

# TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Budget Estimates 2019–20 (Corrections)

Melbourne—Friday, 14 June 2019

#### Members

Mr Philip Dalidakis—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallence

## WITNESSES

Mr Ben Carroll, Minister for Corrections,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary, Department of Justice and Community Safety, and

Dr Emma Cassar, Commissioner, Corrections Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Good afternoon, everybody. Now for the last minister of this 2019–20 Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and with that I declare this hearing open.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this inquiry into the 2019–2020 Budget Estimates. Its aim is to continue to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for generations of multiple different communities right across Victoria, north, south, east and west. The committee will now begin consideration of the portfolio of corrections.

I welcome the Minister for Corrections, the Honourable Benjamin Carroll, and officers from the department. I thank you all for appearing before the committee.

All evidence given is protected by the Parliamentary Committees Act. This means that it attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty, including a correctional facility that is far worse than any of the ones that you look after.

Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes, to be followed by the most insightful questions you could ever prepare for.

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Chair. I will begin my presentation.

### Visual presentation.

**Mr CARROLL:** Increased prison capacity and programs break the cycle of reoffending, and they are among the key initiatives in our 2019–20 budget to reduce crime and keep Victorians safe. Our government is investing more than \$1.8 billion to ensure our prisons remain safe, secure and able to keep pace with demand. This includes funding for over 1550 new beds in the men's system and more than 100 new beds in the women's system as well as significant investment in new infrastructure across the state. The expansion will include an extra 548 beds at the new Chisholm Road prison, making it the largest maximum-security prison in Victoria.

Our government's new corrections infrastructure projects are enhancing community safety while also creating hundreds of local jobs, with apprentices, trainees and engineering cadets comprising 10 per cent of all new workers during the construction phase of the Chisholm Road expansion. The planned expansion will create up to 800 construction jobs and when fully operational will bring 650 ongoing jobs to the local area, including prison officers, psychologists, teachers, administration and maintenance staff, and allied health professionals.

In addition to prison infrastructure, we are also investing in rehabilitation and support to tackle the causes of crime to reduce reoffending. This includes \$20 million to develop a new program for women prisoners, boosting mental health services and reducing incarceration rates of Aboriginal women. An additional \$22.7 million will be used to fund diversion, rehabilitation and reintegration programs, including continuation of bail support programs, regional employment pathway brokers for community-based offenders and extending drug and alcohol treatment services.

Victoria's prison population has grown by 79 per cent since 2010, with over 3500 more prisoners in the system. As at 31 May 2019 Victoria's prison population was 8112, including 7519 male prisoners and 593 female prisoners. The increase has been driven by more prisoners on remand, increasing from 18 per cent to 38 per cent of the population, as depicted in the graph in the middle of the slide. As at 31 May, 38 per cent, or 3044 prisoners, were on remand. This is an increase of about 280 per cent since 2010. Increases in Aboriginal and female prisoners have also been disproportionate. Aboriginal prisoners have increased by about 180 per cent compared to 72 per cent for non-Aboriginal prisoners, and female prisoners by about 90 per cent since 2010

compared to 79 per cent for female prisoners. The smaller chart on the right-hand side describes the growth in the female, Aboriginal and remand prisoner cohorts since 2010.

We have delivered beds to keep pace with the growing prisoner population. More than 2400 beds have been opened since 2014, including the new 1300-bed Ravenhall Correctional Centre; the high-security unit at Barwon Prison; new transition and reintegration units; and an allied health and wellbeing precinct, both the Rosewood and Marmak units at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, our flagship women's prison. Over 900 further beds were in the pipeline prior to this budget, including an initial 700 beds for the Chisholm Road prison. We have also delivered supporting infrastructure to ensure prisons have the amenity to support additional beds, including gatehouse, medical, education and program areas.

There is a further investment of \$1.8 billion—asset \$1.4 million, output \$394 million—in the 2019–20 budget to ensure the prison system can keep pace with demand and continue to focus on reducing reoffending. The investment will deliver more than 1600 new beds and supporting infrastructure, including more than 1500 male prison beds, including a 548-bed expansion of the Chisholm Road precinct to make it the largest maximum-security precinct in the state. It will now include 1240 beds all up.

There is a new 66-bed reception unit, including a 40-bed management unit and a new reception centre at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre based on trauma-informed design, supporting infrastructure such as new buildings for industry, visitor centres, medical and clinical administration, and prisoner program buildings. The images are design concepts at the moment for the Chisholm Road prison.

We are continuing to plan for the future to ensure efficient operation of the justice system more broadly. Six million dollars has been allocated to this budget for detailed planning, design and community consultation on a new custody and court complex in the CBD. Planned to be built on state-owned land, the complex will deliver short-stay cells and additional courts to enable the criminal justice system to better manage growth in prisoner numbers, particularly at the front end. It represents an innovative proposal to divert short-term remandees from the prison system and facilitate greater efficiency in bail and remand hearings.

The chart shows the number of prisoners who leave prison each year after less than one month having spent no time under sentence has doubled between 2013–14 and 2017–18. This figure was over 2100 in 2017–18 and represents around half of all prisoners leaving from remand-only episodes.

We have overseen implementation of significant reforms to Victoria's parole system, with completion rates for parole significantly higher than they were in 2014. The expected outcome for parole order completions in 2018–19 is 81.3 per cent. We have funded and acquitted all 35 recommendations of the Harper review—the biggest reforms to the post-sentencing scheme since it was introduced in 2005. The 20-bed secure Rivergum Residential Treatment Centre opened in late 2018, and a new 10-bed detention unit at Barwon Prison is scheduled to commence operations in the middle of this year.

