by?

Ms Thorn said:

We anticipate that it will be done — —

I said:

For the aged-care sector.

Dr Brook said:

It will be completed by early 2009.

My question is in relation to how we are going with the fabric survey in the forward estimates and the total output cost? Can we get a breakdown of what the increase in the commonwealth and third-party revenue is, as referenced in footnote (d) on page 99 of budget paper 3? How many facilities are now in category 1, 2 and 3 as a result of the 2008 fabric survey? How many of the 17 facilities identified in 2001 but not developed as of last year are now in category 1 and 2, and have they now been funded to fix their facilities?

Is there any funding for the category 1, 2 and 3 facilities in the forward estimates of this budget as a result of that review and the Auditor-General's report last year?

The CHAIR — Minister, I would like you to answer this one quite carefully because this is an Auditor-General's report which is currently before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and the committee has not reported yet. Therefore any proceedings of that, apart from the public hearing, obviously have not yet been reported to Parliament. I think you need to answer very carefully, particularly only in relation to the forward estimates. You can take the rest on notice.

Ms NEVILLE — I suppose what I can talk about — and I presume this goes to the issue — is the category 1 and 2 facilities that were identified originally in the Auditor-General's report. If I talk about those category 1 and 2 facilities originally identified in the Auditor-General's report and the status of those?

The CHAIR — The plans are in the forward estimates.

Ms NEVILLE — PAEC is aware obviously that the performance audit was done and was published by the Auditor-General in 2006. There were 11 facilities at the time identified as category 1 facilities. Of these, 10 facilities have been rebuilt or redeveloped and one has closed. All the facilities have met the commonwealth accreditation requirements. There were 33 facilities identified as category 2 facilities. To date, 14 have been or are being rebuilt or redeveloped. Two have closed, 10 have had service and/or capital planning undertaken and 7 have had no further detailed planning.

All the category 2 facilities, rebuilt or not, have achieved certification and have demonstrated that they meet the requirements of the commonwealth in relation to fire and safety standards and, where required by safety, upgrade works have been undertaken.

Over the last 10 years we have had a significant investment in upgrading — I think \$497 million has been spent on upgrading public sector residential aged care facilities. Of those, I think 45 out of 47 have occurred in regional and rural Victoria, and we have a number currently in the construction stage at the moment that were announced in last year's budget. So our program to upgrade residential aged care is continuing.

I spoke about it at the last PAEC last year and will continue to ensure that our residential aged care facilities meet the standards required by the commonwealth and meet community expectations.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Chair, through you again, I know we discussed this in March last year and I guess the issue is about the delay in our reporting, but that is a separate issue that we will deal with. I am trying to work out, given that there was a fabric survey which I understand was taken in 2008, it was anticipated that something would happen in the year 2009 and in the forward estimates there would have been some provision. You have obviously undertaken the fabric survey and from that analysis you have now determined what needs to be done and there must be something in the forward estimates to say, ‘Yes, we have identified these’ or am I sort of — —

Ms NEVILLE — The fabric survey, as I understand it, was across health so it was not just about aged care. There was a fabric survey; it is going to be completed this year.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So it has not been completed?

Ms NEVILLE — No. In this budget there are significant capital works for health services, so that continues. As I said, there are mental health service upgrades and redevelopment, there is the Geelong Hospital upgrade, Bendigo Health Service, so there are a number of significant investments that go to issues of redevelopment of health services more broadly, and they are in the forward estimates.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Ms Thorn said in March last year that the fabric survey was:

taking place now.

The CHAIR — March this year.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — In March last year you, Ms Thorn, said:

... it is taking place now.

I asked:

... and it will take the year to complete by 2009?

You replied:

Yes.

Ms THORN — If I can add to that, Mr Dalla-Riva? Yes, it has not yet been completed. It is a fabric survey of the total health system, so it is a very comprehensive one. We did say it would be done in 2009 but I remind members of the committee that very large parts of the department spent up to two months of early this year very much focused on assisting with the bushfire effort, and that led to the redeployment of large numbers of staff into that relief and recovery area. But I am happy to take it on notice and give you an estimated time of completion for that fabric survey.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Thank you.

The CHAIR — That would be good, Ms Thorn.

Ms HUPPERT — Minister, budget paper 3, page 25 refers to the government’s commitment to services that enhance the capacity of senior Victorians to maintain their independence and personal safety in the home and engage in the community. In your presentation you referred to \$1 million for the new seniors registers initiative. Could you outline for the committee what this initiative will do to enhance that aim during the forward estimates period?

Ms NEVILLE — The announcement in relation to the \$1 million investment to roll out state-wide seniors registers really came out the extreme heat conditions and the outcomes of those extreme heat conditions that we experienced at the end of January-early February. People may remember that we experienced in Melbourne temperatures of 43, 44, 45 degrees; on a couple of nights the temperature did not drop below 35 degrees; in some rural and regional areas — in Geelong, where I live — it was almost 49 degrees.

