



**Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory**
Standing Committee on Social Policy

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023–24

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Standing Committee on Social Policy

Approved for publication

Report 1
11th Assembly
April 2025

About the committee

Establishing resolution

The Assembly established the Standing Committee on Social Policy on 3 December 2024.

The Committee is responsible for the following areas:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
- Community Services
- Disability
- Early Childhood Development
- Education
- Families
- Health and health services
- Homelessness and housing services
- Intergenerational fairness
- Justice Health
- LGBTIQ+
- Mental health
- Multicultural Affairs
- Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
- Seniors
- Social Housing
- Veterans
- Women (including the Office for Women)
- Youth Affairs.

You can read the full establishing resolution [on our website](#).

Committee members

Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, Chair

Ms Chiaka Barry MLA, Deputy Chair

Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA CSC

Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

Ms Caitlin Tough MLA

Secretariat

Ms Katie Langham, Committee Secretary

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About this inquiry

The 2023–24 Annual and Financial Reports were presented in the Assembly on 3 December 2024. Clause 4 of the establishing resolution refers all calendar and financial year annual and financial reports to the relevant standing committee for inquiry and report by 12 May of the year after the presentation of the report to the Assembly pursuant to the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004*.

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

Acronym or Abbreviation	Long form
ACAT	Administrative and Civil Appeals Tribunal
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACT Agreement	<i>ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028</i>
ACTPS	ACT Public Service
ACT ICS	ACT Inspector of Custodial Services
ACT YAC	ACT Youth Advisory Council
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AMC	Alexander Maconochie Centre
AMHU	Adult Mental Health Unit
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CECA	Children’s Education and Care Assurance
CHS	Canberra Health Services
CMTEDD	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
CSD	Community Services Directorate
DFSV	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence
DFSVO	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office
DHR	Digital Health Record
Disability Royal Commission	Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse and Exploitation of People with Disability
ED	Emergency Department
EPIC	Exhibition Park in Canberra
FOI	Freedom of Information
FOI Act	<i>Freedom of Information Act 2016</i>
HVAC	Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning
JHS	Justice Health Services
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
National Agreement	<i>National Agreement on Closing the Gap</i>
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme

Acronym or Abbreviation	Long form
NSW	New South Wales
OOHC	Out of Home Care
OVMP	Occupational Violence Management Plan
QONs	Questions on notice
QTONs	Questions taken on notice
SHRFV	Strengthening Health Responses to Family Violence
SOs	Standing Orders
TSA	The Salvation Army
UC	University of Canberra
VMOs	Visiting Medical Officers

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide an estimate of the timeframes required for the collation and approval of non-standard data for release to Committees.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government lobby the Commonwealth and NSW Governments for health funding based on the actual cost of service provision in the ACT, rather than the National Efficient Price.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government communicate to the Assembly the expected costs and benefits of Canberra Health Services moving away from fee-for-service models for Visiting Medical Officers to putting on more salaried staff.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government communicate to the Assembly what affect the move away from fee-for-service employment models is having on attracting medical professionals, and the impact on accreditation of all health units.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide greater access and transparency on key health data, including;

- Staff numbers and positions;
- Visiting Medical Officers; and
- Staff surveys on sentiment and how they feel about their workplace.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide regular updates on how the Integrated Operational Centre is working, including any changes to how medical professionals interact with the Centre and how it affects patient care.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide regular forecasts on the demand for health and hospital services, including walk-in centres.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continues the work on paediatric services across the ACT, including fully implementing the paediatric model of care in the Emergency Department.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a plan to ensure the level of healthcare provided in the Alexander Maconochie Centre is equivalent to that provided in the community.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that whole of government strategies and plans for which the Community Services Directorate has a coordinating role are:

- coordinated in such a way that all actions can be reported on by the relevant office;
- have clear expenditure reporting in place; and
- can be discussed in full at public hearings by ensuring officials from across directorates are present, where required, with the relevant Minister.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure programs are designed around measurable outcomes to enable outcomes-based reporting and evaluation.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the Safer Families Levy, including all income and expenses.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure appropriate coercive control training is conducted for all current police, healthcare, and other frontline workers, and that this training is also provided to all new employees in future.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that there are accessible, clear and consistent referral pathways relating to family and domestic violence for the culturally and linguistically diverse community.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government report on the specific actions being undertaken to address women's perception of safety as measured by Strategic Indicator 5 of the Community Services Directorate Annual Report.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government publish all directorate workforce gender equity strategies and action plans on its website.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prioritise increased funding to the Community Sector.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a dedicated Death in Disability Care review function.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide definitive guidance to the Office of the Senior Practitioner, the Education Directorate, and all ACT schools on the definitions and application of the *Senior Practitioner Act 2018* to enable consistent application of the rules, and ensure a safe school environment for ACT children.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that ACT Government provide an update on progress made against the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends the ACT Government provide a revised roadmap for the implementation of the changes to foundational supports in the ACT.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends the ACT Government publish a timeline for the consideration and implementation of the Carers Recognition Card.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure the relevant service provider is appropriately resourced to provide immediate support for Canberrans at immediate risk of homelessness or rough sleeping, and that data is collected and published on the percentage and number of successful callbacks performed monthly.

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government take appropriate action to reduce the average number of individuals confirmed to be rough sleepers, and report on the actions being undertaken.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government have high regard to the housing needs of Canberra's most vulnerable people when making choices on what to fund in future budgets.

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government take steps to significantly reduce the average public housing wait times across all lists as soon as practicable by taking measures such as:

- re-tenanting vacant properties as quickly as possible; and
- significantly increasing the stock of Housing ACT properties.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government increase the number of Housing Managers employed by Housing ACT as soon as practicable, and continue to improve the quality and accessibility of appropriate pastoral and mental health support services available.

Recommendation 28

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government advise how often physical inspections of Housing ACT properties are undertaken, and whether this is frequent enough.

Recommendation 29

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consult with the community when considering the sale of Housing ACT properties which are providing a community amenity, such as the Foveaux Street Peace Garden.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure grant funding available under the Safer Families Assistance Program be demand driven.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider whether updates to Part 2 of the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Directions 2024 are required to ensure easy identification and comparison of actions to implement commitments under:

- the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028*;
- the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*;
- the Our Booris, Our Way report; and
- any independent reviews of these documents, including the Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap Review and the First Nations-led review of the National Agreement.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government announce a roadmap for the transfer of Boomanulla Oval and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to community control, including a date on which the transfers will take place.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider ensuring that invitations are forwarded to non-Government Members of the Legislative Assembly for Government-run multicultural events.

Recommendation 34

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government strengthen accountability in relation to both the Youth Advisory Council and the ACT Youth Assembly.

Recommendation 35

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider providing a formal response to the *Listen to Me!* report.

Recommendation 36

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government review the priorities and culture in place at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, to ensure a more appropriate balance to place the needs of the individual as a primary consideration, within the context of a secure environment, and to ensure better connections and information flows between groups involved in the management of the Centre.

Recommendation 37

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government procure and implement body scanner technology at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, the ACT Watch House and ACT court cells as soon as practicable to eliminate the cause for strip searches to be conducted on children and young people.

Recommendation 38

The Committee recommends that any unqualified and inexperienced person employed at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre as a Youth Worker must be supervised at all times, and be enrolled in an appropriate training program to attain a qualification.

Recommendation 39

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide a formal report of progress on the 12 priority actions listed in the Strong Foundations Phase One Implementation Plan due to be completed in 2024.

Recommendation 40

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide ongoing updates on the 11 priority actions listed in the Strong Foundations Phase One Implementation Plan due to be progressed throughout 2025.

Recommendation 41

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure the scale of its Muliyan flexible education offering is sufficient to meet the level of need in the community.

Recommendation 42

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct rigorous monitoring and review of workplace incidents in ACT public schools and reports at least biannually to the Assembly.

Recommendation 43

The Committee recommends that ACT Government provide a clear timeline and engagement plan surrounding the Majura Primary School upgrades.

Recommendation 44

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide a clear timeline and delivery plan to bring all ACT public school heating and cooling systems up to standard.

Recommendation 45

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to engage with other jurisdictions to both widen the scope and expand the powers of early childhood education and care regulators to capture concerning operator behaviours beyond the area of immediate child safety and ensure stronger protection for educators and families.

Recommendation 46

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide an end of financial year update to the Assembly on the University of Canberra's financial position as at 30 June 2025, as provided for in section 35(2)(d) and Schedule 1 of the *University of Canberra Act 1988*.

Recommendation 47

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate the long-term decline in university enrolments of male students.

Recommendation 48

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide sufficient funding to ensure Official Visitors are able to make as many visits as necessary to fulfil their functions effectively and reliably.

Recommendation 49

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore options for the implementation of a case management software system for use by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People's Commissioner.

Recommendation 50

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider whether further supports and safeguards can be put in place to protect young people and children in residential and Out-of-Home Care.

1. Introduction

Presentation of 2023–24 annual and financial reports

- 1.1. All annual and financial reports for the territory were tabled on 3 December 2024. A collated list of annual and financial reports is available online.¹
- 1.2. During its inquiry the Standing Committee on Social Policy was required to examine all or part of the following annual and financial reports for 2023–24:
 - ACT Health Annual Report 2023–24;
 - Canberra Health Services Annual Report 2023–24;
 - Corrigendum tabled 5 December 2024;
 - Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate Annual Report 2023–24;
 - Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2023–24;
 - Education Directorate Annual Report 2023–24; and
 - University of Canberra Annual Report 2023.

Public Hearings

- 1.3. The Committee held public hearings on 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 25 February 2025. At the hearings the Committee heard from ACT Government ministers, Official Visitors, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, the University of Canberra, and their respective accompanying officials.
- 1.4. Witnesses who appeared before the Committee are listed at **Appendix A**. Transcripts of the hearings are available on the Assembly website. Footage of the hearings is available via video on demand on the Assembly website.
- 1.5. Committees began collecting information on the gender of witnesses in April 2023, in response to an audit by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The aim is to determine whether committee inquiries are meeting the needs of, and allowing the participation of, a range of genders in the community. Participation is voluntary and there are no set responses. A table showing the distribution of witness gender is at **Appendix C**.

Questions taken on notice at hearings and questions placed on notice

- 1.6. A total of 179 questions were lodged during the inquiry: 88 questions were taken on notice (QTONs) by Ministers and statutory office holders during the hearings and 91 questions on

¹ ACT Government, Annual Reports, <https://www.act.gov.au/open/annual-reports> (accessed 15 April 2025).

notice (QONs) were submitted by Committee members and visiting MLAs following the hearings.

- 1.7. The answers to questions, and a list of questions (by subject, submitter, and recipient) are available at **Appendix B**, and on the inquiry webpage.

Responses to questions and Continuing Resolution 8B

- 1.8. Committees are established by the Assembly and share its powers and privileges.² In particular, the power to send for persons, papers and records is provided for under Standing Order (SO) 239.³
- 1.9. During the inquiry, four QONs were submitted to the Minister for Mental Health (QONs 29 and 30), Minister for Disability, Carers, and Community Services (QON 22), and the Minister for Education and Early Childhood (QON 41).
- 1.10. These questions sought copies of all handover briefing documents prepared during the 2024 caretaker period by the ACT Health Directorate, Canberra Health Services, Community Services Directorate, and the Education Directorate for the incoming Ministers.
- 1.11. The Committee received identical responses to these questions as follows:
- Disclosure of parts of the requested information may be contrary to the public interest. The appropriate mechanism to request access to this information is through a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2016.⁴
- 1.12. The Committee considered these responses and determined they included a claim of public interest immunity.
- 1.13. Continuing Resolution 8B sets out the process for Ministers and officials where they believe it would not be in the public interest to disclose information to a committee. This includes providing a statement of the grounds for that conclusion, and the nature of the harm to the public interest that would result from providing the documents to the committee, either publicly or on a confidential basis.⁵
- 1.14. The Committee wrote to the Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services requesting this information on 14 March 2025. Responses were received on 21 and 22 March 2025 respectively. Responses advised:
- There had not been a claim of confidentiality against the documents, however release of parts of the documents may not be in the public interest;
 - Assessment of the documents for partial release to the Committee could not be done within the timeframes for response set out in standing order 254A; and

² *Companion to the Standing Orders*, p 495.

³ *Standing orders and continuing resolutions of the Assembly*, February 2025, standing order 216; *Companion to the Standing Orders*, p 51.

⁴ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, *Answer to QON 22*, 18 February 2025 (received 27 February 2025), Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *Answers to QON 29 and 30*, 17 February 2025 (received 28 February 2025), Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *Answer to QON 41*, 19 February 2025 (received 25 March 2025).

⁵ *Standing Orders and Continuing Resolutions of the Assembly*, February 2025, continuing resolution 8B(2)-(3).

- The most appropriate option available to the Committee to request this information was through a request under the *Freedom of Information Act 2016* (FOI Act) or alternatively a QON in the Assembly Chamber.⁶
- 1.15. The Committee notes that the FOI Act does not contain any express provisions that diminish the Committee’s inquiry power or ability to request information. Freedom Of Information (FOI) processes take longer than the Committee QON process and include several exemptions which may not be applicable in the parliamentary context. There is also no provision allowing documents to be provided to the Committee on a confidential basis.
- 1.16. On 8 April 2025, the Committee informed the Assembly that it did not consider the Minister’s responses met the requirements set out in Continuing Resolution 8B and reported the matter in accordance with Continuing Resolution 8B(4).⁷ The Assembly passed a motion for the production of these documents in accordance with Standing Order 213A on 10 April 2025.⁸

Committee comment

- 1.17. The Committee acknowledges that a request for these documents can be made under FOI legislation or a QON in the Assembly Chamber, and that these avenues provide for longer response timeframes than Committee questions. However, in light of the powers provided by Standing Order 239, the Committee is concerned about the precedent that may be set for future committees by requiring them to request information via these methods. Specifically, the Committee is of the view that this could allow Ministers to determine what matters are disclosed to committees, a premise that was dismissed by the Select Committee on Privileges 2010:

This is at the core of all discussions of the application of the various immunities which may be claimed as a reason for not giving an answer in public – they are simply claims which must be advanced formally by the witness, by the relevant officer of a statutory authority or a Minister on the witness’s behalf. It is the committee’s – or the legislature’s - decision whether to accept a claim or not. There may be a competing and greater public interest in getting the information on the public record. Witnesses must not decide for themselves that a piece of information falls into a category which might attract immunity and on that basis withhold it from a committee of the legislature.⁹

⁶ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Mental Health, Correspondence received 21 March 2025; Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, Correspondence received 22 March 2025.

⁷ *Proof Assembly Debates*, 8 April 2025, pp 891–893.

⁸ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings, No. 16*, 10 April 2025, pp 206–207.

⁹ *Select Committee on Privileges 2010*, Report, pp 21–22.

Acknowledgements

- 1.18. The Committee thanks everyone who participated in, or otherwise assisted, this inquiry. This includes the ACT Government ministers, directorate officials, and statutory officers. The Committee extends particular thanks to the Hansard and Broadcasting staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

Data availability

- 1.19. The Committee received several answers to questions where data could not be provided. Most answers advised the Committee that the provision of data was not possible, because:
- data quality issues were identified;¹⁰
 - data was not recorded or centrally collated;¹¹ or
 - data could not be provided within the 5 working days provided under Standing Order 254D.¹²
- 1.20. The Committee maintains an ongoing interest in the answers to all these questions and would be grateful for the provision of responses even after the completion of this inquiry.

Committee comment

- 1.21. The Committee is likely to request similar datasets in future Annual Reports inquiries. Where directorates are able to advise an estimated time to prepare non-standard datasets ahead of the public hearings commencing, this will enable the Committee to consider what additional time may be required for QON and QTON responses where this information is requested.

¹⁰ See for example, Ms Rachel-Stephen Smith MLA, *answer to QTON 6: Adult Mental Health Unit*, 14 February 2025 (received 24 February 2025), p 1.

¹¹ See for example, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 42: Public School Programs*, 19 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 1, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 57: Workplace or occupational violence*, 18 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 3, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 75: Education – Carers in public schools*, 24 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 1, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 76: Education – Complaints in Public School System*, 24 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 1, Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, *answer to QON 87: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program Funding*, 26 February 2025 (received 27 March 2025), p 1, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QTON 12: Emergency Department presentations 2*, 14 February 2025 (received 25 February 2025), p 2, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 19: OneLink*, 14 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025), p 1, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 20: Housing Manager staffing*, 14 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025), p 1, and Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 40: Maintenance requests at public schools*, 20 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 1.

¹² See for example, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 1: Costs and relocations (Growing and Renewing Public Housing)*, 17 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025), p 2, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 10: Housing*, 17 February 2025 (received 13 March 2025), p 4, Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 58: Social Housing Maintenance*, 20 February 2025 (received 4 April 2025), p 1, *answer to QTON 78: Housing assistance fraud allegations*, 27 February 2025 (received 13 March 2025), p 2, and Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 81: Housing Modifications 2*, 27 February 2025, (received 25 March 2025), p 2.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide an estimate of the timeframes required for the collation and approval of non-standard data for release to Committees.

2. Health Portfolio

- 2.1. The ACT Health Directorate is responsible for providing ‘strategic direction and leadership’ of the health system.¹³ This includes several functions such as:
- Leading the health system across the ACT through the provision of policy advice, and planning, supporting and evaluating services, workforce, and programs;
 - Inter-jurisdictional engagement on funding and policy matters;
 - Infrastructure and resource management, including the provision of digital technologies; and
 - Reducing service demand through the provision of preventive health and health protection programs and services.¹⁴
- 2.2. Canberra Health Services (CHS) ‘is the ACT’s public health care provider’ and is responsible for the provision of a range of clinical services.¹⁵ CHS delivers a range of ‘acute, subacute, primary, and community-based’ services through the following facilities:
- Three hospitals (Canberra, North Canberra, and University of Canberra);
 - Seven community health centres, five Walk-in Centres, and a range of community-based health services such as early childhood services;
 - Specialist palliative care through Clare Holland House; and
 - A variety of mental health, justice health, and alcohol and drug services.¹⁶
- 2.3. Representatives of ACT Health and CHS appeared together across two days of public hearings for this inquiry.

Mental health

Matters considered

- 2.4. Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Mental Health on 11 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Funding for community-based mental health services and early intervention activities;
 - Transfer of people exiting the Adult Mental Health Unit (AMHU) to inappropriate accommodation, including aged care facilities;
 - The Towards our Vision: Re-envisioning Older Persons Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT Strategy 2022–2026;

¹³ ACT Health Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 32.

¹⁴ ACT Health Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 32.

¹⁵ Canberra Health Services, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 10.

¹⁶ Canberra Health Services, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 10.