We have invested in reforms in community corrections operations to respond to the changing needs of offenders in the community. Practice and workforce changes, along with the new service delivery model, are providing for more intensive case management and improved access to target rehabilitation and support services. However, we always know there is more work to do. Investment in programs and services to reduce reoffending is keeping pace with the expanding prison infrastructure. The current budget investment builds on \$123 million allocated to rehabilitation and reintegration programs in 2018–19. As a result more prisons are receiving programs, including drug and alcohol programs and programs to address sexual and violent offending more so than in previous years. We invested more than \$19 million over the last four budgets to ensure tailored responses to family violence across the corrections system as part of our unprecedented whole-of-government funding commitment that followed Australia's first royal commission.

Current correctional responses include the men's behaviour change programs delivered in the community as well as the Out of the Dark recovery program and specialist trauma counselling for female prisoners at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison. Following expansion in the 2017–18 budget, the number of prisoners accessing post-release services is also increasing. By 2019–20 there will be 3000 post-release support places available, more than tripling those available prior to this investment.

Growth in the prisoner recidivism rate has stabilised and the rate has declined since 2014–15. The rate of return to prison—the percentage of recidivism—is based on prisoners discharged after serving a sentence who return with a new sentence within two years. The rate of recidivism for 2014–15 relates to prisoners discharged in 2012–13. The expected 2018–19 result and actual 2017–18 performance have been influenced by those prisoners who do reoffend being returned to custody more quickly than has tended to occur previously. This is largely due to the growth in the number of remandees as bail reforms have taken effect. Prisoners who initially return to prison on remand, who stay on remand prior to receiving a sentence of imprisonment, are in effect counted as returned to custody from the date they are first remanded. This is much sooner than would normally have occurred and has seen sentences to imprisonment from bail in the community as well as what was common previously. Now that the impact of additional police and the sentencing and bail reforms has begun to stabilise, we do expect our work to reduce recidivism to be reflected in this matter. That, Chair, is the conclusion of my presentation.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that, Minister, especially given that you have come in 2 minutes under budget. May you run the portfolio as efficiently as you ran your presentation. That means we move straight to Mr Richardson.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Minister, I want to refer you to budget paper 3, page 90, and the line item referring to ‘Prisoner supervision and support’ and men’s and women’s prison system capacity. Can you explain why the government has chosen to make these investments?

**Mr CARROLL:** I thank Mr Richardson for his question. I think when you address this question, first and foremost, you need to put it in the context of our investments in the first term of office. We made substantial reform through our community safety statement than even the previous government and with the abolition of suspended sentences, reforms to bail, parole, the record investment in Victoria Police we have indeed seen our prison system grow, both male and female. On top of that, though, we have made substantial reform to cater for that growth, and I am very proud that this budget delivers on our commitment—\$1.8 billion.

The Ombudsman herself predicted back in 2015 that we would probably be about 8100, 8200, 8300 prisoners in the middle of 2019, so this is nothing new. The corrections commissioner and her team and staff deserve to be congratulated for being able to manage the growth, and that is what this budget delivers on. That is what that budget item delivers on. So you are seeing the investment made, you are seeing the Chisholm Road facility be built to its initially planned capacity, but you are also then seeing what we really want to address for the first time—about \$43 million to go towards rehabilitation. What I am particularly proud of on the back of the growth in female prison numbers is \$20 million, essentially the first time in decades, for us to have a very serious look at females entering the prison system and knowing that they are a different cohort to men, a different profile to men—generally doing shorter sentences, predominately victims of family violence. That is what this budget does. It builds the capacity for the future while doing that work to try and drive the recidivism rate down. Yes, I am proud it is lower than when we came to office, but with the recidivism rate there is always more to do. That also goes to some of my colleagues’ investments, including Education State, reforming TAFE and focusing on the early years.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Minister, let us go into a bit about recidivism. According to budget paper 3, page 270, the line item ‘Rate of return to prison within two years’ sets a target of 41 per cent for these measures in 2019–20. Beyond increasing prison capacity, how is the government working to ensure the 2019–20 targets of 41 per cent can be achieved?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Mr Richardson. One of the key components that we introduced as a government was employment pathway brokers, and I have gotten to see firsthand their work, particularly in Geelong but also through our TAFE system. We all know essentially the two most important things to address growth in the criminal justice system are a job and a stable home. As the former employment minister I have tried to bring that emphasis to jobs, jobs, jobs and TAFE training and TAFE training. We in Victoria, I am very proud, have some of the highest rates—we are essentially almost the leader in Australia—for employment programs and industry participation amongst our prison system. But we also know that when a prisoner enters the system for the first time that is essentially when the post-release work needs to begin. Giving them the alcohol and drug treatment program, giving them the investment to do a vocational trade, to do vocational

training, to get the qualifications and the certificate for industries in need and demand to exit the system and go on and live a life of purpose.

It also requires me to work with my colleagues. Obviously housing is a big issue for our prisoners, and the government has made substantial investments under Minister Foley and now Minister Wynne in addressing housing. We are very committed through our pathways, our bail access program, our investments in the TAFE sector within our prison environment and our investments in industry to ensure we can do everything we can to reduce the recidivism rate.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Going to women in prison—you mentioned that before, Minister—you mentioned that \$20 million has been allocated to programs to reduce the incarceration of women. Can you talk about this in more detail?