They were very hot days and we took a number of steps, as a government, in the lead up to that heat wave to ensure that all Victorians were aware of those conditions coming up and also what action they could take to take care and minimise the impact of those extreme heat conditions.

We encouraged people to be very mindful of people around them, ensure that they are looking out for their neighbours. We alerted health and aged care services about the heatwave and how they should manage heat-affected patients. Ambulance Victoria also had extra officers and services deployed. Personal Alert Victoria, which I mentioned before, is getting some extra money; it also provided an extra monitoring service for their clients, the 22 000 people they currently service.

But, based on the data that was collected — this is through the chief health officer — from paramedics, locums, emergency departments, the death registry and the Coroner's Court, it is estimated that around an extra 374 deaths were recorded during that period compared to previous years. Unfortunately there was a large increase, about a 64 per cent increase, in the number of deaths for those aged over 75 compared to the previous four-year period.

This has highlighted to us the need to add to the supports we have for senior Victorians, particularly those who are isolated and living alone in their communities. We currently have around 20 community and seniors registers operating in Victoria. They are run by community volunteers, often in partnership with local organisations — most with the police; about 18 are actually based at police stations.

They basically are a list of older people who are living alone and who want to be on a register and to be linked into some volunteer support. These people will receive regular contact calls. Some registers provide visits to check up and ensure people are safe and well. They hold information such as emergency contacts and any medical risks. In the event of any emergency, like floods, heatwaves or storms, the registers can be used to make sure vulnerable seniors are safe and secure.

They can be a very valuable resource for emergency services as well, if they need to contact next of kin or if they need information for evacuation purposes. We also want to target some of the seniors' registers to people who have a disability and live alone, because they often experience the same sort of isolation as older people in our communities.

They are a very important and valuable tool for social connection for people on the list. Many registers send out regular bulletins, they hold events, they make regular phone calls to check up, and they visit the homes. As I said, there is a register card in the event of emergencies, and they are coordinated in conjunction with the police, but they are really coordinated by volunteers — often seniors themselves who want to contribute back to their community and ensure isolated seniors have the support they need to feel secure continuing to live as independently as possible at home, and that is what we know seniors want to do.

This rollout will ensure that we can provide grants — provide the existing ones, but also roll out the initiative in those communities statewide who feel they may benefit from it.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the cognitive dementia and memory services (CDAMS). Alzheimer's Australia Vic in their dementia manifesto indicated that:

CDAMS capacity meets less than 50 per cent of current demand. Waiting lists are very long.

In response to a question on notice from the shadow minister, indeed Mr Dalla-Riva, you indicated that funding had been provided — around \$4.5 million for recent years — but no evaluation had been undertaken of the program. Why has that program not been evaluated, and is that the reason we are still seeing capacity far short of demand?

Ms NEVILLE — All services that we fund are required to meet outcome measures, report against KPIs — there are a whole series of ways in which we monitor the effectiveness of programs across our communities. For some of our services we have a consultant do an evaluation and ask, 'Are they working, are they effective?', particularly where they are new services. For others we require regular reporting against certain outcome measures. All the services, including that service, are required to be reporting against service measures.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — But you have indicated there has been no evaluation of CDAMS. The question was: has the funding been evaluated, and the answer was that it has not been evaluated.

Ms NEVILLE — Well, I suppose that is a technical issue about what you mean by 'evaluation'. Are they monitored, are they meeting KPIs, how is the service tracking? Absolutely, all of that goes on every year. And

where people have funding agreements they are required to report around finances but also around outcome measures — that is, how the program is operating, what difference it is making.

All of that continues as a continuous program of monitoring our services to ensure they are delivering the best service to their client group, as well as ensuring that they are meeting the community's needs.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The substantive part of the question concerned the funding, with Alzheimer's Victoria saying that there is a 50 per cent shortfall in capacity. When can we expect that to be met? They said the program is very good but it is 50 per cent short.

Ms NEVILLE — There are a number of services provided to people who have dementia. This is one of those important programs that do that, and we continue to support Alzheimer's Australia, as does the commonwealth. These are jointly shared responsibilities in aged care, and we provided additional funds in 2006 to roll out over a four-year period to this important service.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — How much funding was provided?

Ms NEVILLE — I would have to have a look at that.

The CHAIR — We might have to put that one on notice.

Ms NEVILLE — It is around \$2 million.

The CHAIR — Around \$2 million? Perhaps you can put a more exact answer on notice. Are we happy with that?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — We will take on notice, thank you.

The CHAIR — That concludes consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of Community Services, Mental Health and Senior Victorians. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. With the questions we have taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests a written response to those to be provided in 30 days.

Witnesses withdrew.