- The Better care for our community – Housing for Vulnerable People 2023–25 Budget initiative;
- Transfer of children from the Children and Adolescent Unit to the AMHU and upgrades to seclusion and de-escalation areas at the Child and Adolescent Unit;
- Mental health Emergency Department (ED) presentations and emergency apprehension and involuntary detention data;
- Efficacy and capacity of the Belconnen Safe Haven and development of the Garran Safe Haven;
- Development of the Medicare Mental Health Centre for Kids and Medicare Mental Health Centre in Tuggeranong;
- Mental health funding models, data recording in the Digital Health Record (DHR), and cross- jurisdictional data projects;
- Cost of mental health services in both public and private sectors;
- Work underway to better integrate the Community Paediatric Service, Child Development Service, and the Child and Family Centres;
- Efforts to improve mental health wellbeing outcomes, including the Lived Experience Policy Team; and
- Outcomes of the cross-jurisdictional analysis of unmet psychosocial need under the *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement* and potential implications of changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.¹⁷

Key Issues

Funding arrangements

- 2.5. The Committee heard concerns regarding the cost of services across hearings with both the Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Health.¹⁸
- 2.6. The Minister advised that the cost of delivering health services in a small jurisdiction such as the ACT is higher than average:

It is the case that small jurisdictions have overall, because of the lack of economies of scale. There are some costs associated with being regional and regional hospital but there are also some efficiencies in having a live system. We have provided data to the Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority around the additional costs of being a small jurisdiction. All of the small jurisdictions—ACT, Tasmania and the Northern Territory—have been arguing in the context of the National Health Reform Agreement that there should be a small jurisdiction supplementation on the National Efficient Price, as there is for remote and as there is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and we do not get

¹⁷ *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, pp 77–104.

¹⁸ *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, pp 77–104; *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, pp 272–324.

either of those. So, yes, it is more expensive to deliver services in a small jurisdiction. Obviously, there are some elements of remuneration costs. We have relatively well-remunerated staff, and that affects our costs as well. It is definitely a factor for us that our lack of economies of scale and our competition with the private sector can mean that we end up paying more.¹⁹

- 2.7. In addition, the Committee notes the following evidence received from officials during the Minister for Health's appearance, in relation to the use of CHS by New South Wales (NSW) residents:

It [the proportion of NSW residents] generally tracks around one in four, so about 25 per cent of our occupied bed base is made up of New South Wales residents, and we see that is slightly higher in certain units. For example, ICU can get up to one in two at times.²⁰

Committee comment

- 2.8. The Committee is supportive of the ACT Governments' view that a small jurisdiction supplementation on the National Efficient Price is essential to ensure parity of funding across states and territories.
- 2.9. It is clear that, across our Health and Mental Health systems, there is a need for Commonwealth funding that reflects true cost.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government lobby the Commonwealth and NSW Governments for health funding based on the actual cost of service provision in the ACT, rather than the National Efficient Price.

Health and Health system

Matters considered

- 2.10. Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Health on 20 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Aged Care Assessments concerning wait times, the proportion of assessments undertaken in the community and hospitals, and federal aged care funding for ACT and NSW residents;
 - Employment models for hospital staff, such as fee-for-service versus sessional employment, and the role of Visiting Medical Officers (VMOs);
 - Data on trends in ED presentations with reference to the Acute Medical Unit and the new Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital;

¹⁹ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Mental Health, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 96.

²⁰ Mr Dave Pepper, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 274.

- The *Appropriation Bill 2024–2025 (No 2)* relating to:
 - the increased funding required for the operation of the health system;
 - the provision of advice to the Minister about increased levels of activity within the health system; and
 - the application of the *Financial Management Act 1996*;
- The DHR in relation to internal and external audits, functionality of the system, and training for staff;
- The provision of primary healthcare and bulk billing rates;
- Respite care access, with a focus on the planned closure of Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre;
- Recruitment of nurses;
- Staff morale and culture surveys; and
- The Workload Reduction Taskforce.²¹

Key Issues

Staffing arrangements and workplace culture

2.11. In January 2025, CHS began conversations with VMO staff about phasing out fee-for-service arrangements in favour of sessional-based contracts. These discussions and proposed changes to employment arrangements were discussed at length during the public hearings.²² The Committee heard that:

- The overall goals of shifting away from VMO fee-for-service arrangements to staff specialists on sessional-based contracts was to reduce staffing costs, and ensure that staff were ‘engaged in the business of the organisation including training, research and management of the organisation as a whole’;²³
- Conversations with various ‘craft groups’ of surgeons remained ongoing,²⁴ noting some specialities are more committed to the fee-for-service model than others;²⁵
- Changes would not be made to current VMO contracts, rather this would happen over time as contracts came up for renewal;²⁶ and
- There is a preference that existing staff stay on under new contractual arrangements where possible.²⁷

²¹ *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, pp 272–324.

²² *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, pp 275–283.

²³ Ms Rachel Stephen Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 275.

²⁴ Mr Dave Pepper, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 276.

²⁵ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 275.

²⁶ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 275.

²⁷ Ms Rachel Stephen Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 278.

- 2.12. The Minister emphasised that, any move away from a fee-for-service model would align the ACT with other jurisdictions:

What we have said is that we want to move towards the arrangements that exist in pretty much every other jurisdiction and every other major hospital network. They have moved away from fee-for-service models for engaging visiting medical officers. That is about two things: one is cost-effectiveness, and the other is engagement of those staff. Our preference, in a number of jurisdictions, is to have employed staff specialists who work on a full-time or part-time basis as part of the hospital team, but that is not the only option. We recognise that visiting medical officers are also a very important part of the workforce in every jurisdiction, and we have never said that we will stop having visiting medical officers as part of our workforce.²⁸

- 2.13. In a statement to the Assembly on 8 April 2025, the Minister addressed – in broad terms – the benefits which are offered from ‘phas[ing] out fee for service contracts’ in favour of additional staff specialists, noting conversations had been productive:²⁹

The majority of conversations with specialty areas that contract surgeons in this way have been productive. I take this opportunity again to thank the hardworking surgeons who have taken the time to sit down and have detailed conversations with CHS leadership about changes that can be made to deliver a more efficient system for patients and taxpayers. We have recognised from the start that VMOs, most of whom already work on sessional contracts, will continue to be an important part of the workforce.³⁰

- 2.14. There has been a significant media attention in relation to this issue, including coverage of the resignation of multiple orthopaedic surgeons.³¹

Committee Comment

- 2.15. The Committee acknowledges the Minister’s statement in the Assembly, and is of the view that the Assembly, and the community more broadly, would benefit from the provision of further information explaining the rationale behind the change and potential impact of resignations in some surgical specialties.

²⁸ Ms Rachel Stephen Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 275.

²⁹ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Proof Assembly Debates*, 8 April 2025, p 885.

³⁰ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Proof Assembly Debates*, 8 April 2025, p 886.

³¹ See, for example, Lanie Tindale, [‘Not easily replaceable’: sixth surgeon resigns from Canberra Hospital](#), *The Canberra Times*, (accessed 8 April 2025); Ian Bushnell, [‘Pressure mounts as sixth orthopaedic surgeon quits Canberra Hospital’](#), *Region Canberra*, accessed 8 April 2025); Lanie Tindale, [‘Huge amount of disrespect’: Coatsworth’s spray for resigning surgeons](#), *The Canberra Times*, (access 8 April 2025).

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government communicate to the Assembly the expected costs and benefits of Canberra Health Services moving away from fee-for-service models for Visiting Medical Officers to putting on more salaried staff.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government communicate to the Assembly what affect the move away from fee-for-service employment models is having on attracting medical professionals, and the impact on accreditation of all health units.

- 2.16. The Committee heard that ACT Health Directorate staff are surveyed regularly in relation to workplace culture.³² In a question on notice (QON) response, the Minister provided engagement data from 2024 and advised that staff engagement for Medical Officers specifically ‘remained steady.’

Table 2: Breakdown of 11 Engagement Questions results

Question	November 2023	Pulse Survey October 2024	Number of respondents
There is a high trust in the Executive Management Team of Canberra Health Services	21%	**22%	325
There is high trust in Managers throughout CHS	30%	**27%	325
There is high trust in the Frontline Supervisors/Team Leaders	64%	**63%	324
There is a climate of ‘Trust and Respect’ throughout the organisation	36%	**37%	326

Figure 1: Engagement question results for Medical Officers [source: Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QON 69, Attachment A*, 24 February 2025 (received 23 March 2025)].

- 2.17. The Committee also received engagement data for CHS following a whole of organisation survey which saw 10,979 surveys distributed and 4,505 responses returned.

³² Mr Dave Pepper, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 320.

The Engagement Questions

	Positive Rating	Last Survey
There is high trust in the Executive Management Team of CHS.	30%	32%
There is high trust in Managers throughout CHS.	42%	42%
There is high trust in the Frontline Supervisors/Team Leaders.	65%	65%
There is a climate of 'Trust and Respect' throughout CHS.	38%	40%

Figure 2: 2024 CHS Workplace Culture Pulse Survey results, Engagement [source: Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QTON 73, Attachment A*, 20 February 2025 (received 3 March 2025)].

2.18. Engagement data from CHS and ACT Health suggest there are:

- some similarities between Medical Officers and CHS staff views as a whole (trust in frontline supervisors and there being a climate of trust and respect); and
- some differences (with fewer Medical Officers having high trust in the Executive Management Team and CHS Managers).³³

2.19. The Committee remains concerned, in general, about these results. Officials advised:

The headline question about, “Does CHS provide a great place to work,” remains static. So that is still at 60 per cent saying yes and 40 per cent saying no. For us, that still says we have got a lot of work to do. We would love that number to be a lot higher.³⁴

2.20. The Minister added that changes had been made in response to the results showing poor confidence and trust in the senior executive:

One of the things that Canberra Health Services and I are concerned about...was in relation to the confidence and trust in the senior exec. There have been some changes in the structure and the work of executives to respond to that and ensure that people are closer to the front line.³⁵

2.21. Officials also advised that the Workload Reduction Taskforce has been set up in response to survey results, with officials noting that ‘the most common issue that comes up is workload for staff. They feel that they have got too much work and too many competing priorities’.³⁶

³³ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QON 69, Attachment A*, 24 February 2025 (received 23 March 2025); Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QTON 73: Culture survey results, Attachment A*, 20 February 2025 (received 3 March 2025).

³⁴ Mr Dave Peffer, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 320.

³⁵ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 321.

³⁶ Ms Rebecca Cross, Director-General, ACT Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 322.

Committee comment

- 2.22. The Committee is broadly supportive of the efforts described to respond to the issues identified by the survey results. In the interests of transparency, the publication of non-identifiable data on both the staffing profile and staffing sentiment of CHS would be useful wherever possible.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide greater access and transparency on key health data, including;

- Staff numbers and positions;
- Visiting Medical Officers; and
- Staff surveys on sentiment and how they feel about their workplace.

Integrated Operational Centre

- 2.23. Officials advised that the Integrated Operational Centre (the Operation Centre) has been set up ‘over the last 18 or so months’:

The operation centre is not anchored within a clinical division; it is anchored to the patient. It uses technology—the Digital Health Record—to map all of the points of congestion right across the health service so that we can track a patient’s journey right the way through and start to anticipate what they will need at a point in time and how we could start to speed things up—what a patient might need from the system and from our service, including the dozens of departments that need to come together to make something work.³⁷

- 2.24. The Committee was advised in a QON response that ‘The Integrated Operations Centre at Canberra Hospital has a live feed from the Epic Digital Health Record (DHR) to manage theatre scheduling’.³⁸

- 2.25. On 8 April 2025, the Minister delivered a statement to the Assembly broadly outlining the Operation Centre process, advising the Centre:

- Focuses on three streams of work – acute care, planned care and sub-acute care;
- Maintains a view of the broader hospital resource allocation;
- Plays a role in ensuring patient access to emergency surgery; and
- Focuses on identifying issues and constraints in the system early and working with clinicians to resolve these, including arranging additional emergency theatres or access to specialist care.³⁹

³⁷ Mr Dave Pepper, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 85.

³⁸ Ms Rachel Stephen Smith MLA, *Answer to QON 82*, 24 February 2025 (received 26 March 2025).

³⁹ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Proof Assembly Debates*, 8 April 2025, pp 883–884.

In relation to concerns raised by some surgeons regarding the Centre’s input into cancellation decisions, the Minister advised in her statement to the Assembly:

...CHS has now introduced an escalation pathway to address the concerns raised by some surgeons. The escalation pathway supports the Clinical Director for Surgery to be the final decision maker where there is a resourcing conflict...CHS is also continuing to work with the senior doctors to address concerns about the broader functioning of the Operations Centre to ensure that it is achieving the best outcomes for patients in their specialty area.⁴⁰

Committee comment

- 2.26. The Committee acknowledges the information contained in the Minister’s statement to the Assembly and considers the Minister should continue to provide updates to both the Assembly and the broader community as the Operation Centre evolves.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide regular updates on how the Integrated Operational Centre is working, including any changes to how medical professionals interact with the Centre and how it affects patient care.

Service demand

- 2.27. In February 2025, the Treasurer presented the *Appropriation Bill 2024–2025 (No 2)* which included an additional \$250 million for the ACT Hospital Network to rectify funding shortfalls associated with a substantial increase in demand across the first half of the 2024–25 financial year.⁴¹
- 2.28. Officials confirmed during the hearing that health system activity had ‘well and truly exceeded 100,000 additional patient episodes compared to the prior year’.⁴² Documents tabled by the Minister indicate her office was made aware of this increased demand during the caretaker period in October 2024.⁴³
- 2.29. The Committee notes that the Assembly has established a Select Committee to examine caretaker conventions following this advice, and as such will not examine this element of the Minister’s evidence further in this report.⁴⁴
- 2.30. The Minister advised that CHS funding had continued to grow to meet rising demand:

In the 2024-25 budget itself, there was an understanding that we had seen significant increased demand on Canberra Health Services in 2023-24 and there was quite substantial additional funding provided—at least a six per cent increase

⁴⁰ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Proof Assembly Debates*, 8 April 2025, p 884.

⁴¹ *Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)*

⁴² Mr Dave Peffer, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February, p 286.

⁴³ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *Exhibit 1: Correspondence from CHS to Health Minister’s Office*, October 2024 (tabled 20 February 2025).

⁴⁴ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings, No 9*, 5 March 2025, pp 110–112.

in Canberra Health Services funding year on year—to account for both cost pressures and demand pressures in the system.⁴⁵

- 2.31. The Minister noted that there was a known ‘ongoing risk’ in relation to health, and this was made public in the ‘statements of risks’ in the budget.⁴⁶
- 2.32. The Committee heard that when it comes to forecasting demand for health care, there are seasonal impacts: ‘It is quite hard to project from winter a straight line trajectory for the rest of the year.’⁴⁷ While seasonal impacts can make it difficult to project demand from one month to the next, the Committee notes that a range of data is now available via the Health Services Data Dashboard:

Comparison of monthly data with the same time in the previous year allows viewers to track year-on-year change at a glance each month. This comparison allows for consideration of the impact of seasonal variation.⁴⁸

Committee comment

- 2.33. The Committee notes the importance of maintaining reliable data based on acceptable methodologies. However, given the significant additional appropriation required to address the additional demand on the ACT hospital network, where appropriate data is available, the Committee considers the government should publish forecasting relating to the predicted demand for health services.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide regular forecasts on the demand for health and hospital services, including walk-in centres.

Paediatric model of care

- 2.34. In relation to paediatric care, officials advised that there had been an increase in presentations since the opening of the dedicated area for children in the Canberra Hospital ED, and ‘good feedback from staff and patients’.⁴⁹
- 2.35. The Committee heard that the provision of healthcare for children in the ACT – both in hospitals and across the Territory – was an ongoing focus for Government:

We still have a little way to go in terms of fully implementing the paediatric model of care in ED, including a short stay unit. That will form part of our winter planning for this year—rather than moving everyone from ED to a ward somewhere, when in fact they just need a little bit of extra care closer to the front door and faster, that is where we will be aiming to go; and broadening the idea of a paediatric emergency department, a paediatric department or a whatever to, actually: what

⁴⁵ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 292.

⁴⁶ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 292.

⁴⁷ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 293.

⁴⁸ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, *Answer to QON 81*, 24 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025).

⁴⁹ Dr Grant Howard, Chief Operating Officer, Canberra Health Services, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, p 285.

does the territory-wide service for children look like and is it integrated and joined up in the way we want it to be? That is a journey we have been on for probably two years now.⁵⁰

Committee comment

- 2.36. The Committee is supportive of further work being undertaken to plan and deliver a comprehensive suite of services for paediatric care across the Territory.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continues the work on paediatric services across the ACT, including fully implementing the paediatric model of care in the Emergency Department.

Justice Health

- 2.37. In response to a QON, the Minister for Health advised that healthcare in Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) is provided by Justice Health Services (JHS), and that ‘While JHS consistently strives to deliver health care equivalent to community standards, JHS does not have control over the wait times for community health care services.’⁵¹

- 2.38. The Minister also advised that work was underway by JHS in response to concerns raised in the ACT Official Visitors *Annual Report 2023–24*, such as:

- Aiming to commence an evening medication round to improve the appropriateness of dispensing times;
- Provision of ‘trauma informed care training’ for medical officers;
- Working to develop a ‘Prisoner Satisfaction Survey’; and
- Increasing visits to AMC by Dentists.⁵²

- 2.39. The Committee also notes with concern that:

Currently, there are no health care services provided in Court cells. The ACT Government has identified this as a gap.⁵³

- 2.40. The Committee observes that in evidence to the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, the Official Visitor for Corrections advised that healthcare within AMC was not equivalent to that available in the community:

...I do have some concerns...For instance, medications for the treatment of ADHD are much more difficult to get within AMC. There are very limited criteria.

Someone would need to be in formal education or employment et cetera and their ADHD would need to be a limiting factor before they might even be eligible

⁵⁰ Dr Grant Howard, Chief Operating Officer, Canberra Health Services, Committee Hansard, 20 February 2025, p 285.

⁵¹ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QON 74*, 24 February 2025 (received 2 March 2025), p 1.

⁵² Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QON 74*, 24 February 2025 (received 2 March 2025), pp 1–2.

⁵³ Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, *answer to QON 74*, 24 February 2025 (received 2 March 2025), p 2.

for ADHD medication, whereas in the community it is recognised that it may be useful for someone's everyday life. That would be just one example of where I would see things being not quite the equivalent to what is in the community.⁵⁴

- 2.41. The provision of healthcare within custodial settings is of utmost importance, given the fact 'detainees may have health needs greater than the general community and time in custody is an opportunity to address those needs'.⁵⁵

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a plan to ensure the level of healthcare provided in the Alexander Maconochie Centre is equivalent to that provided in the community.

⁵⁴ Ms Claire Doube, Board Member and Official Visitor Corrections, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 6.

⁵⁵ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023-24](#), p 11.

3. Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

3.1. The Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) is responsible for a wide range of government policy, including LGBTIQ+ affairs, policies and services (as relevant to this committee).⁵⁶

LGBTIQ+ affairs, policy and services

Matters considered

3.2. Mr Andrew Barr MLA appeared in his capacity as Chief Minister on 20 February 2025. The following matters were considered:

- Findings of the [Capital of Equality Community Consultation Survey Analysis Report](#) released in May 2024;
- Funding, resourcing and engagement activities of the Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs;
- The Capital of Equality Grants Program;
- Data gathering activities, including:
 - academic partnerships;
 - Australian Bureau of Statistics Census variables; and
 - Implementation of the Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Common Dataset;
- The [Capital of Equality Strategy 2024–2029](#) and the [First Action Plan 2024–2026](#);
- Perceptions of Canberra as a LGBTIQ+ friendly city and collaborations with ACT Policing to enhance relationships with the LGBTIQ+ community; and
- Health policies and medical protections in relation to the LGBTIQ+ community.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Administrative Arrangements 2024 (No 1), Schedule 1.

⁵⁷ *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2025, pp 60–71.

4. Community Services Directorate

- 4.1. The Community Services Directorate (CSD) provides policy advice to government and ‘a wide range of human services in the ACT’.⁵⁸
- 4.2. During the reporting period, CSD supported ‘5 Ministers, responsible for 11 ministerial portfolios’.⁵⁹ These portfolios included, but are not limited to: community services, homelessness, multicultural affairs, children, youth and family services, disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, early childhood development, and the prevention of family and domestic violence.⁶⁰
- 4.3. In addition to the provision of services and support to Ministers, CSD supports several ‘Boards, Committees and Advisory Bodies’ within the Territory, such as the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the ACT Youth Advisory Council.⁶¹
- 4.4. The directorate also coordinates whole of government work, such as the statutory reporting requirements of the *Multiculturalism Act 2023* and the implementation of the [ACT Disability Strategy 2024–2033](#).⁶²
- 4.5. CSD officials appeared across five days of public hearings for this inquiry.

Whole of directorate matters

- 4.6. The Committee observed recurring themes throughout several hearings with Ministers whose work pertains predominantly to CSD. These themes are examined below.

Coordination role of CSD

- 4.7. The Committee heard that CSD plays a coordinating role for several policy areas, including reporting and monitoring on whole of government plans and strategies.⁶³ Officials advised that while CSD may have responsibility for monitoring and reporting against cross-government plans, implementation of specific actions may sit with a number of different directorates:

In terms of the plan [ACT Women’s Plan 2016–26] there is a series of actions to which government has committed and those actions are allocated to different directorates. Our role is in coordination...It is a coordination effort for other directorates to give us advice on the actions that they have under the plan.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 21.

⁵⁹ Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 21.

⁶⁰ Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), pp 21–22.

⁶¹ Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), pp 29–30.

⁶² Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 33.

⁶³ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 158.

⁶⁴ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 35.

4.8. Similar arrangements were reported to be in place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs,⁶⁵ Seniors,⁶⁶ and Family and Domestic Violence.⁶⁷

4.9. Officials advised that consultation occurs with other directorates on the progress of actions as well as themes emerging from CSD's stakeholder consultation activities. During the Minister for Senior's appearance, the Committee heard:

For example, if, through that sort of stakeholder consultation process, people were identifying a particular issue as it relates to seniors, be it health or housing, we would work with our colleagues in different directorates across government to advise government on those particular things. In the Office for Seniors, like many of the offices that exist within CSD, we have a coordinating role.⁶⁸

4.10. Likewise, officials advised during the Minister for Women's appearance that 'at an officer level, the Office for Women coordinates and keeps an eye on progress, looking at where we are up to with each action and where we need to increase our coordination efforts.'⁶⁹

4.11. The Committee notes that while CSD coordinates reporting on actions against cross-government plans and strategies, this reporting appears to be at specific points in time, with some officials unable to comment during public hearings on the status of actions undertaken by other directorates. An example of this occurred during the Minister for Women's appearance where the Committee sought an update on the implementation of gender-sensitive urban design under the ACT Women's Plan:

No, it is for a different directorate. I cannot update you on what is happening in a different directorate. That is for Transport Canberra and City Services...With the reporting work, we go out to all the other directorates who are responsible for bits; we consolidate it into a single report which is then given to government. We do not have all of that input yet from the other directorates, so a point-in-time update now is really for the other directorates to provide on their individual actions under the plan.⁷⁰

4.12. The Committee also heard that expenditure could not be reported against specific items in relation to delivering the plan due to the way the ACT Budget is allocated to directorates:

...that is not the way in which the budget has been allocated, to enable that reporting to happen. It would require something specific to be produced and it depends, with each directorate, on what resources have been allocated and how they are therefore monitoring them...There is not a specific bucket of money for

⁶⁵ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 158.

⁶⁶ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, pp 246–247.

⁶⁷ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 6.

⁶⁸ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, pp 246–247.

⁶⁹ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth and Multicultural Affairs, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 35.

⁷⁰ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 28.

the set of actions; therefore we cannot report against a specific bucket of money.⁷¹

- 4.13. In addition to coordination responsibilities, it would seem there is also a division of work in relation to some policy delivery. For example, during the hearings with the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, the Committee was advised to ask questions regarding the Safer Families Assistance payment of the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs.⁷² Later, in a response to a Question Taken on Notice (QTON), the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs advised:

The Safer Families Assistance Program comes under the portfolio responsibility of Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. It is administered by Housing Assistance.⁷³

- 4.14. These responses appear to suggest a lack of clarity as to the responsible Minister for programs spanning multiple policy areas.

- 4.15. The *Administrative Arrangements 2024 (No 1)* require certain Ministers to have a breadth of responsibility (and therefore an awareness of the work occurring across directorates) to reflect the intersectionality of these policy areas, such as:

- Minister for Homes and New Suburbs (Homelessness policy, Housing assistance policy)
- Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs policy and services)
- Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services (Carers Strategy and policy, Disability policy, Volunteering Statement and policy)
- Minister for Seniors and Veterans (Seniors and ageing policy, veterans)
- Minister for Children, Youth and Families (youth affairs policy)
- Minister for Multicultural Affairs (multicultural affairs policy and services); and
- Minister for Women (Women’s affairs policy and services).⁷⁴

- 4.16. When discussing the proposed merger of ACT Health Directorate and CSD under upcoming Machinery of Government Changes, the Committee was encouraged to hear that prevention and early intervention efforts could be strengthened with related policy issues sitting within a single directorate:

...there are a lot of opportunities for mental health. For example, being in the same portfolio as housing and homelessness services, there is obviously a strong overlap there and, with children and young people, if you are into prevention and early intervention, then that is a really important connection. We are looking

⁷¹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 27.

⁷² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, pp 13–14.

⁷³ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, *Answer to QTON 29: Safer Families Grant Funding*, 11 February (received 21 February 2025).

⁷⁴ *Administrative Arrangements 2024 (No 1)*, Schedule 1.

forward to the opportunities and the potential of bringing the two portfolios together.⁷⁵

Committee comment

- 4.17. Notwithstanding the proposed merger, the Committee appreciates that work across directorates – and within the various parts of CSD – will remain essential, given the complexity and intersectionality involved in best addressing social policy matters.
- 4.18. While this is the case, the Committee considers it is equally important that relevant Ministers and offices (such as the ACT Office for Women and the ACT Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs) should have sufficient oversight of policy actions across directorates to enable them to provide point in time advice on the progress and expenditure against actions under the plans they have coordination responsibility for at Annual Reports committee hearings.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that whole of government strategies and plans for which the Community Services Directorate has a coordinating role are:

- coordinated in such a way that all actions can be reported on by the relevant office;
- have clear expenditure reporting in place; and
- can be discussed in full at public hearings by ensuring officials from across directorates are present, where required, with the relevant Minister.

Reporting of outcomes

- 4.19. In discussing the development of a strategy for the prevention of domestic and family violence, the importance of measuring outcomes rather than just reporting expenditure was acknowledged by officials:

At the moment, we are pretty good at counting things. We can tell you how much money was spent, how many instances of service might have happened at times, but we cannot necessarily go to how effective all of those things are.⁷⁶

- 4.20. The Committee heard that a core purpose of implementing the commissioning process for organisations that receive government funding was to enable organisations to deliver and report upon outcomes, instead of outputs:

Giving those community sector organisations more flexibility in how they use the money that we have available to deliver outcomes, rather than what we would

⁷⁵ Ms Rebecca Cross, Director-General, ACT Health, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 99.

⁷⁶ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 11.

describe as outputs, is certainly what the sector tells us they want and need, and it reflects research on best practice around community sector funding.⁷⁷

Committee comment

- 4.21. This focus on the delivery of outcomes, rather than simply stating what actions have been taken creates a natural opportunity to ensure all programs are evaluated. The Committee has formed the view that outcomes-based reporting and evaluation should be used in all social policy areas, and that programs should be designed with clear and measurable outcomes in mind.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure programs are designed around measurable outcomes to enable outcomes-based reporting and evaluation.

Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

Matters considered

- 4.22. Dr Marisa Paterson MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence on 10 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- The Safer Families Levy, with reference to funding arrangements, frontline services provided by the ACT Government, and the recent Performance Audit Report conducted into the Levy by the ACT Audit Office;⁷⁸
 - Coercive control, including its frequent use leading up to homicides, and training in identifying coercive control for police, court staff, health workers and educators;
 - Resourcing and funding for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office (DFSVO);
 - Development of the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy, including consultation and the effectiveness of measures aimed at reducing incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSVO);
 - Housing support for families experiencing DFSV, including the Safer Families Assistance Program;
 - The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program, with reference to the establishment of a multidisciplinary centre and introduction of independent sexual violence advisors;

⁷⁷ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 40.

⁷⁸ ACT Audit Office, *Safer Families Levy*, Auditor-General's Report No 10, 2024.

- Violence prevention activities, including funding for perpetrator intervention programs, the Innovative Perpetrator Response project, and development of a culturally and linguistically diverse community pilot program; and
- Support for young people who have experienced DFSV or are at risk of perpetrating violence, including the Solid Ground Program and therapeutic intervention by the Enhanced Child Health Services.⁷⁹

Key Issues

Safer Families Levy

- 4.23. The Safer Families Levy (the Levy) has been in place since 2016, and ‘provides a partial offset to the ACT Government’s broader investment to address domestic, family and sexual violence’.⁸⁰
- 4.24. The Minister advised that ‘The [L]evy is designed to raise awareness of the issue of domestic and family violence in the ACT as well as prevention and addressing, and supporting, community services in the frontline response’.⁸¹
- 4.25. The Committee sought confirmation that the Levy was being directed to front line service provision rather than funding the DFSVO. Officials advised the Levy is ‘used to offset a package of measures’ which was determined through the Budget process:
- ...there is a complete package, some of which is staffing and some of which is funding for the sector and other things. It adds up to a total expenditure; then there is a total offset, some of which is consolidated revenue and some of which is family safety levy. But there is not a decision in budget that says, “\$10 from the levy will go to fund staff and \$10 will go to the sector.” It is all done across the bottom line of the whole package. We will not be able to break down the number of staff that were funded by the levy, because that is not quite how the budgeting process works.⁸²
- 4.26. In a QTON response, the Minister advised that:
- In 2024-25, the Safer Families Package totalled \$16.146 million of which the Levy provides a \$9.535 million offset. Of the total Safer Families Package in 2024-25 of \$16.146 million, \$15.731 million, or 97%, is directed to frontline services.⁸³
- 4.27. The ACT Audit Office raised several concerns in its 2024 Performance Audit Report No. 10 regarding the DFSVO’s ability to measure the effectiveness of the Levy:

⁷⁹ *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 1–19.

⁸⁰ ACT Government, [Safer Families Levy Principles](#), p 1.

⁸¹ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 1–2.

⁸² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 9.

⁸³ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, *Answer to QTON 3: Funding for frontline domestic and family violence services*, 10 February 2025 (received 18 February 2025).

Planning and development is also undermined by poor communication with the community and other stakeholders on how domestic and family violence initiatives are designed to respond to community needs, how they are funded and what their intended benefits are.

The DFSVO has not developed a performance monitoring strategy or evaluation framework to measure the outcomes and impacts of domestic and family violence initiatives funded through the Safer Families Levy.⁸⁴

- 4.28. On 4 December 2024, the Assembly passed a motion calling on the government to take a series of actions in relation to the Audit Office's report, including exploring options for the establishment of a discrete fund for the Safer Family Levy. On 19 March 2025, the Minister provided an update against this motion, advising:

Treasury and the Community Services Directorate have explored the possibility of establishing a mechanism to separate the levy from the Territory Banking Account and found that this will require significant resourcing, manual reconciliations and potential legislative changes. It would not be practical or cost-effective to create a discrete fund. Although establishment of a separate account is not practical, I am dedicated to ensuring expenditure of the levy is fully transparent and targeted to where it is most needed.⁸⁵

Committee comment

- 4.29. Given the vitally important role played by frontline services in responding to domestic and family violence, the Committee is concerned that continuing to use the Levy to offset the broader Safer Families Package does not provide sufficient transparency about the use of these funds.
- 4.30. The Committee notes the additional measures raised by the Minister that may be required to establish a discrete fund for the Levy, however, is of this view that this is still needed given the Levy is a distinct and additional cost to ratepayers.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the Safer Families Levy, including all income and expenses.

⁸⁴ ACT Audit Office, *ACT Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report Safer Families Levy*, Report No 10, 2024, p 1.

⁸⁵ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, *Proof Assembly Debates*, 19 March 2025, p 666.

Training for frontline workers

- 4.31. The Committee sought an update on activities to address coercive control in the ACT. The Minister told the Committee:

Coercive control has been identified in the death review and multiple reviews around Australia as a key factor in domestic violence homicide. It is absolutely a priority of this government to look at addressing and responding to coercive control.⁸⁶

- 4.32. The Minister also acknowledged the ‘importance of training and education within the community, within our courts and police’ on coercion, advising that this was an ongoing priority for government.⁸⁷

- 4.33. The Committee heard that a range of training is available for frontline workers, such as:

- Strengthening Health Responses to Family Violence (SHRFV) training for health workers; and
- Funding allocated to ‘train ACT policing and the courts, to build that awareness and understanding of coercive control’.⁸⁸

- 4.34. Officials advised that the SHRFV program is funded until the end of the 2024–25 financial year, with future funding decisions being ‘a matter for cabinet consideration’.⁸⁹ The aforementioned funding for police and courts is ‘still being worked through’ with an intent to ensure ‘it can reach as many police officers as possible’.⁹⁰

Committee comment

- 4.35. The Committee agrees with the Minister that that training in coercive control forms a vital part of the response to family and domestic violence and considers training opportunities should be ongoing and available to all current and future frontline staff.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure appropriate coercive control training is conducted for all current police, healthcare, and other frontline workers, and that this training is also provided to all new employees in future.

⁸⁶ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 5.

⁸⁷ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 5.

⁸⁸ Ms Vasiliki Bogiatzis, Executive Branch Manager, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 5.

⁸⁹ Ms Vasiliki Bogiatzis, Executive Branch Manager, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 6.

⁹⁰ Ms Vasiliki Bogiatzis, Executive Branch Manager, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 5.

Referral pathways

- 4.36. The *Domestic and Family Violence Review Biennial Report 2023* highlighted the ‘critical need’ for a curated response to members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in relation to domestic and family violence.⁹¹ The Report recommended ‘Specialist services that support the [CALD] community to design and implement a domestic and family violence community-based education campaign in partnership with ACT Government as appropriate’.⁹²
- 4.37. Officials advised that in response to this report, the ACT Government ‘entered into an arrangement with the Multicultural Hub last year and they are taking referrals’.⁹³
- 4.38. A review of the Multicultural Hub Canberra website indicates domestic and family violence support is available via the ‘Women’s Service’ menu item. However, a separate page of this same website notes that ‘new referrals to Multicultural Counselling Services are currently closed’.⁹⁴

Committee comment

- 4.39. The Committee considers the information available on the Multicultural Hub Canberra website may cause confusion as to what supports are available to the CALD community and whether these are accepting referrals.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that there are accessible, clear and consistent referral pathways relating to family and domestic violence for the culturally and linguistically diverse community.

Women

Matters considered

- 4.40. Dr Marisa Paterson MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Women on 10 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- The *ACT Women’s Plan 2016–2026*, with respect to grants, reporting on the third action plan, women’s health and wellbeing, financial reporting, gender sensitive urban design and women’s safety;

⁹¹ ACT Government, [Domestic and Family Violence Review Biennial Report 2023](#), 2023, p 9.

⁹² ACT Government, [Domestic and Family Violence Review Biennial Report 2023](#), 2023, p 10.

⁹³ Ms Vasiliki Bogiatzis, Executive Branch Manager, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 17.

⁹⁴ Multicultural Hub Canberra, <https://mhub.org.au/>, accessed 2 April 2025. Under ‘Womens Service’ in the main menu, a Domestic and Family Violence Support page details available supports - <https://mhub.org.au/domestic-and-family-violence-support/>. However, the ‘Counselling Service’ page - <https://mhub.org.au/counselling-service/> advises that referrals are closed.

- The Women’s Return to Work program, with reference to grant applications, engagement and completion, and evaluation;
- Development of the next Women’s Plan;
- Gender equality, including the *ACTPS Workforce Gender Equity Strategy*, *Women in Construction Program*, and *Understanding Building and Construction Program*;
- Roll out of free period products in public places; and
- Funding, participation and demand for the suite of Audrey Fagan programs.⁹⁵

Key Issues

Perception of women’s safety

- 4.41. Strategic Indicator 5 of the CSD Annual Report measures the proportion of women who feel safe walking alone during the day and at night. This indicator is informed by the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing.⁹⁶
- 4.42. When questioned about the actions undertaken to address this perception indicator, officials advised work is undertaken as part of the *ACT Women’s Plan 2016–2026* to increase ‘awareness and education around appropriate behaviours and expectations.’ The Third Action Plan includes 10 actions addressing the theme of safety and inclusion.⁹⁷
- 4.43. In a question on notice (QON) response, the Minister advised survey results ‘indicate the proportion of women who feel safe when they are by themselves, walking in the neighbourhood during the day and at night is higher in the ACT when compared against the national average.’ The response acknowledges that there are ‘factor outside of the influence of the ACT Government’ that impact the data year to year.⁹⁸

Committee comment

- 4.44. The Committee notes that the percentage of women who felt safe walking alone at night has remained steady since 2016–17. This suggests that the current strategic indicator measurement may not be capturing the effect of the work undertaken as part of the *ACT Women’s Plan 2016–2026*.
- 4.45. If the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing remains the most fit-for-purpose data source to report on women’s perceptions of safety in the ACT, the Committee considers further clarity is needed on the actions being undertaken to improve performance against this measure.

⁹⁵ *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 20–38.

⁹⁶ Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 51.

⁹⁷ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 10.

⁹⁸ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, *answer to QON 20*, 18 February 2025, (received 25 February 2025), pp 1-2.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government report on the specific actions being undertaken to address women’s perception of safety as measured by Strategic Indicator 5 of the Community Services Directorate Annual Report.