**Mr CARROLL:** I certainly can. This is an area of interest I have had for some time. I was very fortunate quite a number of years ago, through the Reichstein Foundation, to meet Baroness Jean Corston. She reformed the women's prison system in the United Kingdom, and her big statement essentially was to treat women prisoners as troubled rather than troublesome. What she was getting at there is that women prisoners are generally doing shorter sentences for less serious crimes and predominantly—and this is borne out in the literature and the Australian Institute of Criminology reporting—they are victims of either sexual, physical or emotional abuse. I got to spend, with the commissioner, my International Women's Day at Dame Phyllis Frost and got to meet a lot of the female prisoners firsthand and got to hear their stories firsthand, whether it be family violence, whether it be an issue with the taxation department that has led them into prison. I was rolling out the financial counselling Out of the Dark programs—all of that sort of information and support to get them back out in the community.

This \$20 million that we have in this budget will be groundbreaking, and it will build on the investment we have made. *Four Corners* did a recent program on women prisoners. Victoria did not feature in that but we have a 70-bed mental health and wellbeing precinct—I was very happy to be part of the opening of the Rosewood and Marmak units. We also have a women and children's program. We are addressing the issue of stripsearching of female prisoners and rolling out more saliva testing and more technology. We want female prisoners to feel supported. I think it is an area that has got a lot of attention on it at the moment, Mr Richardson. That is why I am very committed to doing everything I can to stop females going into the prison system, and when they are there to work with them to support them, make them feel dignified, treat them with respect and try and help them when they release. So we are rolling out a range of programs in post-release support as well—there are good mentoring programs available. We really want to support them, and if they do have children, support them with their children in Dame Phyllis Frost up to when they attend primary school.

There is more work to do—I get that—but I think we have made substantial investments. This budget paves the way forward to make some innovative investments too, but also for Indigenous women as well to make sure we have got the cultural liaison officers and the cultural support for them that they need that will be particular to their needs.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thanks, Minister. I want to go to education, training and employment, and I refer you to budget paper 3, page 82. Are you able to explain to the committee what the employment pathways broker program is and speak about the importance of providing offenders with employment opportunities?

**Mr CARROLL:** I certainly can, and thank you, Mr Richardson. I have seen firsthand the employment brokers and how they work. They are essentially embedded in different parts of Victoria to support prisoners post release. The employment pathways brokers have unique partnerships with social enterprises in their community. They are very committed to ensuring that exiting the prison system leads you to a job. I have got to see this firsthand. Down in Geelong, for example, the Karrenga prison down there the bakery for the whole prison system. If you are in prison, you get the opportunity to do the training, to do the qualifications, on essentially a state-based industry of pastry cooking and the like. I have seen how that bakery is then leading to not only young men turning their lives around and getting a vocational trade but as our hospitality grows regions like Geelong grow. They have the opportunity to then get work in a cafe, work in hospitality and to essentially find a passion that they have got and to become a sustainable member of the community. But there are record partnerships being done.

Our employment brokers are also working with our TAFE sector. I met an employment broker with the commissioner recently down at Holmesglen TAFE and saw firsthand really how the employment broker is literally using the instruments of our social procurement framework, our social enterprises, indeed our infrastructure building agenda, to find employment opportunities for people exiting the prison system. It is one of the keen issues that our government introduced, as I said earlier—the importance and centrality of a job and the economic sustainability that brings in tandem with a stable home. But employment brings so many benefits and it is a key measure that we need to keep rolling out. So you are in prison, you are doing the qualification, you are doing the TAFE training, and then our employment brokers are leading you to a job on the outside.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** So, Minister, let us deep dive a little bit further into social procurement. How is the government leveraging its major infrastructure investment, that we have heard about in evidence before this committee, to provide opportunities for disadvantaged Victorians, including ex-prisoners and offenders?

**Mr CARROLL:** I thank Mr Richardson for his question. Social procurement is an interest I have had for some time. We all talk about our Victorian Industry Participation Policy, but social procurement really is about getting the social dividend for our people entering the criminal justice system and then exiting it. We have a massive pipeline of infrastructure and work happening at the moment. Indeed we are in some ways a victim of our own success with there being a skill shortage. We are giving, through Kangan training, Kangan TAFE, lots of industry and employment focus in our prison system, right throughout the system, which is then leading to opportunities on the outside. Our employment brokers, working with our social procurement teams, are doing everything they can to lead to a job. I think it will be a critical area going forward. I want to give a pat on the back to a range of private enterprises out there. They are seeing it now as part of their core mission—social procurement—and giving a social dividend on the work that they are getting, often through government or other major contracts. So it can be a win-win. Many of these people, despite having a criminal record number, do want to turn their lives around. You have got to look at the social context—often what led them into prison. Most prisoners are doing a sentence of three years. You have then got to look at: how can we basically do the housing, do the employment, get them in the community and being a sustainable member of the community through a job.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thanks, Minister. I want to go now a bit more into the 2019–20 budget outcomes, and I refer you to budget paper 3, pages 81 and 90. Are you able to explain to the committee how the corrections initiatives outlined in tables 1.15 and 1.16 will improve the safety of the Victorian community?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Mr Richardson. As I highlighted in my introduction, our prison population has grown substantially on the back of significant reform—essentially beginning with the abolition of suspended sentences, reform to bail and reform to parole—on top of the biggest population boom since the gold rush and on top of record recruitment into Victoria Police. That entails obviously a bigger impact on not only our court system but then at the further end of our corrections system. So in this year's budget we are investing \$1.8 billion to ensure our prisons are safe, secure and keeping pace with demand. But more than that, I want to make sure as minister that I am not just building prison beds. I want to build the programs and I want to build the TAFE training and I want to build to ensure that our prison system copes with demand.

I am very proud, though, that the Chisholm Road facility, which will become essentially the largest maximum-security prison, will not only have our Victorian Industry Participation Policy embedded with it but we are also working with G21 and GROW in the Geelong region to see what sort of upside we can give to the local community, particularly any disadvantaged areas of the community in that region, so they have an opportunity to participate and be part of it.

Diversion, rehabilitation and reintegration are very important. That is why we are putting more money into bail support, and it is why out of my corrections budget too I am funding the Youth Junction, which is really a diversion program run in the Sunshine and Broadmeadows magistrates courts to try and support young people graduating from the youth area to the adult corrections system.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Minister, 1550 new beds in the male prison system and more than 100 new beds in the women's prison system is a significant undertaking. Are you able to talk about the government's record on delivering such projects in that context?

**Mr CARROLL:** I certainly can, Mr Richardson. I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, Minister Tierney, because what she has done in previous years has been substantial as well. I spoke about the investment in the mental health and wellbeing precinct at Dame Phyllis Frost, but we have made a record investment in post release and support. With the commissioner I went and visited recently the Rivergum Residential Treatment Centre, which opened up in 2018. This is essentially a residential treatment facility for the most serious offenders post release, and it came out of the review into post-release sentencing. I think when you look at Victoria's post release, if anyone visits Rivergum, they will see just what a world-class facility is and some of our most violent and serious offenders getting the treatment that they actually need. We are trying to get them for essentially the remaining period of their lives to have some sort of life and dignity to give them support. It is really world class.

That also builds on the investments we have made in Ravenhall, which opened in 2017—1300 beds—and the Karreenga annexe, which opened up down in Geelong in 2016 with 300 beds. Karreenga, next door to Marngoneet down in Geelong, is the one that essentially has the bakery that is servicing the whole of the Victorian corrections system. I met with the staff recently down there. They are very committed to enhancing their community partnerships in the Geelong region—social enterprises—and really the emphasis is on employment and basically personal growth to go on and live a healthy life.

On top of that, though, is our flagship women's prison, Dame Phyllis Frost. A 132-bed expansion was completed in June 2017. Also we know we have got a mental health royal commission underway. That will be very important for the criminal justice system, but we have also put investments through our 70-bed mental health and wellbeing precinct at Dame Phyllis Frost, including 20 dedicated mental health beds that were completed at the end of last year. We have also done an additional 48 beds at Dame Phyllis Frost, which were also completed in December.

We have had a substantial agenda in the first term of the Andrews Labor government, and it is very much a substantial investment—\$1.8 billion—to continue the investments we have made but to also tackle some of the causes of crime and reduce the recidivism rate.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thanks, Minister. You have focused on the government's ambition to keep people out the prison system in the first instance and then get them back on track to not reoffend, but I am wondering if you could take us on this occasion to speak a bit more about any other benefits associated with the Chisholm Road prison project.

**Mr CARROLL:** Certainly, and thank you, Mr Richardson. As I highlighted earlier, Chisholm Road will be a new large maximum-security prison down in the Barwon region—the Geelong region. Above and beyond it being procured under our Victorian Industry Participation Policy—so it will essentially be mandating that 10 per cent of the jobs go to engineering cadets, trainees and other young trade workers—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Have you got enforceable penalties for those?

**Mr CARROLL:** It will all come under the VIPP policy, but above and beyond that what is very important is that we are actually going a step beyond that and working with G21 and GROW Geelong. Down in Geelong we really want to make sure that the people that live in that region, whether you are in Norlane or the Greater Geelong region, actually have an opportunity to do a trade and be part of this project.

The other thing with prison builds is that they are more and more technical, world's best practice through security measures, technical assistance and crime prevention through environmental design frameworks. This will be a cutting-edge facility. If anyone has been to any prisons recently, Ravenhall, which has opened up, they are very modern and fit for purpose and are doing incredibly good work. Not only that but they have got institutions like Forensicare and things like that to really ensure as we move forward that there is that mental health capability as well. We are very committed to making sure Chisholm Road is a win-win for industry and a win-win for local employment.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Minister, in the 5 minutes I have got remaining I want to take you to reducing reoffending, and I refer you to budget paper 3, page 81 again. Could you please describe the 'Reducing

reoffending and improving community safety' initiative outlined in table 1.15, and explain how it will keep the community safe?

**Mr CARROLL:** Certainly. I will get to exactly our budget measures, but I will also hark back to the Ombudsman's report in 2015, because the Ombudsman pointed out, too, that our investments in the Drug Court, the Koori Court and the court integrated services program under the Attorney-General are very important programs that go towards reducing reoffending and reducing the recidivism rate. But we need to build on what we have done in that term of office, and that is what this budget does provide. I am very committed to ensuring the continuation of our bail access program, which is essentially a wraparound service delivering a range of accommodation options, case management support and housing, to secure and ensure that people entering the criminal justice system do have that option of housing. Our Bail and Remand Court is continuing to be funded; essentially we are ensuring that we have successful applications where possible at the first bail hearing, which is critical in terms of managing our court process. But we have also got the KickStart program, which is the forensic alcohol and drug treatment program for people on court orders with AOD assessment and treatment conditions, directly addressing that link between drugs and offending.

I also spoke about Youth Junction before, our youth community and law program providing a range of specialist services to young adults between 18 and 25 facing a criminal matter, which will hopefully divert them from the prison system through the provision of case management support. I mentioned mental health before. We are becoming a leader in youth mental health through our investments in Orygen and the work of Pat McGorry and his team at Headspace, and Youth Junction case management, the multi-agency panels, are critical in addressing, particularly, the front end of young people and that cohort that have a range of complexities. So we are very keen.