Gender Equity Strategies

- 4.46. The Committee sought information about actions undertaken by the Office for Women to promote gender equality within the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) and CSD.
- 4.47. Officials advised that an annual women’s mentoring program is delivered, aimed at further developing the workforce and gender equity:

We do have one of the programs that the Community Services Directorate run—again, under the ACT Women’s Plan—and that is to deliver a yearly ACTPS women’s mentoring program, where we target women, and officers who identify themselves as women, to support them in that general equality space so that they feel more confident to take on further responsibilities and go up with higher duties and that sort of confidence boosting. That is an annual mentoring program, where the ACTPS workforce participates both as mentors and mentees.⁹⁹

- 4.48. The Committee heard that *ACTPS Gender Equity Strategy 2024–2029* was also delivered in consultation with other directorates. The strategy was released in 2024 and requires all ‘ACTPS directorates and Public Sector Bodies with workforce headcounts of over 100 people’ to develop and implement Gender Action Plans.¹⁰⁰

- 4.49. The CSD Annual Report notes:

The CSD Gender Equity Action Plan 2024–2028 (GEAP) signifies the directorate’s ongoing commitment to equal outcomes at work for people of all genders. The GEAP is a priority action under the *CSD Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2024–2027* and will assist the directorate to embed gender equity into its business model, including strategies, systems and governance.¹⁰¹

- 4.50. In a QON response dated 9 April 2025, the Minister advised the *CSD Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2024–2027* ‘will be updated to the CSD website as a priority.’¹⁰² The Committee notes that this document has now been published.¹⁰³

- 4.51. The Committee was able to locate a copy of the *ACTPS Gender Equity Strategy 2024–2029* in the National Library of Australia online catalogue.¹⁰⁴ However, it is unclear if this

⁹⁹ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 26.

¹⁰⁰ ACT Government, *ACT Public Service Gender Equity Strategy 2024–2029*, p 3.

¹⁰¹ Community Services Directorate, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p 184.

¹⁰² Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 55*, 18 February 2025 (received 9 February 2025).

¹⁰³ ACT Government, [Community Services Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2024-2027](#) (accessed 12 April 2025).

¹⁰⁴ National Library of Australia catalogue, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3450778026/view> (accessed 3 April 2025).

document and other individual directorate action plans are publicly available on directorate websites or through the ACTPS Workforce Portal.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government publish all directorate workforce gender equity strategies and action plans on its website.

Women's Return to Work program

- 4.52. The Women's Return to Work Program provides support to eligible women wishing to return to the workforce after an absence of six-months or more. The program consists of two elements – a grant program offering \$1,000 to eligible women, and a workshop component offering mentoring and guidance to support participants to apply for and gain employment. \$2,000 grants are available for eligible women exiting the Alexander Maconochie Centre and seeking to gain employment.¹⁰⁵
- 4.53. In 2023–24, 158 women received grants through the program, totalling \$155,516 and 63 women attended workshops in the community.¹⁰⁶ When asked how many applications were declined during the financial year, officials advised all grants are 'assessed in terms of the eligibility guidelines, and therefore some are declined on the basis that they are ineligible for grant funding under that program'.¹⁰⁷ The Minister advised in a QON response that 22 Women's Return to Work Grant applications had been declined in the 2023–24 financial year.¹⁰⁸

Committee comment

- 4.54. The Committee is supportive of the Women's Return to Work Grants program and considers further research into the ongoing demand would ensure the program continues to be appropriately funded.

¹⁰⁵ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 23.

¹⁰⁶ Community Services Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), pp 40–42.

¹⁰⁷ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 24.

¹⁰⁸ Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, *Answer to QTON 4: Women's return to work program grants*, 10 February 2025, (received 18 February 2025).

Disability, Carers and Community Services

Matters considered

- 4.55. Ms Suzanne Orr MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services on 10 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Commissioning, with reference to the commissioning roadmap, the primary aims of the commissioning model, and progress to date;
 - Community sector funding arrangements, in relation to the timing of budget allocations, contractual arrangements, indexation, pay and conditions for workers, funding insecurity, and reporting and acquittal requirements;
 - Carers, with reference to available respite, purpose-built respite facilities, the *Carer's Recognition Act 2021*, and a carer's recognition card;
 - Disability, relating to the advisory council provided for by the *Disability Inclusion Act 2024*, foundational supports, housing, employment statistics, and the Disability Royal Commission report (specifically, the recommendation to establish a death review function for deaths that occur in disability care);
 - The administration of the *Official Visitors Act 2012*;
 - The ACT Senior Practitioner, with reference to:
 - The elimination of restricted practices, including the provision of training;
 - The status of an independent review into the enactment of the *Senior Practitioners Act 2018*;
 - Statistics pertaining to the number of incidents and complaints made within the Education Directorate's remit in relation to restrictive practices; and
 - Processes which enable the ACT Senior Practitioner to make legally binding directions, pursuant to the *Senior Practitioners Act 2018*;
 - The potential impact of Machinery of Government changes; and
 - The ACT Social Recovery Framework, the ACT Volunteering Strategy, and an Assembly motion to establish an ACT food relief action plan.¹⁰⁹

Key Issues

Community Sector funding

- 4.56. The Committee raised concerns regarding the adequacy of overall community sector funding with the Minister.¹¹⁰ These concerns primarily rest with the sector's inability to meet the current demand for support by Canberrans.

¹⁰⁹ *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 39–76.

¹¹⁰ Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, Chair, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 39.

- 4.57. Although officials were unable to provide specific detail on how community sector funding has evolved over time (advising that the matter should be directed to Treasury),¹¹¹ a later QTON response by the Treasurer during a session before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration advised that there is no trend data available in relation to community sector funding across the whole of government:

Treasury does not collect specific data on total funding provided to the community sector across all programs and all Directorates. Relevant Directorates manage delivery of Government funded programs by engaging services from the sector through the commissioning process.¹¹²

- 4.58. In recognition of the valuable contribution the sector makes both to CSD priorities and across government, a commitment was made to developing a 'community sector hub' to assist organisations to work with the government:

...the community sector hub that has been announced as an election commitment, which is really intended to provide a bit of a front door for community sector organisations to be able to come into government and for us to help them make some of those connections across government of different programs and things that might exist.¹¹³

Committee comment

- 4.59. The Committee recognises the significant contribution that the community sector makes to the ACT. Funding for the sector was discussed with multiple ministers,¹¹⁴ with officials advising that CSD understands the reality faced by the sector which 'is always over-subscribed. There is often demand that we cannot meet'.¹¹⁵
- 4.60. Wherever possible, the sector should be funded appropriately to meet demand.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prioritise increased funding to the Community Sector.

Deaths in disability care

- 4.61. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) recommended the establishment of disability death review schemes in each state and territory.¹¹⁶ The purpose of such a scheme is to

¹¹¹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 39.

¹¹² Mr Chris Steel MLA, *Answer to QTON 20 [of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration]:*

Community Sector – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 13 February 2025 (received 28 February 2025).

¹¹³ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 175.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 15; 11 February 2025, p 79; 12 February 2025, pp 175–176.

¹¹⁵ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 15.

¹¹⁶ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 9.

‘assess, record, monitor, and review such deaths, formulate preventive strategies, maintain a death register, and support an expert advisory committee’.¹¹⁷

- 4.62. Government officials advised CSD was preparing advice to government on the potential for an ACT disability death review function, and highlighted the potential complexities involved in developing such a scheme:

What we do know is that whilst there are some benefits of that work, it requires a range of information sharing. It really depends on the information that you have access to and we do not always have access to the information that largely sits with the NDIS regulator...The numbers are actually, we think, quite small here in the ACT. It is also quite a resource intensive function to staff a death review function.¹¹⁸

- 4.63. Mr Matthew Hingston, Official Visitor, Disability, advised that ‘there are plenty of cases that do not attract any scrutiny or examination’.¹¹⁹ He went on to explain that the need for a death review function has been raised with the government frequently in recent years:

We have raised that issue in almost all quarterly reports and annual reports over the last few years. While it does ebb and flow in terms of numbers, it is just something that we cannot help but be noticed by disability OVs when we are out and about. We hear so many of these stories that we do not have a segue to do anything more with or about that information.¹²⁰

- 4.64. Further to this, the ACT Official Visitors Annual Report offers strong support for the establishment of a disability death review function, noting that Official Visitors ‘continue to unofficially hear about deaths of people in visitable places’.¹²¹

- 4.65. The Committee appreciates that there appears to be an appetite for enacting such a reform, noting the ACT Government’s ‘agreement in principle’ to the Royal Commission’s recommendations¹²² and the Minister’s assurance that ‘it is being actively looked at’.¹²³

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a dedicated Death in Disability Care review function.

¹¹⁷ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 9.

¹¹⁸ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 44–45.

¹¹⁹ Mr Matthew Hingston, Official Visitor Disability, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 143.

¹²⁰ Mr Matthew Hingston, Official Visitor Disability, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 143.

¹²¹ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 13.

¹²² ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 9.

¹²³ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 44–45.

The Senior Practitioner

- 4.66. A core function of the *Senior Practitioner Act 2018* (the Act) is to ‘reduce and, as much as possible, eliminate the use of restrictive practices’.¹²⁴ The Senior Practitioner is the ‘accountable officer’ with whom responsibility rests for the implementation of the Act,¹²⁵ and the remit covers providers of education, disability services, and care and protection of children services.¹²⁶
- 4.67. During the hearing, the Committee sought an update on processes for the reporting of restrictive practice use in education settings, following media reports regarding ‘differences of views in the Office of the Senior Practitioner.’¹²⁷
- 4.68. Officials advised that an independent review was being undertaken:

We are working through our own procedures and processes in the Office of the Senior Practitioner. We are implementing a review to make sure that those processes and procedures are consistent with the requirements of the act. We need to be mindful of these sorts of views, but I think there is two sets of opinions. We will work our way through it in a sensible and measured way to make sure that the—my primary interest is making sure that the intent of the act is being delivered. At the moment, my view is that is the case, but I accept that it is the right time to review and make sure we can be assured of that.¹²⁸

- 4.69. It was acknowledged at the hearing that:
- Part of the role of the Senior Practitioner is to undertake ‘educative functions’;¹²⁹
 - An audit was undertaken ‘about a year ago’ with the Education Directorate, after which the number of reports of restrictive practice use increased and that this increase can be attributed to ‘actually reporting what is happening’ rather than increased incidence;¹³⁰ and
 - The independent review referred to above may provide the opportunity to improve clarity for all stakeholders:

...there is opportunity to be clear on what the procedural processes are. For example...“five days” versus “five business days”. It is those sorts of detail things that I think we can be much clearer on, to ensure there is a consistent view of what those requirements are.¹³¹

¹²⁴ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 49.

¹²⁵ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 49.

¹²⁶ *Senior Practitioner Act 2018*, s 8.

¹²⁷ *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 47–54.

¹²⁸ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 48.

¹²⁹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 51.

¹³⁰ Ms Tracey Harkness, Senior Practitioner, Office of the Senior Practitioner, Community Services Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 53.

¹³¹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 50.

Committee comment

- 4.70. The Committee is of the view that consistent application of the *Senior Practitioner Act 2018* is critical in order to achieve continuing reductions in restrictive practices in all settings, including schools.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide definitive guidance to the Office of the Senior Practitioner, the Education Directorate, and all ACT schools on the definitions and application of the *Senior Practitioner Act 2018* to enable consistent application of the rules, and ensure a safe school environment for ACT children.

Education and support for disability care providers

- 4.71. In response to questions on notice, the Committee received data on the number of reports of from the Education Directorate regarding the use of restrictive practice use made by the education directorate over the last five years:

Year \total	Number of reports from Education Directorate	Trends from previous year
2024	218	25% decrease
2023	292	29% increase
2022	226	45% decrease
2021	412	37% decrease
2020	652	53% increase
2019	426	

Figure 3: Reporting of restrictive practices from the Education Directorate to the Office of the Senior Practitioner - 2019 to 2024 [source: Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, *answer to QTON: Senior Practitioner Reporting*, 10 February 2025 (received 20 February 2025), p 3].

- 4.72. Officials advised that reporting trends can increase following education activities and audits, and therefore any increase may be the result of further understanding of reporting requirements and not necessarily reflective of increases in the use of restrictive practices.¹³²
- 4.73. The Committee also examined the powers granted to the Senior Practitioner under section 26(h) of the *Senior Practitioner Act 2018*, which allows the issuing of directions to service

¹³² Ms Tracey Harkness, Senior Practitioner, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 53.

providers regarding the use of restrictive practices.¹³³ The Committee was advised that the term ‘providers’ under the Act includes disability service providers, education and care providers, and those working in child protection.¹³⁴

- 4.74. When asked how frequently the power has been used, the Senior Practitioner advised they had issued a legally binding direction once (not within the reporting period), explaining their approach:

The risk-responsive regulation approach that I take is about spending the majority of our time, where possible, in the education space. You can think about a compliance and enforcement pyramid system where you have compliance and education at the bottom, you have fines and penalties right at the top, and there are a number of different steps in-between. The bulk of our work is about supporting providers to comply with the regulations that require them to report their use of restrictive practices to my office, engaging a behaviour support practitioner, getting a behaviour support plan – because we know that behaviour support plans really help to address the unmet need of a person – and making sure that they can reduce the need to use restrictive practices.¹³⁵

Disability Royal Commission

- 4.75. During the Committee’s public hearing, officials confirmed that a series of agreements had been negotiated from the Disability Royal Commission recommendations, calling for action by the ACT Government.¹³⁶
- 4.76. The Committee heard that many of the recommendations have been agreed to in principle by the government but are ‘subject to further consideration.’¹³⁷ For instance, the establishment of a disability death review scheme. While this recommendation was agreed to in principle, further discussions will determine the scheme's parameters and funding arrangements.¹³⁸
- 4.77. The Committee considers that the community should be updated as regularly as possible in relation to this matter.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that ACT Government provide an update on progress made against the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission.

¹³³ Senior Practitioners Act 2018, ss 26(h).

¹³⁴ Ms Tracey Harkness, Senior Practitioner, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 49-53.

¹³⁵ Ms Tracey Harkness, Senior Practitioner, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 54.

¹³⁶ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 46.

¹³⁷ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 46.

¹³⁸ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 46.

Foundational supports

- 4.78. The Committee discussed foundational support services, noting concerns among people with disability about eligibility, availability, and uncertainty regarding changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).¹³⁹
- 4.79. The Minister noted that National Cabinet has set a timeline for key milestones, including the development of a Foundational Supports Strategy. This strategy, along with an associated Federation Funding Agreement, is expected to be considered by National Cabinet within the calendar year.¹⁴⁰ The Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to progressing these milestones in line with the established timeline.¹⁴¹
- 4.80. Officials advised that concerns about individuals who currently need foundational supports but are not receiving them are being addressed as part of the NDIS review conducted by the Commonwealth. It was noted that the NDIS review 'found that whilst the NDIS has been very good for those people who are on NDIS packages, there are now some gaps in the system that foundational supports will be needed to fill'.¹⁴²
- 4.81. The Committee heard that the foundational supports reform process is a shared responsibility:
- The ACT Government has been clear on what its commitments are to negotiate through the foundational supports work with the federal government. There is some complexity there, but there is an acknowledgment, I think, that the NDIS has grown faster than is sustainable in the long term in an economic sense. The nature of the legislation around the NDIS is that it is jointly government by the Commonwealth and the states and territories. So the states and territories do get a say about changes to legislation and to regulations.¹⁴³
- 4.82. The Committee understands that a timeline for the delivery of agreed milestones from the NDIS Review, including the implementation of foundational supports 'has been set through the national cabinet decisions.'¹⁴⁴ The Disability Reform Roadmap indicates a 'phased implementation of Foundational Supports commences from 2025-2026'.¹⁴⁵

Committee comment

- 4.83. Given the ongoing anxieties many people with disability face while navigating the NDIS and the commencement of changes to foundational supports to begin from July this year, the Committee considers it is crucial for the ACT Government to provide clear communication

¹³⁹ *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 64-69.

¹⁴⁰ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 65.

¹⁴¹ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, pp 64-69.

¹⁴² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 66.

¹⁴³ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 69.

¹⁴⁴ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 65.

¹⁴⁵ Disability Reform Ministerial Council, [Disability Reform Roadmap for 2024 and 2025](#), September 2024 (accessed 11 April 2025).

on its implementation plans as it continues to negotiate foundational supports with the federal government.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends the ACT Government provide a revised roadmap for the implementation of the changes to foundational supports in the ACT.

Carer Recognition Card

- 4.84. The Committee discussed the government’s commitment to introduce a Carer Recognition Card (the Carer Card). The Minister noted that the development of the Carer Card is still in its early stages, with ongoing efforts to gather feedback from the sector and advocacy groups.¹⁴⁶
- 4.85. The Minister confirmed that no firm timeline for implementation could be provided at this stage and that the government is continuing to engage with stakeholders and is now entering the next phase of exploring the card’s feasibility.¹⁴⁷

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends the ACT Government publish a timeline for the consideration and implementation of the Carers Recognition Card.

Homes and New Suburbs

Matters considered

- 4.86. Ms Yvette Berry MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Homes and New Suburbs on 11 and 21 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Homelessness, with reference to annual figures, crisis accommodation, and the OneLink services’ contracts, callbacks, and accessibility;
 - The Safer Families Assistance grant;
 - Housing ACT, with reference to housing managers, property inspections, vacancy rates and the temporary use of vacant properties, tenant relocations, complaint statistics and mechanisms, and fraud allegation processes;
 - Housing ACT stock, in relation to:
 - the construction and delivery of new houses, including the Housing Australia Future Fund, and the Minister’s ability to declare public housing a Territory

¹⁴⁶ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 55.

¹⁴⁷ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 55.

Priority Project, and interactions between Housing ACT developments and the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT);

- existing stock issues, such as insulation, electrification, energy costs, accessibility modifications, maintenance, repair and end-of-use processes, and dwelling condition, type, and location;
- an Ainslie property that was leased to the Salvation Army, with reference to the construction of a garden, and relevant communications and inspections; and
- the Growing and Renewing Housing Program; and
- Engagement with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) as community housing providers.¹⁴⁸

Key Issues

OneLink

- 4.87. OneLink is the central intake service for homelessness services in the ACT. The service provides information for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, as well as connections to various support and crisis accommodation services.¹⁴⁹
- 4.88. An evaluation of the service was undertaken in 2022 to inform future procurement activities. The evaluation found that access to the OneLink service was ‘arguably the single biggest issue facing the service’ at the time, with deterioration of the service evident through several factors, including the declining telephone answering rate.¹⁵⁰
- 4.89. When asked about access to OneLink, officials advised recommended changes to the centralised model had been incorporated into the statement of requirements for an ongoing procurement process.¹⁵¹ The Committee heard this procurement process was close to completion with CSD ‘aiming to have a new provider in place by 1 April this year.’¹⁵²
- 4.90. Officials advised contact could be made with OneLink via phone, however acknowledged there could be challenges with call-backs ‘because of the nature of clients. Not everyone has a phone. Not everyone has access to a phone.’ In-person contact and engagement with other organisations, including Street to Home, were provided as alternative methods for people to access information and support.¹⁵³
- 4.91. The Committee was advised that OneLink services are not available 24 hours a day, with the service operating both phone and in-person services between 8.00am to 6.00pm Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays). Phone services are available on weekends

¹⁴⁸ *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, pp 105–138; *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, pp 352–369.