But the \$20 million also, out of that \$43 million, that is to go towards some innovative programs that will really target women in particular, with gender-specific and gender-orientated programs and support, I think will be wonderful. I would probably be remiss if I did not mention the appointment of Fiona McCormack, the victims of crime commissioner, and her leading expertise in CALD communities and support for family violence victims. I think she will also be a wonderful advocate as we deliver on this \$20 million investment and address real, specific needs of women and their reasons for offending.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** I have got a couple more minutes and one more question I think I could fit in. Can you give us further insight into the measures that will improve alcohol and other drug treatment services in Victoria's correction system?

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, Mr Richardson. Eleven point seven million dollars over four years is committed in our budget to continue delivery of the successful KickStart program and expand its geographic coverage. KickStart is an intensive AOD offending program for offenders who are subject to a community corrections order and who are required to undertake AOD treatment as a condition of their order. The program directly addresses the link between offending behaviour and alcohol and other drug use. At present four AOD service providers deliver the program in the community across 13 of our busiest community correctional service locations. Under the program offenders participate in either 24 hours or 42 hours of group-based treatment. I am very committed to addressing drugs and alcohol. In a previous role I sat on the parliamentary inquiry into crystal methamphetamine, as did the shadow corrections minister, and I think we know that there is a direct link between offending and alcohol and drugs when they are mistreated. So KickStart is very important, as is the expansion of the Drug Court. Prior to the trial of KickStart, offenders on community-based orders could only attend complex counselling services that did not address that specific link between AOD and offending. So we are very committed to ensuring that we have the workforce development, that we support and broaden our forensic AOD assessment tool for the program, that we identify risk early and that the appropriate treatment response is there.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** I might run out of time for this last one, so this might be on notice, but this is going to women prisoners, budget paper 3, pages 81 and 90, which you have outlined, and mental health support for women. We know women prisoners experience a number of specific issues, including complex and varied mental health issues. You might have to take this on notice, but can you tell us how the investment in the correction system responds to these needs?

**The CHAIR:** Unfortunately not ‘might’ but will have to take that on notice as we move to the Deputy Chair.

**Mr RIORDAN:** My first question rolling out is, Minister, the budget papers confirm that total output funding for prisoner supervision and support at the departmental objective has risen by more than 75 per cent between 2014–15 and 2019–20. According to the Productivity Commission, this increase has resulted in Victoria operating the nation’s most expensive prison system on a per prisoner basis, while having the highest rates of recidivism in the country. Minister, do you admit that Victorians are funding, at \$323.82 a day, the most expensive, yet worst performing correction system?

**Mr CARROLL:** I do not mean to correct the Deputy Chair, but he is wrong to say that we have the highest recidivism rate in the country. If anything, we are below the national average. The recidivism rate is lower than when we came to office, and in terms of the—

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not sure your own graph says that.

**Mr CARROLL:** We are below the national average, and you will find other states—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Are you still confirming that the graph is wrong?

**Mr CARROLL:** I am confirming that our prisoner population has more out-of-cell hours than the national average, our recidivism rate is below the national average, and we are almost the leader in the country in terms of employment and industry participation in our prison system.

**Mr RIORDAN:** That was not my question. My question was how much is it costing, Minister?

**Mr CARROLL:** Your question went to the heart of the cost. Yes, and you cannot compare apples with oranges. It is really looking at what each prison—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So it is true we have the highest cost per prisoner bed?

**Mr CARROLL:** We have one of the best-managed prison systems in the country. There has been some recent literature comparing us to other jurisdictions, and I highlight the fact that we did not appear on the *Four Corners* program more recently. We have more time out of cells—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So, Minister, just to confirm, we have got the highest rate per prisoner bed—the highest cost per prisoner bed numbers?

**Mr CARROLL:** But what I am getting at, Deputy Chair, is when you look at—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Well, you are putting a spin on it; I get that because that is what you are paid to do.

**Mr CARROLL:** When you look at the costs, you have got to take it in the context of which prison. One prison is not comparable to another prison. Each bed is different and each prison has a different range of programs.

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, we are talking about the budget figure—how much it is costing us in Victoria to house our prisoners, and we have the highest cost per prisoner.

**Mr CARROLL:** Below the national average recidivism rate, more out-of-cell hours than the national average, and almost the top of the chart in leading on—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. Minister, the 2019–20 justice and community safety questionnaire shows expenditure on the Ravenhall PPP increasing from \$107 million in 2017–18 to \$176 million in the current 19–20 year—an increase of almost 65 per cent. Why have these costs increased so dramatically?

**Mr CARROLL:** Ravenhall is a substantial prison. I have visited it recently and seen firsthand the operations there. In particular it is running a very strong forensic—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Does it look 65 per cent better?

**Mr CARROLL:** It is delivering what it has been mandated to deliver, which is a real focus on forensic care, a real focus on rehabilitation and a real focus on TAFE and investment and industry. Prisons like Ravenhall—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Right. So have there been changes to the operation of that prison that caused the 65 per cent increase in costs?

**Mr CARROLL:** In terms of the operation of that, Deputy Chair, I will ask the commissioner if she would like to supplement what I have said.

**Dr CASSAR:** Sure. So there were a couple of significant changes in the first two years of operation; one is the scale up of prison beds. So they do scale up slowly—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So you have turned them into twin-share rooms?

**Dr CASSAR:** No, that is not what I said. I said they scale up slowly in terms of the build program and the decanting of prisoners in there. The other reason for the high cost is the significant investment into the 75 beds of forensic mental health. So this is intensive treatment for acute and subacute prisoners.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So there are a lot more services at Ravenhall.

**Dr CASSAR:** Indeed.

**Mr RIORDAN:** And have you changed the accommodation configurations? Essentially, you are putting more people in rooms in that prison.

**Dr CASSAR:** So the numbers at Ravenhall when they opened was for 1000; we scaled it up to 1300.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Right. So is that another 300 rooms or did you put the extra 300 people into twin-share?

**Dr CASSAR:** No, that was the master plan and built into the original design.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Right. So there was always supposed to be twin-share rooms or multiple-share rooms?

**Dr CASSAR:** There is a percentage of twin-share rooms, which is part of the design element at Ravenhall.

**Mr RIORDAN:** And is that capped now, or do you continue to put more prisoners into that space?

**Dr CASSAR:** Ravenhall is just sitting under 1300.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So it is staying at that figure? There are no immediate plans to increase that?

**Dr CASSAR:** Any plans to increase that is a commercial discussion with GEO, and I cannot actually talk about those any further.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So you are not ruling out putting more prisoners in more twin-share rooms in Ravenhall?

**Dr CASSAR:** Are you talking about—

**Mr RIORDAN:** What I am getting at is: you built the prison for 1300. Are you planning to put more people into that space?

**Dr CASSAR:** At this stage we are considering a range of options, but there are still—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So you are not ruling it out?

**Dr CASSAR:** There are still commercial discussions.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. Minister, the 2019–20 budget allocated over \$1.25 billion for an expansion of the men's prison system, including an additional 548 beds at the Chisholm Road prison, which you talked about extensively in your presentation. Up until recently the Corrections Victoria website stated that the construction

of this new prison was set to commence in early 2019, with completion scheduled for 2022. We are now halfway through 2019. Has construction started at the Chisholm Road prison?

**Mr CARROLL:** The works on the architect's drawings and the planning has commenced. Indeed, when we made our announcement for Chisholm Road, the community advisory group that is integral and working with the local community was up and running, and we are now going through the fine-tuning of that precinct. Bear in mind that Chisholm Road is adjacent to some already existing prison infrastructure and the community advisory group—particularly as we work out the Victorian Industry Participation Policy and we work through G21 to grow the Geelong region and look at employment and procurement opportunities, we want to make sure that the community are very much embedded—

**Mr RIORDAN:** But, Minister, you are already operating in that area, so I mean you should already be able to fast-track many of those conversations, because presumably they are conversations you are having on an ongoing basis in that community.

**Mr CARROLL:** I think you have got to be careful of fast-tracking conversations with the community, because you have got to consult with them and you have got to hear feedback—

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, no, but you are talking about procurement and other opportunities. They can all happen. My question is, and the question was: will it be finished by 2022 as you are publicly stating?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, everything is going in accordance with plans for Chisholm Road.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. Minister, given that the Chisholm Road prison construction has—well, I am saying it is delayed; you are saying it is underway and will be finished by 2022, against Corrections Victoria's own time line. Will you guarantee that this project will be finished by 2022 and that other measures, such as putting extra prisoners into rooms, will not need to be implemented?

**Mr CARROLL:** I thank the Deputy Chair for his question. So Chisholm Road currently is in the procurement process, and it is wrong for me as minister to comment on that—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Yes, we understand that, and you have said 2022, so—

**Mr CARROLL:** But as part of that 1550 men's capacity and additional 107 for women, we are now having a look at our whole Corrections Victoria system and how we manage that cohort correctly. As I also said in my introduction, remand prisoners have gone up substantially. One of things I have been impressed—

**Mr RIORDAN:** That is right. So you have made much of population growth and the increase in remand prisoners, and I think every cohort you could identify is increasing in our prisons; we understand that, and 2022 is quite a way away. We have had the commissioner say that you are looking at sensitive commercial negotiations to put more people in the same amount of space. Apart from that, are there other provisions you have made to house—presumably this steady increase in prisoners will continue and we have got 2020, 2021 and 2022—the growing prisoner population when we are still—

**The CHAIR:** Have you got some land you want to sell the government?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, I could sell some tents. I am thinking it is tents, or we have heard from other ministers of course that there is probably going to be an endless supply of flammable buildings that will be vacant and available that the minister might look at, but that might expedite their repair and maintenance. It seems the government is very quick to fix government buildings. But the serious question is, Minister: what are your plans for the next three or four years to deal with this burgeoning prisoner problem?

**Mr CARROLL:** To go to the heart of your question, Deputy Chair, we are building for growth, we are putting the beds in place, but we want to also tackle the causes of offending and the causes of reoffending, and that is requiring us to put more investment into our TAFE sector—

**Mr RIORDAN:** But presuming you have been doing that for the last three or four years, it still has increasing numbers, so what is the plan for the increasing numbers for the next four years until Chisholm Road is complete?