¹⁴⁹ ACT Government, *Homelessness*, <https://www.act.gov.au/housing-planning-and-property/housing/homelessness> (accessed 4 April 2025).

¹⁵⁰ Community Services Directorate, *Housing ACT Evaluation of the Central Intake Service Final Report*, 6 June 2022, p 2.

¹⁵¹ Mr Ash Balaretnaraja, Executive Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Policy and Programs, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 106.

¹⁵² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 105.

¹⁵³ Mr Ash Balaretnaraja, Executive Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Policy and Programs, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 106.

between 12:30pm to 5.00pm. Where the service is contacted outside these hours and a message is left, 'staff will review the request and respond the next business day.'¹⁵⁴

- 4.92. When asked how many callbacks were undertaken in the last year, the Minister advised in a QTON response that OneLink does not specifically collect this data, however 83% of calls were answered on the first attempt from November 2024 to January 2025.¹⁵⁵

Committee comment

- 4.93. The Committee is concerned by reports of individuals having trouble accessing OneLink and considers regular reporting on call-backs would provide an ongoing indication of access and service performance.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure the relevant service provider is appropriately resourced to provide immediate support for Canberrans at immediate risk of homelessness or rough sleeping, and that data is collected and published on the percentage and number of successful callbacks performed monthly.

Rough sleepers in the ACT

- 4.94. The Committee sought information on the number of individuals confirmed to be sleeping rough in the ACT and trends over time.
- 4.95. In a QON response, the Minister advised that the number of rough sleepers in Canberra had been formally counted by the homelessness sector since January 2021, with numbers provided by the CSD as follows:

Calendar Year	Number of unique rough sleepers (average per month)
2021	49
2022	68
2023	58
2024	74

Figure 4: Community Services Directorate data: Average number of rough sleepers [source: Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 3*, 17 February 2025 (received 28 February 2025)].

Committee comment

- 4.96. The Committee notes the average number of rough sleepers has increased over the past four years and considers further action is needed to reverse this trend.

¹⁵⁴ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 8*, 17 February 2025 (received 28 February 2025).

¹⁵⁵ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 19: OneLink*, 14 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025).

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government take appropriate action to reduce the average number of individuals confirmed to be rough sleepers, and report on the actions being undertaken.

Availability of housing

- 4.97. The Committee heard a range of evidence about the availability of Housing ACT properties, pertaining to both efficient use of existing stock and the need to increase the number of properties.¹⁵⁶

Efficient use of existing stock

- 4.98. Officials advised that there are a range of complexities to consider with regards to Housing ACT's 'vacant profile', ranging from existing tenants requiring transfers or housing that requires repairs, through to properties being sold or demolished.¹⁵⁷
- 4.99. Whilst a reduction in the vacant property turnaround time is encouraging (an average of 43 days, down from 89 days in 2021–22¹⁵⁸), the Committee notes that the occupancy rate as at December 2024 is below the government's target:

Occupancy rate	
	as at 30 Dec 2024
Actual	94.7%*
Target (minimum)	96%

*This figure is point-in-time and may fluctuate as the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program prepares selected vacant properties for sale or redevelopment, in advance of newly purchased or constructed properties joining and growing the portfolio.

Figure 5: Occupancy rate of public housing [source: Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 10: Housing*, 17 February 2025 (received 12 March 2025) p 6].

The need for more homes

- 4.100. In addition to streamlining tenancy processes to use existing Housing ACT stock as efficiently as possible, the Committee heard that increasing the stock of housing overall remains a priority.¹⁵⁹ The Minister advised:

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Ms Aisla Borwick, Executive Group Manager, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p. 108; Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 123.

¹⁵⁷ Ms Aisla Borwick, Executive Group Manager, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 108.

¹⁵⁸ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 10*, 17 February 2025 (received 12 March 2025) p 4.

¹⁵⁹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 123.

In completing the Growth and Renewal Program that we currently have in place, by 2026-27, we will have replaced 1,000 properties and grown the housing stock by an additional 400.

The 30,000 [new homes target] includes a commitment to 5,000 affordable community and public housing as well as another 25,000 private dwellings.¹⁶⁰

- 4.101. The Committee considers that the waiting times for eligible housing applicants demonstrates the need for more public housing stock, with most people waiting more than three years:

1. As of 31 December 2024, the average waitlist times in days to access a Housing ACT property is:
 - a) 187 days for the Priority housing list.
 - b) 1,104 days for the High needs housing list.
 - c) 1,945 for the Standard housing list.
2. As of 31 December 2024, there are 3,002 approved ACT Housing applications.

Figure 6: Average waitlist times in days to access a Housing ACT property [source: Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QON 6: Housing ACT and Waitlists*, 17 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025)].

Committee comment

- 4.102. The Committee is of the view that public housing is of utmost importance, and that the provision of adequate housing to all who are eligible should be a government priority.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government have high regard to the housing needs of Canberra's most vulnerable people when making choices on what to fund in future budgets.

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government take steps to significantly reduce the average public housing wait times across all lists as soon as practicable by taking measures such as:

- re-tenanting vacant properties as quickly as possible; and
- significantly increasing the stock of Housing ACT properties.

¹⁶⁰ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 358.

Management of ACT Housing stock

- 4.103. Housing ACT employ 45 full time Housing Managers, who manage a total of 11,845 properties.¹⁶¹ Officials advised that the caseload for each Housing Manager varies:

It completely depends on the complexity of tenants that somebody might look after in their housing portfolio. There can range from anywhere between two hundred to three hundred properties. As I said, it depends on a range of factors in terms of how much support each tenant needs.¹⁶²

- 4.104. The Committee heard that Housing ACT ‘undertake to do at least one client service visit each year’, however this was not always possible for a range of reasons:

These are the homes of the people that live in them, and it can depend on the circumstances of that person—they may be unwell; there may have been a turnover in the tenancy; there has been some type of circumstance impacting the people that live in that home. It is not necessarily possible for us to do an annual inspection for 100 per cent of homes 100 per cent of the time. But I think the data...shows that there are certainly very regular visits to every housing property from our housing managers.¹⁶³

- 4.105. Housing Managers fall under the Client Services Branch within CSD. The Committee sought information regarding the vacancy rate for Housing Manager positions over the last financial year. The Minister advised in a QTON response that data on the average vacancy rate was unavailable, however the ‘separation rate for the Client Services Branch was 5.7% over the 2023-2024 Financial Year.’¹⁶⁴

- 4.106. Officials advised that there had been a particular focus on the wellbeing of Housing ACT staff over the last 12 months:

We have a range of supports for our housing managers. We have internal supervision and regular check-ins with our staff. We have a debriefing after any incidents or after check-ins in the field. We also have EAP services available and they are regularly on site, every week, so that housing managers have access to those supports.¹⁶⁵

- 4.107. In addition, the Committee heard that staff go out to housing properties in pairs where needed.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, and Ms Megan Valler, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts Branch, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 110. 11,845 was the total number of properties as at December 2024.

¹⁶² Ms Megan Valler, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts Branch, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 110.

¹⁶³ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 111.

¹⁶⁴ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 20: Housing Manager Staffing*, 14 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025).

¹⁶⁵ Ms Kate West, Executive Branch Manager, Client Services Branch, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 112.

¹⁶⁶ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 112.

Committee comment

- 4.108. The Committee notes the recent focus on improving supports for Housing Managers, who play a vital role in both supporting tenants who may have complex needs, and ensuring ACT Housing stock is well maintained.
- 4.109. Providing adequate support for these workers, and frequent enough visits for homes and tenants to be effectively managed, should continue to be a priority.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government increase the number of Housing Managers employed by Housing ACT as soon as practicable, and continue to improve the quality and accessibility of appropriate pastoral and mental health support services available.

Recommendation 28

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government advise how often physical inspections of Housing ACT properties are undertaken, and whether this is frequent enough.

Community consultation

- 4.110. A Housing ACT property located at 48 Foveaux Street Ainslie, which was recently sold, included a garden which had been constructed and maintained by volunteers for use by young people and other vulnerable community members.¹⁶⁷
- 4.111. In a QTON response, the Minister advised that, although a modification request was declined in 2021, Housing ACT was aware of the Peace Garden:

On 20 April 2021, The Salvation Army (TSA) submitted a Modification Request to Housing ACT to build some additional structures at 48 Foveaux Street Ainslie. Garden Plans were also attached to the request. On 9 June 2021, Housing ACT provided written advice to TSA advising that the Modification Request was declined, and works should not proceed.

From 2022 through to 2024, there were 12 requests which resulted in property attendance to address maintenance issues.

On 9 May 2024, The Salvation Army provided an invitation to Housing ACT to attend the opening of the Peace Garden, scheduled for Sunday 19 May 2024.

Housing ACT staff did not attend this opening. Housing ACT are not aware of any direct engagement by staff with volunteer groups.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Mr Thomas Emerson MLA, Chair, and Mr Peter Cain MLA, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, pp 352–354.

¹⁶⁸ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, *answer to QTON 75: Ainslie community garden*, 21 February 2025 (received 12 March 2025).

Committee comment

- 4.112. The Committee acknowledges that the development of the Peace Garden in Ainslie occurred after advice was provided by Housing ACT that the related modification request was not approved.
- 4.113. The Committee considers that this case provides an example where amenities at Housing ACT properties can offer significant value to the broader community. In future instances, consultation with relevant stakeholders – particularly those who have invested time and effort in the development of such an amenity – would be desirable prior to the sale of a property.

Recommendation 29

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consult with the community when considering the sale of Housing ACT properties which are providing a community amenity, such as the Foveaux Street Peace Garden.

Safer Families Assistance Program

- 4.114. The Safer Families Assistance Program provides eligible applicants with \$2,000 to assist with the costs associated with moving when people are ‘seeking to leave their home due to domestic violence’.¹⁶⁹ The funding allocation increased in the most recent financial year to \$363,000.¹⁷⁰
- 4.115. The Minister advised:
- In late 2024, the Program received an influx of applications that used up the funding allocated to the Program for the entire 2024-25 period.
- We know that statistically occurrences of family and domestic violence peak over Christmas and New Year period, and the demand in 2024 demonstrates the continuing challenges caused by domestic and family violence felt by our community.
- In the last three years the budgeted funding has been exhausted within the first half of the financial year’.¹⁷¹
- 4.116. Officials advised that once funding was exhausted, they do not directly track the number of applicants who can no longer access the grant but rather that ‘we are referring them to other programs, so we will keep an eye on whether there is an influx of applications to those other programs’.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Ms Vasiliki Bogiatzis, Executive Branch Manager, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 10 February 2025, p 13.

¹⁷⁰ Ms Aisla Borwick, Executive Group Manager, Housing Assistance, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p. 130.

¹⁷¹ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 30: Safer Families Grant Funding 2*, 11 February 2025 (received 21 February 2025).

¹⁷² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 129.

4.117. The Safer Families Assistance payment application process has since been reinstated.¹⁷³

Committee comment

4.118. The Committee is pleased that the Safer Families Assistance Payment has been reinstated. Despite this, the Committee considers further examination of demand for the payment should be undertaken given funding allocated over the past three years has been exhausted within the first half of the designated funding period.

4.119. In addition, in circumstances where funding is exhausted, the Committee is of the view that data should continue to be captured, so that the number of people who would be eligible to access the grant, but could not, informs funding needs under future budgets.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure grant funding available under the Safer Families Assistance Program be demand driven.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Matters considered

- 4.120. Ms Suzanne Orr MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs on 12 and 25 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, including the recent Productivity Commission review, in relation to:
 - barriers to undertaking system reform;
 - government progress on completing key actions and reporting requirements; and
 - the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body;
 - Implementation progress of the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028*;
 - The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre;
 - The Boomanulla, Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, and Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation facilities, with reference to governance, operations, and handover or opening timeframes;
 - Consultation on cultural heritage, with reference to the Ainslie Volcanics site;

¹⁷³ ACT Government, Apply for financial support after domestic and family violence – Safer Families Assistance, <https://www.act.gov.au/community/domestic-family-and-sexual-violence/apply-for-financial-support-after-domestic-and-family-violence> (accessed 15 April 2025). A Media Release from YWCA Canberra on 18 March 2025 ‘welcome[d] the reinstatement of the Safer Families Assistance payment’ [source: YWCA Canberra, Safer Families Assistance Payment Restored – Urgent Funding Boost Needed at Next ACT Budget, <https://ywca-canberra.org.au/safer-families-assistance-payment-restored-urgent-funding-boost-needed-at-next-act-budget/> (accessed 15 April 2025)].

- Reporting and Government response requirements pursuant to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Act 2008*;
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People’s Commissioner, regarding the Minister’s engagement with the Commissioner, funding arrangements, and issues raised during the Commissioner’s appearance before the Committee;¹⁷⁴ and
- The growth and development of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) sector, including:
 - The number of ACCOs operating within the ACT, and their involvement in consultation and delivering programs with government funding; and
 - The ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund.¹⁷⁵

Key Issues

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreements

- 4.121. The Committee sought an update on progress against the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028* (the ACT Agreement) and the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (the National Agreement).
- 4.122. Last year, the Productivity Commission published the final report from its Closing the Gap Review (the Review).¹⁷⁶ The Review, which commenced in 2022, identified 16 essential actions, 15 of which have been agreed.¹⁷⁷
- 4.123. Officials advised there are two priority bodies of work which CSD is working on with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and across government – strategic uplift of implementation plans, and the development of a transformation strategy. These actions are linked to Phase 3 of the ACT Agreement and the six transformational elements under Priority Reform 3 of the National Agreement.¹⁷⁸
- 4.124. The Committee understands that a further national review is being developed which will sit next to the Productivity Commission review:

There will be an additional review that is currently being developed, which is the Indigenous or First Nations-led review, which is due this year as well...It draws on the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we are likely to see more recommendations from that which the joint council will need to consider later this year.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2025, pp 259–272.

¹⁷⁵ *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 146–165; *Committee Hansard*, 25 February 2025, pp 370–388.

¹⁷⁶ Productivity Commission, *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Study Report*, Volume 1, 2024.

¹⁷⁷ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 148–149.

¹⁷⁸ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 148–149.

¹⁷⁹ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 152.

4.125. The Committee heard that implementation of priority reforms and essential actions occurs across directorates, making reporting and monitoring across the ACT and National Agreements, and any reviews of these, complex:

The challenge...is: how do we roll that all up into a whole-of-government response where we can monitor, track, see real progress and understand where progress is not being made as quickly as we need it, and therefore be able to target more effort?¹⁸⁰

4.126. Given the crossover between identified reforms in the ACT and National Agreements, as well as agreed essential actions from the Productivity Commission Report, officials spoke to the need to ensure alignment of governance and reporting activities.¹⁸¹

4.127. One method of reporting occurs via the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reporting within ACT Government Annual Reports. All reporting entities under the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004* are required to include reporting on progress under the ACT Agreement and the National Agreement.¹⁸²

4.128. In 2023–24, a new format was available for agencies with obligations under both agreements to report on how ‘actions and programs undertaken relate to the implementation of the Priority Reforms’ in the National Agreement, including:

- Work undertaken to improve areas not on track in their responsibility under the ACT Agreement;
- Engagement undertaken to understand the environment and evidence used to inform action to address issues impeding progress towards targets; and
- Findings from work undertaken that supports the rationale of our actions and how they connect to the National Agreement Priority Reform areas.¹⁸³

4.129. The Directions indicate that this format will be the new requirement for 2024–25 annual reports.¹⁸⁴

Committee comment

4.130. The Committee notes the intersection and complexity of reporting on actions against the ACT Agreement and National Agreements. Added to this are further actions arising out of the Productivity Commission’s review of progress against the National Agreement.

¹⁸⁰ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 149.

¹⁸¹ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 25 February 2025, p 383.

¹⁸² Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Directions 2024, Pt 2, B9.

¹⁸³ Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Directions 2024, Pt 2, B9.

¹⁸⁴ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 148.

- 4.131. Given the advice received during public hearings, the Committee considers it is important that progress against the ACT Agreement, National Agreement, and any agreed actions arising from reviews of those agreements, continues to be included within Annual Reports. This information should be formatted in a consistent way that allows easy comparison and identification of connected actions across directorates.
- 4.132. The new format outlined in the Annual Reports Directions would appear to promote this approach. However, the Committee considers it is important that work undertaken to address agreed actions from the Productivity Commission Report is also clearly identifiable in this reporting.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider whether updates to Part 2 of the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Directions 2024 are required to ensure easy identification and comparison of actions to implement commitments under:

- the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028*;
- the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*;
- the *Our Booris, Our Way* report; and
- any independent reviews of these documents, including the Productivity Commission’s *Closing the Gap Review* and the First Nations-led review of the National Agreement.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

- 4.133. One of the Priority Reforms included in both the National and ACT Agreements is building the community controlled sector.¹⁸⁵
- 4.134. The Committee sought an update on the actions under this priority reform area, with particular reference to Boomanulla Oval. Officials advised work was underway to support transfer of the management of Boomanulla Oval to community control in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body:

Government has committed to handing Boomanulla over to community control. What we are working through now with the elected body is: what does that look like? There is not an existing entity that we can easily just hand it over to. We have got to find somebody who can take on the management of Boomanulla that the community is happy with—for that group of individuals to take over the management of Boomanulla...It is absolutely on the work program with the

¹⁸⁵ ACT Government, *Closing the Gap: Jurisdictional Implementation Plan*, 2022, pp 7 and 12–13.

elected body to make that commitment happen, but we can only move at the pace that the community and the elected body are able to move at.¹⁸⁶

- 4.135. The Committee understands that discussions about the transfer of Boomanulla Oval to community control have been occurring for almost 10 years,¹⁸⁷ with several ACCOs having expressed interest in and plans for managing the site.¹⁸⁸ The challenges raised by officials included the need for capacity building within the ACCO sector, as well as the desire for transfer to community control to occur in an ‘equitable way.’¹⁸⁹
- 4.136. In relation to capacity building, the ACT Government established the ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund (the Fund) which provides grants under four tiers to new and existing ACT ACCOs. Applications for grants under the first tranche of the Fund, which will provide \$3.86 million over four years, opened on 3 March 2025.¹⁹⁰ Officials advised the grant process will be a ‘non-competitive grant round’ to provide flexibility to meet the needs of individual ACCOs, which are at different stages of establishment and have different support requirements.¹⁹¹
- 4.137. Officials advised there is also ongoing engagement with Transport Canberra and City Services (which manages Boomanulla Oval) and the ACT Health Directorate (which manages the Ngunnawal Bush Health Farm). This engagement is examining the management needs at these sites and the community members and organisations that are joining together to be part of the delivery services.¹⁹²
- 4.138. The Committee heard that work is also underway following engagement with the Elected Body on a proposed community oversight committee that can ‘govern the administration and provide strategic oversight’ of how ACCO management of Boomanulla Oval might work.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 154–155.

¹⁸⁷ The ACT Government sought expressions of interest from ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations interested in contributing to the future of Boomanulla Oval’ in a 2016 tender. See Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister Chris Bourke MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, ‘New management sought for Boomanulla Oval’, *Media release*, 1 March 2016.

¹⁸⁸ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 155.

¹⁸⁹ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 155.

¹⁹⁰ Mr Chris Simpson, Executive Branch Manager, Aboriginal Service Development, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 156, ACT Government, *Funding to support Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations*, <https://www.act.gov.au/money-and-tax/grants-funding-and-incentives/funding-to-support-aboriginal-community-controlled-organisations> (accessed 10 April 2025).

¹⁹¹ Mr Chris Simpson, Executive Branch Manager, Aboriginal Service Development, Community Services Directorate, and Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 25 February 2025, p 386

¹⁹² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 154–155; Mr Brendan Moyle Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 155; and Mr Chris Simpson, Executive Branch Manager, Aboriginal Service Development, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 156.

¹⁹³ Mr Brendan Moyle, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 155–156.

Committee comment

- 4.139. The Committee is encouraged by the government’s consultation with the community and efforts to build capacity within ACT ACCOs. However, given the extended period since the initial commitment to return Boomanulla and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing farm to community control, the Committee considers greater transparency is needed regarding the timeline for this to occur.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government announce a roadmap for the transfer of Boomanulla Oval and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to community control, including a date on which the transfers will take place.

Multicultural Affairs

Matters considered

- 4.140. Mr Michael Pettersson MLA appeared in his capacity as Minister for Multicultural Affairs on 12 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Venues available in the ACT for multicultural community events, with reference to affordability, venue size and suitability, and the refurbishment of Fitzroy Pavilion at Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC);
 - The implementation of and funding arrangements for the *Multiculturalism Act 2023* across the public service, noting the provisions in the Act requiring action across all directorates, and the role of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism;
 - The 2024 and 2025 National Multicultural Festival, including The National Multicultural Festival Grant program, stall fees, revenue, volunteerism, and festival accessibility;
 - Discrimination, with reference to:
 - The recently achieved Advanced Level Welcoming Cities Accreditation;
 - Upcoming positive duty obligations pursuant to the recently amended *Discrimination Act 1991*; and
 - Preventive education and training programs, and the general promotion of social cohesion, with respect to racism and international conflicts;
 - Support for newly arrived migrants seeking employment and recognition of qualifications, including the role of government, the community sector, and social enterprises; and
 - Housing support for newly arrived migrants and refugees.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 166–182.

Key Issues

Multicultural Affairs events

- 4.141. The National Multicultural Festival is held annually in Canberra and is ‘Australia’s largest celebration of cultural diversity.’¹⁹⁵ The festival is a ‘community-led’ event which is reliant on a ‘huge volunteer base.’¹⁹⁶
- 4.142. The Committee heard that for the 2025 festival, approximately 245 registered volunteers filled 450 volunteer shifts across the three-day event.¹⁹⁷
- 4.143. When asked what incentives are available to encourage people to volunteer, officials advised:

In terms of incentives, what we provide to them is training so that they know what they will be doing and they are aware of their responsibilities. We also provide a free T-shirt with the festival printed on it. I feel very proud every time I wear it. That is something. Also, there is a tote bag with goodies, if possible. And we provide a meal voucher at the end of each shift so that they are able to enjoy the festival and also eat something that they would like... After all of that, we deliver a thankyou event at which the minister comes and thanks the hundreds of volunteers. We provide a certificate of appreciation, and we also feed them during that thankyou event.¹⁹⁸

- 4.144. In a QTON response, the Acting Minister advised that the Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs had not been invited to the volunteer thankyou event.¹⁹⁹

Committee comment

- 4.145. Considering the widespread support across the Assembly for the multicultural community, the Committee is of the view that events like the National Multicultural Festival volunteer thankyou event offer an opportunity for all members of the Assembly to acknowledge the important contribution that the multicultural community makes to the ACT.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider ensuring that invitations are forwarded to non-Government Members of the Legislative Assembly for Government-run multicultural events.

¹⁹⁵ National Multicultural Festival, ‘About’, <https://multiculturalfestival.com.au/about/> (accessed 3 April 2025).

¹⁹⁶ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, pp 179–180.

¹⁹⁷ Ms Anita Perkins, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 180.

¹⁹⁸ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 180.

¹⁹⁹ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, *answer to QTON 39: National Multicultural Festival Volunteer Event*, 20 February 2025 (received 25 February 2025).

Children, Youth and Families

Matters considered

- 4.146. Mr Michael Pettersson MLA appeared in his capacity as Minister for Children, Youth and Families on 18 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, concerning:
 - Physical contact between detained young people and visitors;
 - Centre capacity, programs offered, and staffing considerations;
 - Body scanner technology and strip searches; and
 - The role of oversight bodies, alongside the complaints handling process;
 - Preparation being undertaken to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, particularly concerning the work of the Therapeutic Support Panel;
 - The *Next Steps for Our Kids Strategy 2022–2030*, with reference to the phased approach to reform and new service system implementation which focuses on earlier intervention; and
 - The Youth Assembly, in relation to the government’s obligation to respond to reports and recommendations and youth involvement in decision making.²⁰⁰

Key Issues

ACT Youth Assembly

- 4.147. The ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC) hosts the biennial ACT Youth Assembly, which brings together Canberrans aged 12 to 25 years to provide thoughts and recommendations on how to advance and advocate for youth issues.²⁰¹
- 4.148. Following each Youth Assembly, a report and recommendations are submitted for government consideration. Officials advised:

When recommendations are made by the Youth Assembly, the government agrees, agrees in principle or notes recommendations that broadly align with its existing work programs. Consequently, when the Government agrees or agrees in principle to these recommendations, it is assumed they will be fully or partially implemented as part of those existing work programs and tracked through their monitoring processes. There is no formal reporting or monitoring process back to the Youth Assembly as participants are generally only engaged for the event itself.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2025, pp 218–237.

²⁰¹ Ms Sanzida Akhter, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs, Community Services Division, *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2025, p 230.

²⁰² Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, *answer to QTON 45: Youth Assembly recommendations*, 18 February 2025 (received 27 February 2025).

- 4.149. The ACT YAC and Youth Assembly are not bodies established under legislation and there is therefore no legislative requirement for government to formally respond to the recommendations from the Youth Assembly.²⁰³ When asked what avenues are available to participants should they feel recommendations had not been implemented, the Minister advised:

I would not place too much of the responsibility to ensure those recommendations are actioned with the participants of the Youth Assembly. Broadly, through the democratic processes that exist within our territory and the ways that they can engage with us as their representatives, would be a pathway available to them. But the Youth Assembly is not a binding forum. It does not have a democratic mandate, so to speak. So the weight of those recommendations needs to be considered in that context. We take them very seriously and we respond to them and recommendations should be actioned and followed up.²⁰⁴

Committee comment

- 4.150. The Committee acknowledges the government's actions to respond to the recommendations of the Youth Assembly. The Committee considers that greater transparency as to how recommendations from the Youth Assembly are implemented would provide further acknowledgement of the important role played by the ACT YAC, and forums they host, in promoting and advocating for youth issues in Canberra.

Recommendation 34

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government strengthen accountability in relation to both the Youth Advisory Council and the ACT Youth Assembly.

Listen to me Report

- 4.151. The *Listen to Me* Report is a publication released by the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner in 2024. The report was 'designed, researched, and written by a young person with lived experience of the out-of-home care (OOHC) system', informed by input and experiences shared by other young people.²⁰⁵
- 4.152. The report includes five actions addressed to adults, particularly those working in the OOHC system.²⁰⁶
- 4.153. Officials advised that there was ongoing engagement with the children and young people who contributed to the report:

...we certainly have been working closely with the Human Rights Commission on that work, which is incredibly powerful—done by a group of young people. We

²⁰³ Mr Michael Petterson MLA, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 231.

²⁰⁴ Mr Michael Petterson MLA, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 231.

²⁰⁵ ACT Children and Young People Commissioner, "[Listen to me!](#)" *A plea from children and young people with an Out-of-Home Care experience to the adults who work with them*, 2024, p 3.

²⁰⁶ ACT Children and Young People Commissioner, "[Listen to me!](#)" *A plea from children and young people with an Out-of-Home Care experience to the adults who work with them*, 2024, p 4.

have established ongoing relationships with the young people who did that work and the Human Rights Commission, to ensure that we are continuing to embed the lived experience of the young people and that their voices are being heard in the reform of the system.²⁰⁷

Committee comment

- 4.154. The Committee is pleased that CSD continues to engage with the author and contributors to the *Listen to Me!* Report. Given the actions identified in the report relate to the work of adults within the OOHC system, the Committee considers a formal response from government may further demonstrate the work undertaken to ensure these actions are listened to and implemented.

Recommendation 35

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider providing a formal response to the *Listen to Me!* report.

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre

- 4.155. The Committee sought clarification of a range of security and therapeutic processes at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Bimberi) following concerns raised in the ACT Inspector of Custodial Service's (ACT ICS) *Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024*. In its report, the ACT ICS noted that while many staff were committed to providing the most therapeutic environment possible for young people in Bimberi, these efforts were hampered by the centre's operating environment.²⁰⁸
- 4.156. The Committee heard that activities were undertaken to provide a therapeutic response for children in Bimberi, particularly in relation to the raising of the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Officials advised that there are children who 'previously may have gone into Bimberi who will not go into Bimberi at this point in time and will have access to the range of supports and interventions' via the Therapeutic Support Panel.²⁰⁹
- 4.157. The Minister noted the 'alignment' between the approach taken by the Panel with young people who have been referred to the program, and the services and supports offered within the Centre, stating that 'we want to provide a therapeutic response, whether that be in the community or in Bimberi.'²¹⁰
- 4.158. Officials advised that while therapeutic needs are considered within the Centre, it remains a security environment:

It is a custodial environment, but it does not mean that we are not paying attention to the therapeutic needs of the children within Bimberi. It is always a balance...They all have different needs, and we work with them in different ways

²⁰⁷ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2025, p 230.

²⁰⁸ ACT Inspector of Custodial Service, *Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024*, p 12.

²⁰⁹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 226.

²¹⁰ Mr Michael Petterson MLA, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 226.

to make sure that they are engaged with things that can help them longer term to stay out of a custodial environment, but there is always a secure environment.²¹¹

- 4.159. The Committee notes the ACT ICS’s evidence before the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs regarding the concerns raised in its report:

I think there is an overtly risk-averse operational culture [in Bimberi]. In a sentence, I think it comes down to that. I think when you are worried about the risk of what could go wrong and that is driving decisions—when you are locking down a whole centre for a single code, even if it is a rolled ankle—that to me says the calibration of risk and aversion to risk is wrong.²¹²

Committee comment

- 4.160. The Committee recognises the need to balance security and therapeutic considerations within Bimberi. However, Members remain concerned that an overly risk-adverse culture may negatively impact individuals and undermine efforts to implement more consistent therapeutic responses, both within and outside the centre.
- 4.161. As the second phase of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility commences, the Committee considers a therapeutic approach to the management of individual young people is even more imperative and should be prioritised wherever possible.

Recommendation 36

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government review the priorities and culture in place at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, to ensure a more appropriate balance to place the needs of the individual as a primary consideration, within the context of a secure environment, and to ensure better connections and information flows between groups involved in the management of the Centre.

- 4.162. The *Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024* highlighted the ACT as one of the last places in Australia that young people can be strip searched, and made clear that the practice should no longer occur:²¹³

²¹¹ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, Committee Hansard, 17 February 2025, p 226.

²¹² Ms Rebecca Minty, ACT Inspector of Custodial Services, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 78.

²¹³ ACT Inspector of Custodial Services, [A review of a Detention Place by the ACT Custodial Inspector, Health Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre](#), 2024, pp 70–73.

The ACT is one of the last Australian jurisdictions to permit a body/cavity search of a young person in detention. OICS Review Standards do not permit such searches and while the Review Team found no evidence of such searches being conducted at Bimberi, recommend that this legislation be repealed.

Recommendation 10:

The ACT Government:

- a) Repeal s 246 of the CYP Act, thereby preventing any form of body/cavity search involving a child or young person.
- b) Expedite the procurement of body scanner technology at Bimberi, ACT Watch House and ACT court cells, and prohibit the use of strip searches in legislation.

Figure 7: Recommendation 10 of the Healthy Centre Review [source: ACT Inspector of Custodial Services, *A review of a Detention Place by the ACT Custodial Inspector, Health Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre*, 2024, p 73].

- 4.163. While the most recently available trend data shows that few children or young people are strip searched on induction to Bimberi, this practice still occurs:

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	YTD 2023-24
Inductions	169	221	164	165	230	141
Strip Searched	0%	>1%	2%	1%	>1%	>1%

Figure 8: Searches on Induction to Bimberi [source: ACT Government, *Bimberi Headline Indicators Report - May 2024*, p 8].

- 4.164. During the public hearing, the Minister spoke to the ACT ICS’s recommendation and acknowledged that, although infrequent, such searches do occur:

From the figures I have in front of me, one out of 141 young people were strip searched upon induction at Bimberi in the first half of last financial year...I do acknowledge the existence of that issue. I appreciate that an X-ray scanner would assist in reducing that number from one to zero. We will consider the recommendation [of the Health Centre Review], and we will respond back through the Assembly.²¹⁴

Committee comment

- 4.165. In light of the alternative option offered by body scanner technology, the Committee is of the view that strip searches of children and young people is an avoidable practice that should be eliminated as soon as possible.

²¹⁴ Mr Michael Petterson MLA, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2025, p 225.

Recommendation 37

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government procure and implement body scanner technology at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, the ACT Watch House and ACT court cells as soon as practicable to eliminate the cause for strip searches to be conducted on children and young people.

- 4.166. The Committee heard that some positions within Bimberi, such as youth work roles, do not require any training or experience at commencement. Officials advised that this is used as a recruitment strategy:

There is a very intensive training program for youth workers that work in Bimberi before they actually work with any of the young people who are in our care in Bimberi. The work is hard, so recruiting and retaining staff in that environment is difficult. This has been a good strategy for us to get people who are interested in youth work as a career but may not think about that in the context of youth justice; they may think more about the community sector. It attracts people into that work. The same ad mentions that we will give people comprehensive training, which we do. Many of the staff will go through that training program, work for a period of time in Bimberi, and then they may do youth work in other parts of the sector. It is one of many recruitment strategies to try to attract and retain staff in Bimberi. It is a very thorough training program.²¹⁵

Committee comment

- 4.167. The Committee recognises the need to attract and retain quality staff into Bimberi; however, considers adequate supervision and training for unqualified or inexperienced individuals to be of utmost importance.

Recommendation 38

The Committee recommends that any unqualified and inexperienced person employed at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre as a Youth Worker must be supervised at all times, and be enrolled in an appropriate training program to attain a qualification.

²¹⁵ Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2025, p 164.

Seniors and Veterans

Matters considered

4.168. Ms Suzanne Orr MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for Seniors and Veterans on 18 February 2025. The following matters were considered:

- The establishment of a Veterans Wellbeing Centre within the ACT;
- The Seniors and Veterans Grants Programs;
- Housing supports and respite care for seniors;
- The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, with regard to the implementation of recommendations that fall within the ACT's remit;
- The Veteran's Ministerial Advisory Council, with reference to eligibility criteria and the management of potential conflicts of interest;
- Cost of living pressures for seniors and veterans;
- The ACT War Memorial, alongside the utilisation and accessibility of Memorials across the Territory;
- Digital literacy barriers for seniors, and relevant support and education programs;
- The *Age Friendly City Plan 2020–2024*, regarding progress made, the nature prescription program which was not commenced; the development of a new plan, and actions that will be carried over; and
- Part time employment opportunities for seniors, with reference to working hours eligibility for the ACT Seniors Card.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2025, pp 238–258.

5. Education Directorate

- 5.1. The Education Directorate is responsible for facilitating education services across the Territory, including public preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and specialist schools. In addition, the Directorate oversees ‘the registration and regulation of home education, early childhood education and care services, and non-government schools’.²¹⁷

Education and Early Childhood

Matters considered

- 5.2. Ms Yvette Berry MLA appeared in her capacity as Minister for the Education and Early Childhood on 17 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Flexible education and demand for the Muliyan education model;
 - Strong Foundations, including:
 - Progress against the actions in the Strong Foundations Phase One Implementation Plan;
 - Multi-tiered systems of support; and
 - Consistency of teaching methods across public schools;
 - Activities by the ACT early childhood education regulatory authority, Children’s Education and Care Assurance (CECA), including the Quality Engagement Program;
 - Workload reduction measures for public school teachers;
 - School facilities maintenance;
 - Class and school sizes;
 - Upgrades to Majura Primary School;
 - Support for students facing social or economic barriers to educational outcomes;
 - Management and reporting of racial harassment in schools;
 - The Safe and Supportive Schools Policy and Positive Behaviours for Learning framework;
 - Review of the Education Directorate Corporate Sponsorship Policy; and
 - Development of climate action plans for public schools.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Education Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 20.

²¹⁸ *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, pp 183–217.

Key Issues

Strong Foundations

- 5.3. Strong Foundations was developed to implement the recommendations made by the Literacy and Numeracy Expert Panel. It aims to ‘give children and young people at ACT public schools a high-quality and consistent foundation to their literacy and numeracy education’.²¹⁹ The implementation plan lists 12 priority actions for completion in 2024, and 11 for completion in 2025.²²⁰
- 5.4. Officials provided updates on progress made in delivering the 12 priority actions slated for completion in 2024.²²¹ When asked about the expert panel’s annual review of implementation progress, the Minister advised that a decision was yet to be made about how the report would be shared, but that it may be tabled in the Assembly:

It is important that people understand the journey that we have been going on together with our schools, so that we can make sure that everybody is well supported, but we also want to make sure that we are achieving all of the goals and implementing all the recommendations. One of the things that is probably going to be more challenging than the literacy is the numeracy space...Finding the expertise in that space is a bit of a challenge. We are not giving up. We had some experts on the panel who were very knowledgeable in that space. Having them coming back and helping us understand what we need to do to introduce and improve numeracy outcomes in our schools will be incredibly beneficial.²²²

Committee comment

- 5.5. In the interests of transparency, the Committee considers it important that a progress report on the actions that were to be completed in 2024 is made public, given the significance of the program for schools, teachers and students.
- 5.6. In addition, the Committee is of the view that regular updates should be given throughout the upcoming year with regard to the 11 actions due to be completed during 2025.

Recommendation 39

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide a formal report of progress on the 12 priority actions listed in the Strong Foundations Phase One Implementation Plan due to be completed in 2024.

²¹⁹ Education Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 737.

²²⁰ Educate Directorate, [Implementation Plan Phase 1: Policy and Program Development](#), September 2024, p 9.

²²¹ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood; Ms Angela Spence, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate; Dr Nicole Moore, Executive Group Manager, System and Policy Reform, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, pp. 186–191, 197–198.

²²² Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Early Childhood and Education, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 199.

Recommendation 40

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide ongoing updates on the 11 priority actions listed in the Strong Foundations Phase One Implementation Plan due to be progressed throughout 2025.