**Mr CARROLL:** There are a range of things. I also spoke of the very innovative model to look at the court and custody centre in the CBD, so \$6 million of planning has been invested in that: the corrections commissioner, the commissioner for police, the head of the Magistrates Court—this could be a really innovative model, we believe, to particularly address that front end and the growth in remand prisoners, who are doing—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay, so while we are talking about that, Minister—

**Mr CARROLL:** as I said in my presentation, a short stay. But on top of that, at the front end, it is then managing the prisoners that are sentenced, and that is why you have a record essentially \$1.8 billion, 1550 beds, 100 women. Deputy Chair, you have also got to think about: all the evidence shows that how you treat a prisoner on the inside is how they will come out in the community.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. So accepting that—that is quite good; I understand that—my question to the commissioner is: you have got accommodation pressures, we have got projects that the minister says he is talking about, he has got programs to try and slow the intake. Can you guarantee to the community that, under rule 11 of the Mandela rules outlining basic minimum standards for prisoners, at all times you are going to be able to maintain the separation between untried prisoners and convicted prisoners?

**Dr CASSAR:** We have a detailed strategy in terms of what we are going to do to meet the growth and sustain ourselves for the next three years. The minister spoke about the expansion at Chisholm Road. There are also a range of infill beds which we are fast-tracking and which will be designed through—

**Mr RIORDAN:** But can you make that public guarantee that you will at all times be able to keep untried prisoners separate from convicted prisoners?

**Dr CASSAR:** I can say confidently now we do not meet that standard—

**Mr RIORDAN:** You do not?

**Dr CASSAR:** and we have not for years. What we are trying to do is make sure that we have the systems and processes in place and the strategies to ensure that going forward in the next three years we can return the system and have the separation of sentenced and—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So it has been quite a long time since you have been able to maintain that basic standard?

**Dr CASSAR:** I would have to come back to you with the dates, but—

**Mr RIORDAN:** If you could, that would be good, take that on notice.

**Dr CASSAR:** Of course.

**Mr RIORDAN:** The funding provided in the 2018–19 budget for the Lara prison expansion project equates to approximately \$1 million a bed. The Macquarie Correctional Centre, a newly opened 400-bed maximum-security prison in New South Wales, was completed at a capital cost of approximately \$200 million, which equates to around half the price of what the Lara prison expansion is going to be. Why would the maximum-security prison system in Victoria cost nearly twice what it does in New South Wales?

**Dr CASSAR:** You have got to compare apples with apples. You are talking about the Macquarie centre in New South Wales. That is not a cell-design prison. That is a dormitory-style prison, and for a range of very obvious reasons—i.e. the human rights charter—we would not be interested in building those types of facilities here—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So their standards do not meet human rights standards?

**Dr CASSAR:** There are some human rights issues in terms of our requirements which would prevent them being built in Victoria. Needless to say if you have been to that facility, you will see the difference in terms of a maximum security cohort and the cohort that we would be building for, so Macquarie—

**The CHAIR:** Who is your shadow? They need to do more work. Who is it?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Chair, I do not need the commentary. I want to follow up.

**The CHAIR:** They are making you look like a goose, Deputy Chair. Who is your shadow?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I do not think—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** If you are meant to be the Chair of this committee, then have some respect for it, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** I am not 'meant to be'—I am the Chair.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** How about you act like a chair and not as a partisan commentator and let us ask the questions?

**The CHAIR:** That is not partisan. I fear for his reputation—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You are meant to be responding on points of order—

**The CHAIR:** asking dumb questions because he was poorly prepared.

**Mr RIORDAN:** That was not a dumb question.

**The CHAIR:** I just asked, 'Who's your shadow?'.

**Mr RIORDAN:** The commissioner has just told us, Chair, on the one hand they overlook human rights conditions and on the other hand they take advantage of them.

**The CHAIR:** Again, I am just trying to be helpful and look out for Mr Riordan's reputation.

**Mr RIORDAN:** It is not exactly clear where we draw the line.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You can be helpful by chairing the committee, not by offering partisan comments, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** That was not partisan; it was friendly assistance and help.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Minister, you made much of your endeavours in the Lara precinct for local procurement and other local components. We have heard consistently across the ministry of local content commitments which have been routinely broken with little capacity to reclaim or to hold the contractors accountable. Have you got measures in place with that local community, because there are many people in my community that actually benefit from that Lara prison precinct? So can those people be assured that when you say you are going to have local content and employment, you will in fact enforce that and it is an enforceable component to the contract?

**Mr CARROLL:** Essentially, yes, Deputy Chair. Above and beyond that, I want to say when we made our announcement for Chisholm Road, we were very committed to make sure that the community advisory group were part of the announcement. The chair of the community advisory group, you may be aware, is Justin Giddings, who is also chair of the Gordon Institute in your region and the chair of Avalon Airport. Above and beyond the 10 per cent mandated procurement, it is those employment opportunities for the community around the Geelong region—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Will there be penalties in place if those 10 per cent local procurement figures are not seen to?

**Mr CARROLL:** As I said earlier, there are two things: firstly, I will not go into penalties while the contracts are out for tender and are being finalised right now.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Well—

**Mr CARROLL:** Let me finish, because what is happening, though—

**Mr RIORDAN:** That is not going to put the tender off.

**Mr CARROLL:** This project will come—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Unless you are planning to not have anything to hold them to account, it will not matter.

**Mr CARROLL:** Deputy Chair, what I am saying is this project will come online post the legislation that was passed by the Parliament on local procurement and local jobs in the last term, which passed, I think, about a year ago, and it will also come online post the appointment of the jobs commissioner, which is essentially the new cop on the beat to make sure these projects are meeting their milestones and achieving what they do. So this project—I am very happy—is a new project post that legislation, post the appointment of the jobs commissioner and the local content commissioner, so it should meet everything, but above and beyond that, to think we have gone—

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not asking about the ‘should’. I want to know if you are going to be able to hold them to account.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I gave you the time to answer that, but we do need to move to Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Minister, Commissioner and your team, for appearing tonight—has it ticked over to night already?—late afternoon.