Access to flexible education

- 5.7. Muliyan is an ‘off-campus flexible learning program support[ing] public high school students who, at a point in time, require additional support’.²²³
- 5.8. The Committee heard that a decision was made in 2023–24 to move to a more flexible program with education provided both onsite at the Muliyan setting and offsite through an outreach program. Officials emphasised that flexibility was important, and that bespoke or targeted approaches were taken to meet the needs of particular students, such as individuals ‘in and out of care and in and out of youth justice’.²²⁴
- 5.9. Officials advised that the capacity of the flexible education program will remain at 30 students, with 15 students to access education onsite at Muliyan and up to 15 students participating via offsite flexible education models.²²⁵
- 5.10. The Committee raised concerns regarding access to the program. Officials provided the most recent statistics on referrals to Muliyan, which demonstrated a consistent level of unmet demand for the program:

Generally, we receive more applications than we can take. There is a process whereby a panel looks at all of those applications. It is based on a set of established criteria to prioritise those young people in terms of their needs and the access to that service. Those people that do not get offered a place are still supported through their mainstream school settings and are provided support through flex ed, as needed, in terms of how to engage those young people in a mainstream environment in their local schools. From time to time we have young people that return back to their local school. As places become available, we take young people off the waiting list so that they can start their engagement with that Muliyan flexible education service.²²⁶

- 5.11. Data provided by the directorate demonstrates that there is significant oversubscription, with two intake periods each year in term 2 and term 4:

In term 2 of 2023, 22 referrals were received for five places that were available. In term 4 of 2023, 32 referrals were received for 17 places. In term 2 of 2024, 22 referrals were received for three places.²²⁷

²²³ Education Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 79.

²²⁴ Ms Angela Spence, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 184.

²²⁵ Ms Angela Spence, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 184.

²²⁶ Ms Angela Spence, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 185.

²²⁷ Ms Angela Spence, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 216.

- 5.12. When asked whether consideration was given to maintaining the onsite capacity at Muliyan while providing extra capacity for off-site flexible education, officials advised a review would be required ‘to be able to determine the best way to cater for the different numbers in all of our flexible education settings’.²²⁸

Committee comment

- 5.13. The Committee supports the directorates efforts to better meet the needs of students through the introduction of off-site flexible education offerings. However, given the consistent level of oversubscription to the Muliyan program, the Committee is of the view that these offerings should be in addition to the on-site capacity of 30 students previously offered at Muliyan.

Recommendation 41

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure the scale of its Muliyan flexible education offering is sufficient to meet the level of need in the community.

Workplace incidents

- 5.14. The directorate’s Annual Report states that ‘the most significant risk to health and safety of workers in ACT public schools continues to be occupational violence in the form of verbal or physical aggression by students or parents’.²²⁹
- 5.15. The report also notes that ‘significant resources’ were invested in the implementation of the Occupational Violence Management Plan (OVMP), which was published in July 2017.²³⁰ Notwithstanding the implementation of the OVMP, the data on incident reports has remained relatively static in the last two reporting periods:

In 2023–24, there were 7,328 distinct work incident reports submitted via the RiskMan work incident reporting system in relation to occupational violence. This is in comparison to 7,448 reports in 2022–23.²³¹

Committee comment

- 5.16. The Committee considers the safety of teachers and school staff to be of utmost importance and is of the view that greater transparency is required to monitor the impact of actions aimed at reducing workplace incidents in ACT schools.

²²⁸ Ms Jo Wood, Director-General, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, p 184; Ms Angela Spence, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 186.

²²⁹ Education Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 211.

²³⁰ Education Directorate, [Occupational Violence Management Plan](#), July 2017.

²³¹ Education Directorate, [Annual Report 2023–24](#), p 211.

Recommendation 42

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct rigorous monitoring and review of workplace incidents in ACT public schools and reports at least biannually to the Assembly.

Majura Primary School

- 5.17. In 2022, the ACT Government announced a modernisation and expansion project for Majura Primary School. The school, which opened in 1963, caters for over 800 students. The project would provide capacity for an additional 300 student enrolments at the school.²³²
- 5.18. The Committee sought an update on the project after it was paused just prior to the 2024 election. The Minister acknowledged the need for ongoing consultation, stating that the government was ‘in the process of re-engaging with the school’ that ‘there are also the aspirations for the school, so we want to listen to them about what that looks like’.²³³
- 5.19. The Committee notes that the following update was provided on the Majura Primary School website on 7 March 2025:

The Education Directorate and Infrastructure Canberra are working together on this project and will keep the school community updated, providing opportunities for input during Term 2.²³⁴

- 5.20. Despite the pause to the project, the Built for CBR website which was updated on 12 March 2025 still lists the project as ‘set to complete in 2025’.²³⁵

Committee comment

- 5.21. The Committee considers that the provision of clear information and planned timings regarding engagement opportunities would be beneficial.

Recommendation 43

The Committee recommends that ACT Government provide a clear timeline and engagement plan surrounding the Majura Primary School upgrades.

²³² ACT Government, Majura Primary School expansion and modernisation, <https://www.act.gov.au/builtforcbr/browse-all-projects/education/majura-primary-school-expansion-and-modernisation> (accessed 15 April 2025).

²³³ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 201.

²³⁴ ACT Government, Majura Primary School, Majura Primary School expansion and modernisation project, 7 March 2025, https://www.majuraps.act.edu.au/school_expansion_and_modernisation (accessed 28 March 2025).

²³⁵ Built for CBR, *Majura Primary School Expansion and Modernisation*, <https://www.act.gov.au/builtforcbr/browse-all-projects/education/majura-primary-school-expansion-and-modernisation>, 12 March 2025 (accessed 12 April 2025).

Heating and Cooling Infrastructure

- 5.22. During the discussion relating to Majura Primary School, officials noted that there are heating and cooling problems which can be a general problem 'in older schools'.²³⁶
- 5.23. In a question taken on notice (QTON) response, the Minister advised a number of programs were being undertaken in relation to Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) within schools, including a 'Building Management Systems and Data Analytics pilot to optimise energy efficiency and thermal conditions in classrooms by providing real-time and centralised measurement, monitoring and control of HVAC systems'.²³⁷
- 5.24. In addition, the development of an Indoor Air Quality Strategy was canvassed.²³⁸ The Committee notes that this was also committed to as part of the Government Response to the *Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT* conducted by the Tenth Assembly Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion:

The ACT Government, through the Education Directorate, is currently developing an Indoor Air Quality Strategy to guide long term heating and cooling in ACT public schools. Indoor Air Quality Plans are in place for all ACT public schools...Review of HVAC systems continues to occur in ACT public schools every 3 years.²³⁹

- 5.25. Further, an earlier Inquiry by the same Committee saw the Government agree in principle to 'ensure[s] that all indoor spaces in ACT public schools are climate controlled by the end of 2024'.²⁴⁰

Committee comment

- 5.26. Given the impact of indoor air on the health and cognitive performance of students, and the commitments already made by the ACT Government, the Committee considers a clear timeline is needed to provide assurance to schools, teachers, students and families that there is a planned and in-progress response to this issue.

Recommendation 44

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide a clear timeline and delivery plan to bring all ACT public school heating and cooling systems up to standard.

²³⁶ Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 203.

²³⁷ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 44: Climate Adaption Plans*, 17 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 2.

²³⁸ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, *answer to QTON 44: Climate Adaption Plans*, 17 February 2025 (received 4 March 2025), p 2.

²³⁹ ACT Government, [Report No.9 of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT Government Response](#), pp 7–8. This was an 'agreed in principle' response to recommendation 20 of the Committee's report: The committee recommends that the ACT Government develop and implement long term air quality plans and ensure adequate heating and cooling in ACT public schools.

²⁴⁰ ACT Government, [Report No. 3 of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion Inquiry into the Management of ACT School Infrastructure Government Response](#), p 9. Recommendation 29 was agreed in principle: The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that all indoor spaces in ACT public schools are climate controlled by the end of 2024.

Early childhood education and care regulation

5.27. Children’s Education and Care Assurance (CECA) administers the National Quality Framework in the ACT.²⁴¹ During the hearing, the recent closures of some Genius Childcare centres were discussed, with reference to:

- Centre closures relating to non-payment of staff entitlements, resignation of staff because of pay issues, and safety concerns resulting in licence suspension; and
- the role of CECA in relation to compliance and the assistance provided to any centre that is subject to a suspension.²⁴²

5.28. Officials advised that when there is a closure at a centre, ‘Under the national law, the onus is on the provider to communicate with the families. Their standards expect that level of engagement from the provider with a family. So that is part of our expectation too’.²⁴³

5.29. When asked how national laws impact the ACT Government’s ability to intervene and support families impacted by such closures, the Minister stated:

I have raised it with our federal government as well as state and territory ministers. I think nearly every state and territory minister would have some experience in the space where early childhood settings are being monitored. So they are all keen to figure out a way through what changes could be made at the national level so that regulations, governments or somebody can do something different or more.²⁴⁴

Committee comment

5.30. The Committee considers that the non-compliance and non-payments of wages and superannuation by early childhood education and care providers is highly concerning. Any workers should be paid and this is an expectation within the community, particularly in the field of early childhood education and care.

5.31. In addition, the Committee recognises that national laws need strengthening so that early childhood education and care regulators across the country can better communicate with each other and step in where there are concerns about an operator’s behaviour, including beyond the immediate safety of children.

²⁴¹ ACT Government, Regulating early childhood education and care, <https://www.act.gov.au/education-and-training/education-service-providers/regulating-early-childhood-education-and-care> (accessed 28 March 2025).

²⁴² Ms Caitlin Tough MLA, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, pp 191–192.

²⁴³ Mr Sean Moysey, Executive Branch Manager, Education and Care Regulation and Support, Education Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 193.

²⁴⁴ Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, *Committee Hansard*, 17 February 2025, p 193.

Recommendation 45

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to engage with other jurisdictions to both widen the scope and expand the powers of early childhood education and care regulators to capture concerning operator behaviours beyond the area of immediate child safety and ensure stronger protection for educators and families.

6. University of Canberra

- 6.1. The University of Canberra (UC) was established under the *University of Canberra Act 1989*. The university is governed by the University of Canberra Council and is required to undertake a range of functions related to research, vocational services, and higher education.²⁴⁵

Matters considered

- 6.2. Officials from UC appeared before the Committee on 21 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Student accommodation and tenant rights;
 - Drivers impacting UC's financial position and actions to address this;
 - The previous Assistant Professor Scheme;
 - Ethical investment guidelines;
 - Enrolment trends for students by gender;
 - The [University of Canberra Campus Master Plan](#);
 - Development and sale of university-owned land and consultation on the Bruce Precinct Master Plan; and
 - Renovation of the Vice-Chancellor's office.²⁴⁶

Key Issues

Financial management

- 6.3. The Committee sought an update on UC's financial position, following an announcement in 2024 that the university needed to save '\$50 million in recurrent expenditure' by the end of 2025.²⁴⁷
- 6.4. Officials stressed that the university was sustainable but acknowledged it had been 'living beyond its means', with a deficit of approximately \$30 million resulting from internal and external factors.²⁴⁸
- 6.5. The Committee heard external factors included unmet domestic and international student enrolment forecasts, as well as competition with vocational institutions and the offering of fee-free TAFE.²⁴⁹ These, combined with hiring activities to meet growing student enrolment

²⁴⁵ University of Canberra, [Annual Report 2023](#), p 140.

²⁴⁶ *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, pp 335–351.

²⁴⁷ Professor Stephen Parker AO, Vice-Chancellor University of Canberra, '[UC's Vice-Chancellor points to organisational change process](#)', *Media Release*, 21 October 2024.

²⁴⁸ The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 338 and Mr Jonathan Pheasant, Chief Operating Officer, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 342.

²⁴⁹ The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 339.

projections, resulted in actions being taken to address the university's staffing profile, across both academic and professional staff.²⁵⁰

The executive leadership and the council developed a plan to reduce and disestablish positions. Roughly 120 professional staff positions were reduced and 70 academic staff positions were reduced, so roughly 190 positions are being reduced. That is off a base of approximately 1,200 staff.²⁵¹

- 6.6. The Committee heard a rebalancing exercise would also occur to replace outgoing professors with more junior teaching staff, addressing unintended outcomes of the previous Assistant Professor Scheme.²⁵²
- 6.7. The university reports its financials by calendar year, meaning the exact nature of the deficit was being finalised, however officials advised UC was on track to address the shortfall:

As you know, our financial year is a calendar year, so we are still finalising the 2024 report. We will have more precise understandings of the extent of the deficit. We have the broad picture. We believe that, with the reduction in staff numbers and the other professional savings, we are on track to return to net out expenditure and revenue. Whether we quite get to that in one year will be difficult, but there will be a marked and significant reduction. We are on track, either by 2026 or during 2026, to return to our revenue meeting our expenditure.²⁵³

Committee comment

- 6.8. Given the extent of UC's financial deficit, the Committee considers the government should seek an update on the university's financial position at the end of the 2024–25 financial year. This would provide an early indication of whether the actions taken by the UC executive are having the intended effect, noting reporting for 1 January to 30 June 2025 would not be made available in the UC Annual Report until 2026.
- 6.9. The Committee notes that the Treasurer may seek this information under the *University of Canberra Act 1989*.²⁵⁴ In the interests of transparency, and noting the important role UC plays in the ACT higher education ecosystem, the Committee considers the government should present this statement to the Assembly after its receipt.

²⁵⁰ The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 339.

²⁵¹ The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 339.

²⁵² Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy-Vice Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, pp 341 and 343.

²⁵³ The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, pp 340–341.

²⁵⁴ University of Canberra Act 1989, s 35(2)(d) and Sch 1.

Recommendation 46

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide an end of financial year update to the Assembly on the University of Canberra's financial position as at 30 June 2025, as provided for in section 35(2)(d) and Schedule 1 of the *University of Canberra Act 1988*.

Gender difference in university enrolments

- 6.10. The Committee raised concerns regarding the decline in male student enrolments, with the percentage of male students decreasing from 46.4% of UC students on Australian campuses in 2015 to 41.3% in 2023.²⁵⁵
- 6.11. The Committee heard that this trend is experienced across the Australian university sector, with course offerings in 'feminised professions' and the interaction with vocational education listed as factors contributing to the lower percentage of male students enrolling at UC.²⁵⁶
- 6.12. Officials described actions undertaken to attract more men to courses that are predominantly undertaken by women:

I think that is an ongoing challenge. We certainly partner with the professional associations in that space to make sure that we have equal representation, for example, in our marketing and advertising materials, and that we do not shy away from, for example, when we are engaging with all-boys schools, promoting courses like nursing, occupational therapy and some of the others that are highly feminised. Yes, we have to be very aware of that, because if we take a photo of our group of students in nursing, it is nearly all women.²⁵⁷

Committee comment

- 6.13. The Committee notes that little is known about the factors driving the decline in male university enrolments, and considers further research is needed to ensure men are not discouraged from seeking higher education in the ACT.

Recommendation 47

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate the long-term decline in university enrolments of male students.

²⁵⁵ University of Canberra, [Annual Report 2023](#), p 21.

²⁵⁶ The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 347.

²⁵⁷ Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2025, p 348.

7. Official Visitors

- 7.1. ACT Official Visitors are independent statutory officeholders. The *Official Visitor Act 2012* provides that Official Visitors are appointed by the Minister to visit places mentioned in a range of legislation, including the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, the *Disability Services Act 1991*, the *Housing Assistance Act 2007*, and the *Mental Health Act 2015*.²⁵⁸ The Official Visitor scheme has a range of functions, including the identification of ‘systemic issues’ with a general aim of ‘improving service[s] outcomes for vulnerable members of the community’.²⁵⁹

Matters considered

- 7.2. Representatives of the ACT Official Visitors appeared before the Committee on 11 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Transfers of children and young people to the Adult Mental Health Unit;
 - Suitability of accommodation for people exiting detention and mental health facilities;
 - Housing availability, maintenance, and suitability;
 - The potential for a disability death review scheme;
 - Progress on the development of a common protocol for the development and maintenance of visitable places registers;
 - Funding and resourcing of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre; and
 - The capacity and budget of the Official Visitors.²⁶⁰

Key Issues

Capacity constraints

- 7.3. ACT Official Visitors performed a total of 825 visits during the reporting period.²⁶¹ However, the Chair of the ACT Official Visitors Board advised that there were concerns about the ability of Official Visitors to adequately undertake their role:

As chair of the board, I am concerned about our capacity as a system. We would like to be doing more visits, but, at the moment across the scheme, our budget really is running at capacity. That is something we will work out in internal processes. We have a very significant growth in disability visitable places I am aware we are not seeing. Certainly the official visitors have been amazing in working with us as a board on these budget issues, but we are somewhat constrained in our ability to deliver the level of service that we would like to.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Official Visitor Act 2012, s 9.

²⁵⁹ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 5.

²⁶⁰ *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, pp 139–145.

²⁶¹ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 17.

²⁶² Mr Peter Muir, Board Chair, ACT Official Visitors, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, p 144.

- 7.4. The Committee also notes that ‘issues with the accuracy of some visitable place registers’ was raised as a systemic issue in the Official Visitors Annual Report,²⁶³ although it appears this is being addressed via the development of common protocols across all directorates which are close to being finalised.²⁶⁴

Committee comment

- 7.5. The Committee acknowledges the importance of the role of ACT Official Visitors in protecting, and giving a voice to, vulnerable people. As such, it considers that adequate funding to allow a sufficient number of visits to take place should be a priority.

Recommendation 48

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide sufficient funding to ensure Official Visitors are able to make as many visits as necessary to fulfil their functions effectively and reliably.

²⁶³ ACT Official Visitors, [Annual Report 2023/24](#), p 12.

²⁶⁴ Mr Paul Wyles, Official Visitor Mental Health, ACT Official Visitors, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2025, pp 142–143.

8. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner

- 8.1. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner is an independent statutory office holder appointed in accordance with the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner Act 2022*. The Commissioner's office is responsible for advocating on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; promoting the enjoyment of their rights and those of their families; and inquiring into matters that affect their safety, development and wellbeing. The Commissioner may also intervene in relation to decisions that will affect the rights or interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.²⁶⁵

Matters considered

- 8.2. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts on 19 February 2025. The following matters were considered:
- Resourcing and case load of the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner (the Office);
 - Interventions in legal matters on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
 - Use of the formal recommendation mechanism provided under section 24 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner Act 2022*;
 - Strategic priorities of the Office in relation to advocacy;
 - Outcomes and learnings from the 2024 Youth Forum;
 - Systemic issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including family policing and over-surveillance, sexual exploitation and trafficking, health and education supports and outcomes, and the appropriateness of out of home care arrangements and residential care facilities; and
 - The implementation of the increase to the minimum age of criminal responsibility, including early intervention mechanisms and front line community supports.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner Act 2022, ss 8–11.

²⁶⁶ *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2025, pp 259–271.