I would like to just go first to budget paper 3, page 81, and the initiative in reducing incarceration of women, in particular the targeted strategic responses to Aboriginal women, which you pointed out—record numbers of Aboriginal women in prison. What will be the specific targets for this program?

**Mr CARROLL:** I thank Mr Hibbins for his question. I sat down with the Koori caucus a fortnight ago and had a very thorough discussion with them on how we can embed self-determination in addressing the incarceration rates of women. The commissioner has seen firsthand jurisdictions overseas, particularly their therapy and healing units, and some of the investments we have made in therapy and healing will go towards that particular cohort. I have spoken earlier about what we need to do for women more generally, and I will come to Aboriginal women—

**Mr HIBBINS:** I guess I am just probably looking more to how you are going to be measuring the effectiveness of that particular program, and will it be with a reduction of Indigenous women being incarcerated.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes. So we have established a specific committee, which is the Women’s Correctional Advisory Service Committee. Indeed the head of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre was just recently recognised in the Queen’s Birthday honours. I have also met with Djirra, who are doing a lot of work with our women prisoners, particularly Antoinette Braybrook, and we are very committed to making sure that they have the healing environment. As part of Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4 we want to make sure that everything we do above and beyond employing cultural liaison officers and gender-specific training that we actually are looking at—

We have got \$20 million and we are going to look at innovative ways. One area we think we have got in the men’s system; they essentially have a healing centre. In Canada they have introduced a healing centre with great success for the women’s prison system. The commissioner and I are both very committed to addressing whether or not we could do some sort of centre like that in the Victorian women system. While we have appropriate gender-specific training and Aboriginal liaison officers, we do think we need to go that step further

and we are very committed to looking at world's best practice to address Indigenous prisoners, but particularly young Indigenous women prisoners.

**Mr HIBBINS:** I just want to go to the effectiveness of the other programs to reduce the incarceration of women too. Your slide indicated that there are 593 female prisoners, but you have indicated in the budget that there will be an increase of around 7 to 12 per cent in the number of women in prison. I am just wondering how are these programs going to be affected if you are already factoring into the budget an increase in women in prison?

**Mr CARROLL:** Certainly. I will get the commissioner to supplement what I am about to say, Mr Hibbins. We have seen an increase in women. Essentially it is growing at a fast rate. It has basically reached the stage where it is growing above the men's prison system. As I said earlier, shorter sentences, victims of trauma, often they are the primary caregiver and they are in there for not only shorter sentences but for very much less serious crimes. We also know with women prisoners we do need to look at that social context. They are predominately coming as victims to the prison system. So we need to introduce a range of gender-based programs and a range of trauma-specific programs to deal with what they have been through, that address sometimes their criminogenic behaviours but also support them too if they do have children, and we have been leading in this area through our women and children's program to ensure that we can address them and try and put them in their social context. But also too financial counselling is a big component of working with the women's prison system. But I will ask, because we are dealing with substance abuse and a whole range of other measures too, the commissioner to just supplement what I have just said.

**Dr CASSAR:** Both things have to occur. We have to ensure that we have got enough beds to sustain us into the future, but also those strategies around front-end demand, so diverting our women from custody and looking at legislative options in which to do that. All of those things are on the table, and for me it is a really exciting year because for the first time in my 22 years within the system we are actually talking about reducing the number of women in custody. We have to be able to both in order to do that.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes, unfortunately it has been going in the opposite direction for some time now.

**Mr CARROLL:** We are, yes.

**Mr HIBBINS:** I just make the point that it has been heartening to hear the things that you have been saying and I do not doubt your sincerity, but it feels like that with these programs coming on now, the massive increase over the last almost decade now and our spending \$1.8 billion on a new prison, in many ways we are acting after the horse has bolted. I suppose you can take that as a comment.

**Mr CARROLL:** I thank you for that, Mr Hibbins. I did have a discussion with the new member for Brunswick, because I noticed in his inaugural speech his interest in essentially our incarceration rate but also, with his health background, victim and women prisoners. As the Ombudsman said too, what we can do in our four walls, it is about what I can do in terms of housing, our Jobs Victoria program under Minister Pakula, giving them every support. I do think the appointment of Fiona McCormack with her family violence background will be very important across my portfolios, but important for the Attorney-General, the family violence minister and across government as we try and address some of these particular drivers that have led to women offending and going into prison. Essentially at the moment it is a bit of a national conversation and, while we did not feature on *Four Corners*, I think we have a lot of investments in place but there are other things to do too, whether it is addressing the issue of stripsearching, whether it is addressing gender-specific programs. I had a great day with the commissioner on International Women's Day there, but there is a lot more to do to support them.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Can I get an understanding in terms of the new prison build, the expansion I think to the women's prison and the men's prison? Is that a public-private partnership? What is the funding arrangement?

**Mr CARROLL:** No, that is essentially a straight from the state investment, that 1.8 for that 1550 male and just over 100 female. At the moment, given the growth in our prison system, we are managing a range of cohorts throughout our prison system. I can get the commissioner to supplement my answer. But in terms of the

public-private partnership, if, Mr Hibbins, you are asking if that applies to Chisholm Road, that is not the case. It is a straight government build, and we are in the middle of that procurement process right now.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Do you have the annual cost, once that is completed, of what will be the actual cost of running those existing beds?

**Mr CARROLL:** Once the beds become operational? That will be—

**The CHAIR:** Minister, you will have to take that on notice unfortunately. Our time in the corrections portfolio has expired. Thank you for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request.

**Witnesses withdrew.**