Key Issues

Case Management Software

- 8.3. The Commissioner advised the Committee that manual work was being undertaken in relation to case management which was ‘quite hard’, noting that both the Community Services Directorate and the ACT Human Rights Commission use case management software systems.²⁶⁷
- 8.4. The Commissioner highlighted the benefits that such software could offer, with particular reference to the Commission’s ability to track and report on data:
- my office has been advocating particularly for a software system, to be able to capture accurately all of our data and to be able to present effectively at inquiries like this and at estimates, and to community members, so that we can tally...Unfortunately, we have again been met with barriers to be able to budget for our software system...We do need the software in order to be able to come here and say, “This is what we’re doing. This is what we’ve done. This is where a case is at.”²⁶⁸
- 8.5. The Committee is supportive of the Commissioner’s desire to both improve efficiencies and present accurate data to all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 49

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore options for the implementation of a case management software system for use by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People's Commissioner.

Allegations of exploitation

- 8.6. During her appearance, the Commissioner raised concerns regarding sexual exploitation of vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in residential out of home care facilities.²⁶⁹
- 8.7. The Commissioner advised that she had been alerted to these concerns through the Office’s individual advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. While these issues had been raised in community roundtables and forums, the Commissioner stated the risk is one ‘that must be addressed by the Director-General and

²⁶⁷ Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2025, p 264.

²⁶⁸ Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2025, pp 263–264.

²⁶⁹ Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, *answer to QON 88*, 25 February 2025 (received 10 April 2025).

ACT Policing, and is not within the control of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.’²⁷⁰

- 8.8. When questioned about the action taken in response to reports of exploitation or abuse, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs acknowledged the ‘very serious position’ put forward by the Commissioner and advised those specific reports had not been raised with her prior to the public hearing.²⁷¹
- 8.9. The Committee heard that officials work closely with the Commissioner on issues that she or CSD identify in their work:²⁷²

In terms of any concerns around perpetration of abuse, we take all of that seriously. We look at not just individual cases. If there is a cohort of children experiencing the same thing, we also look at what we can do there. That might mean some expert training around how to respond, as well as working with all of our counterparts, such as police, who have responsibility in terms of the issues of sexual exploitation. We have systems in place to formalise the approaches for all government agencies in order to respond to the issues presented.²⁷³

Committee comment

- 8.10. The Committee notes that it did not receive evidence suggesting exploitation of children had been undertaken by or with the knowledge of CSD employees. However, considering the concerns raised and the reported vulnerability of children in residential OOHC, the Committee considers it may be beneficial to examine options to further support the safety of children in these settings.

Recommendation 50

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider whether further supports and safeguards can be put in place to protect young people and children in residential and Out-of-Home Care.

²⁷⁰ Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, *answer to QON 88*, 25 February 2025 (received 10 April 2025).

²⁷¹ Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 25 February 2025, p 373.

²⁷² Ms Catherine Rule, Director-General, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 25 February 2026, p 373.

²⁷³ Ms Anne Maree Sabilico, Acting Deputy Director-General, Children, Families and Strategic Reform, Community Services Directorate, *Committee Hansard*, 25 February 2025, p 374.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1. The Committee would like to thank the Ministers, statutory officers and directorate staff who participated in this inquiry.
- 9.2. The Committee makes 50 recommendations.

Mr Thomas Emerson MLA
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy
29 April 2025

Appendix A: Witnesses

Monday, 10 February 2025

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Vasiliki Bogiatzis**, Executive Branch Manager, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, Inclusion Division
- **Ms Kirsty Windeyer**, Deputy Director-General, Housing and Inclusion, and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Coordinator-General

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Minister for Women

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Anita Perkins**, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division
- **Ms Sanzida Akhter**, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Anita Perkins**, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division
- **Ms Jacinta Evans**, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy
- **Ms Tracey Harkness**, Senior Practitioner, Office of the Senior Practitioner

Justice and Community Safety Directorate

- **Mr Daniel Ng**, Acting Executive Group Manager, Legislation, Policy and Programs

Tuesday, 11 February 2025

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Mental Health

Canberra Health Services

- **Mr Dave Pepper**, Chief Executive Officer
- **Mr Bruno Aloisi**, General Manager Mental Health Justice Health Alcohol and Drug Services

ACT Health Directorate

- **Ms Rebecca Cross**, Director-General
- **Dr Sarah Miller**, Coordinator-General, Mental Health and Wellbeing
- **Ms Wendy Kipling**, Senior Director, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Division
- **Prof Anthony Cidoni**, Chief Psychiatrist, Office of the Chief Psychiatrist

Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Kirsty Windeyer**, Deputy Director-General, Housing and Inclusion
- **Ms Ailsa Borwick**, Executive General Manager, Housing Assistance
- **Ms Megan Valler**, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts Branch, Housing Assistance
- **Ms Kate West**, Executive Branch Manager, Client Services Branch, Housing Assistance
- **Mr Ash Balaretnaraja**, Executive Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Policy and Programs, Housing Assistance
- **Mr Mitch Pirie**, Deputy Under Treasurer and Coordinator General Housing, Treasury

ACT Official Visitors

- **Mr Peter Muir**, Board Chair
- **Mr Matthew Hingston**, Official Visitor Disability
- **Mr Christopher Redmond**, Official Visitor Children and Young People
- **Mr Paul Wyles**, Official Visitor Mental Health

Wednesday, 12 February 2025

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Anne-Maree Sabellico**, Acting Deputy-Director General
- **Mr Christopher Simpson**, Executive Branch Manager, Aboriginal Service Development Branch, Children, Youth and Families Division
- **Mr Brendan Moyle**, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Mr Michael Petterson MLA, Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Anita Perkins**, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division
- **Ms Sanzida Akhter**, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs

Monday, 17 February 2025

Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood

Education Directorate

- **Ms Jo Wood**, Director-General
- **Ms Angela Spence**, Deputy Director-General
- **Dr Nicole Moore**, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy and Reform
- **Mr Sean Moysey**, Executive Branch Manager, Education and Care Regulation and Support
- **Mr David Matthews**, Executive Group Manager, People, Governance and Communications, and Chief Operating Officer
- **Ms Vanessa Attridge**, Executive Group Manager, Finance and Infrastructure
- **Mr Mark Huxley**, Executive Group Manager, School Improvement and Performance Division

Infrastructure Canberra

- **Ms Gillian Geraghty**, Director-General

Tuesday, 18 February 2025

Mr Michael Petterson MLA, Minister for Children, Youth and Families

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Tina Brendas**, Acting Executive Group Manager (Deputy); Children, Youth and Families Division
- **Ms Melanie Saballa**, Executive Branch Manager; Next Steps; Children, Youth and Families Division
- **Ms Jacinta Evans**, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy
- **Ms Sanzida Akhter**, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth Engagement and Multicultural Affairs
- **Dr Justin Barker**, Chair of the Therapeutic Support Panel
- **Ms Anne-Maree Sabellico**, Acting Deputy-Director General; Children, Families and Strategic Reform

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Seniors and Veterans

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Jacinta Evans**, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy
- **Ms Brooke Yates**, Executive Branch Manager, Housing and Inclusive Policy Branch, Strategic Policy
- **Ms Sarah Conway**, Senior Director, Seniors and Veterans

Wednesday, 19 February 2025

Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

- **Ms Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner
- **Ms Gabrielle McKinnon**, Senior Director

Thursday, 20 February 2025

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health

Canberra Health Services

- **Mr Dave Pepper**, Chief Executive Officer
- **Dr Grant Howard**, Chief Operating Officer
- **Mr Holger Kaufmann**, Chief Information Officer, Digital Solutions Division
- **Ms Kellie Lang**, Executive Director, Nursing and Midwifery
- **Ms Catherine Loft**, Executive Group Manager, Infrastructure, Communications and Engagement Division
- **Mr Shane Nielsen**, Acting Executive Group Manager, Corporate and Governance Division
- **Dr Suzanne Smallbane**, Executive Director, Medical Services
- **Ms Janet Zagari**, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

ACT Health Directorate

- **Ms Rebecca Cross**, Director-General

Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Chief Minister

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

- **Mr Andrew Mehrton**, Executive Branch Manager, Social Policy and Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs, Policy and Cabinet Division

Friday, 21 February 2025

University of Canberra

- **Mr Bill Shorten**, Vice-Chancellor
- **Professor Michelle Lincoln**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- **Mr Geoff Drummond**, Chief Financial Officer
- **Mr Jonathan Pheasant**, Chief Operating Officer

Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Ailsa Borwick**, Executive General Manager, Housing Assistance
- **Ms Megan Valler**, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts Branch, Housing Assistance

Tuesday, 25 February 2025

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Community Services Directorate

- **Ms Catherine Rule**, Director-General
- **Ms Anne-Maree Sabellico**, Acting Deputy-Director General
- **Mr Christopher Simpson**, Executive Branch Manager, Aboriginal Service Development Branch, Children, Youth and Families Division
- **Mr Brendan Moyle**, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Justice and Community Safety Directorate

- **Mr Daniel Ng**, Acting Executive Group Manager, Legislation, Policy and Programs

Appendix B: Questions on Notice and Questions Taken on Notice

Questions on Notice

No.	Date	Asked of	Subject	Response received
1	12/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Costs and relocations (Growing and Renewing Public Housing)	21/02/25
2	12/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Dwellings (Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program)	28/02/25
3	12/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Statistics (Homelessness)	28/02/25
4	12/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Disruptive behaviour (Housing ACT)	28/02/25
5	12/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing ACT Statistics (Housing ACT)	21/02/25
6	12/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Wait lists (Housing ACT)	21/02/25
7	16/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Southside homelessness services	21/02/25
8	17/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Homelessness (CSD)	28/02/25
9	17/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	28/02/25
10	17/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing	13/03/25
11	17/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Community Collaboration Programs	28/02/25
12	17/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Safer Families Levy	25/02/25
13	17/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Community Services for Women Experience Sexual Violence	25/02/25
14	17/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence	25/02/25
15	17/02/25	Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services	Disability Inclusion	27/02/25

16	17/02/25	Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services	Carers (CSD)	05/03/25
17	15/02/25	Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services	Burrangiri respite care - closure	03/03/25
18	15/02/25	Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services	Community sector funding and sustainability	26/02/25
19	16/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Safer Families Levy (CSD)	25/02/25
20	17/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Women's perceptions of safety	25/02/25
21	17/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence Orders - service of	04/03/25
22	17/02/25	Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services	Handover Documents from Community Services Directorate	27/02/25
23	18/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Safe Haven Garran	03/03/25
24	18/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Mental Health Care Affordability	03/03/25
25	18/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Social Housing - maintenance	28/02/25
26	15/02/25	Minister for Women	ACT Women's Plan and the Third Action Plan	25/02/25
27	15/02/25	Minister for Women	ACT Women's Plan and the Third Action Plan - financial management	28/02/25
28	17/02/25	Minister for Women	Staffing and budget	03/03/25
29	17/02/25	Minister for Health	Handover Documents from ACT Health Directorate	28/02/25
30	17/02/25	Minister for Health	Handover Documents from Canberra Health Services	28/02/25
31	15/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Seniors and ageing (mental health)	28/02/25
32	16/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Safe Haven Woden	23/02/25
33	16/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Preventative health	26/02/25
34	17/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Responses to Chief Psychiatrist Report dated January 2024	24/02/25

35	17/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Emergency detention under the Mental Health Act	28/02/25
36	18/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Apprehensions by Apprehending professional	28/02/25
37	18/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Transfer from detention or youth detention to mental health facility.	26/02/25
38	18/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Care Orders	03/03/25
39	18/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Mental Health workforce planning	17/03/25
40	17/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs - resource allocations 2024	26/02/25
41	17/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Handover Documents from Education Directorate	21/03/25
42	17/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Education and Youth Affairs	04/03/25
43	17/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Strathnairn School - Oval	05/03/25
44	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Free 3-year-old Preschool	04/03/25
45	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Climate Adaption	04/03/25
46	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Strathnairn ECEC Centre	27/03/25
47	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Small Group Learning	04/03/25
48	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	ACT Public School Staffing	04/03/25
49	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Discrimination in Schools	04/03/25
50	18/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Bullying	04/03/25
51	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Period products in schools	04/03/25
52	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Resources to deal with racism	04/03/25
53	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Operation Kite – Fraud controls	28/02/25
54	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Freedom of information requests	07/03/25
55	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy	09/04/25

56	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Three-year-old preschool initiative	04/03/25
57	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Workplace or occupational violence (Workplace or occupational violence)	04/03/25
58	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Social Housing Maintenance	04/04/25
59	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Act of Grace payment	24/03/25
60	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Enhanced Care	28/02/25
61	20/02/25	Minister for Health	Closure of Burrangiri Respite Centre	04/03/25
62	20/02/25	Minister for Health	NDIS changes	05/03/25
63	20/02/25	Minister for Health	Disability Royal Commission	04/03/25
64	20/02/25	Minister for Health	Website updates	03/03/25
65	20/02/25	Minister for Health	Disability Access	04/03/25
66	20/02/25	Minister for Health	Weekly Respiratory Illness Report	04/03/25
67	21/02/25	Minister for Health	Iatrogenic injuries in Canberra Health Services	07/03/25
68	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health - Infant Program	04/03/25
69	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health Culture Survey	24/03/25
70	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health - Aboriginal affairs - Health	24/03/25
71	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health - Alternative Health Practice	04/03/25
72	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health - Aboriginal Health Unit	04/03/25
73	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health - Change in fee services	04/03/25
74	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health - AMC Health care	03/03/25
75	24/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Education - Carers in public schools	04/03/25
76	24/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Education - Complaints in Public School System	04/03/25
77	24/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Aboriginal Affairs - out of home care	04/03/25
78	24/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs - Our Booris Implementation	04/03/25
79	24/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle	04/03/25
80	24/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	The Child, Youth and Family Service Program	04/03/25
81	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health Service Data Dashboard	04/03/25
82	24/02/25	Minister for Health	Health Costing – Operating Theatres	27/03/25

83	21/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Public housing numbers (Housing ACT)	27/03/25
84	25/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	National Agreement on Closing the Gap - 17 SEOs	05/03/25
85	25/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Reporting on Productivity Commission Review of National Agreement on Closing the Gap	06/03/25
86	25/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Indigenous Social Workers	06/03/25
87	25/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program Funding	27/03/25
88	25/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner	10/04/25
89	27/02/25	University of Canberra	University of Canberra Hiring Process	07/03/25
90	27/02/25	University of Canberra	Careers UC	07/03/25
91	15/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Domestic and family violence services	21/02/25

Questions Taken on Notice

No.	Date	Asked of	Subject	Response received
1	13/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office funding	18/02/25
2	13/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office staffing profile	21/02/25
3	13/02/25	Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence	Funding for frontline Domestic and Family Violence services	18/02/25
4	13/02/25	Minister for Women	Women's Return to Work Program grants	18/02/25
5	13/02/25	Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services	Senior Practitioner - elimination of restricted practices	21/02/25
6	14/02/25	Minister for Health	Adult Mental Health Unit	24/02/25
7	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Children transferred to the Adult Mental Health Unit	28/02/25

8	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Child admissions to the Adult Mental Health Unit	24/02/25
9	14/02/25	Minister for Health	Emergency department presentations	24/02/25
10	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Safe Haven	24/02/25
11	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Location of mental health services	25/02/25
12	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Emergency Department presentations 2	25/02/25
13	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit modifications	24/02/25
14	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	National funding body referrals	24/02/25
15	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Lived Experience team	24/02/25
16	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Towards our Vision Strategy	24/02/25
17	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Mental Health Consumer Network Grant	24/02/25
18	14/02/25	Minister for Mental Health	Mental Health Consumer Network Grant 2	24/02/25
19	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	OneLink	21/02/25
20	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing Manager staffing	21/02/25
21	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Complaints data	21/02/25
22	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Complaints system	21/02/25
23	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing Australia Future Fund	03/03/25
24	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Dwelling types	21/02/25
25	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Territory Priority Project Applications	04/03/25
26	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Development Application changes	19/02/25
27	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	ACAT matter	19/02/25
28	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Community consultation with Yarralumla community	21/02/25

29	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Safer Families Grant Funding	21/02/25
30	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Safer Families Grant Funding 2	21/02/25
31	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Southside Men's Crisis Accommodation	21/02/25
32	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Distribution of public housing	21/02/25
33	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Rough Sleeper Data	21/02/25
34	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Distribution of public housing 2	21/02/25
35	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Vacant properties	21/02/25
36	14/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Tenant Relocation List	19/02/25
37	14/02/25	Official Visitors Board	Transitions from criminal detention	21/02/25
38	20/02/25	Minister for Multicultural Affairs	Assessment of overseas qualifications	26/02/25
39	20/02/25	Minister for Multicultural Affairs	National Multicultural Festival Volunteer Event	26/02/25
40	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Maintenance requests at public schools	04/03/25
41	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Maximum class sizes	04/03/25
42	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Majura Primary School	Not received as at 29/04/25
43	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Reporting of harassment in schools	04/03/25
44	20/02/25	Minister for Education and Early Childhood	Climate Adaption Plans	04/03/25
45	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Youth Assembly recommendations	27/02/25
46	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Complaint response timeframes	27/02/25
47	20/02/25	Minister for Children, Youth and Families	Out-of-home care staffing	07/03/25
48	20/02/25	Minister for Seniors and Veterans	Supported Housing for Seniors	07/03/25
49	20/02/25	Minister for Seniors and Veterans	Age Friendly City Plan	27/02/25

50	26/02/25	ATSI CYP Commissioner	Court interventions	05/03/25
51	26/02/25	ATSI CYP Commissioner	Reports to police	05/03/25
52	26/02/25	ATSI CYP Commissioner	Narrabundah House	05/03/25
53	26/02/25	ATSI CYP Commissioner	Residential care facilities	05/03/25
54	26/02/25	ATSI CYP Commissioner	Implementation of the increase to the minimum age of criminal responsibility	05/03/25
55	26/02/25	Chief Minister	Capital of Equality Grants	28/02/25
56	26/02/25	Chief Minister	Capital of Equality Grants 2	04/03/25
57	26/02/25	Chief Minister	Capital of Quality Grants 3	03/03/25
58	26/02/25	Chief Minister	Capital of Equality Strategy	03/03/25
59	26/02/25	University of Canberra	Student accommodation	05/03/25
60	26/02/25	University of Canberra	Student enrolment figures	05/03/25
61	26/02/25	University of Canberra	International student numbers	05/03/25
62	26/02/25	University of Canberra	Ethical Investment Guidelines	05/03/25
63	26/02/25	University of Canberra	Ethical Investment Guidelines 2	05/03/25
64	26/02/25	University of Canberra	Land use	05/03/25
65	27/02/25	Minister for Health	ACAT Team vacancies	19/03/25
66	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Emergency Department presentation categories	04/03/25
67	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Health portfolio cash reserves	04/03/25
68	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Funding	04/03/25
69	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Digital Health Record	07/03/25
70	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Primary Health Care	03/03/25
71	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Burrangiri	04/03/25
72	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Burrangiri 2	04/03/25
73	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Culture survey results	04/03/25
74	27/02/25	Minister for Health	Workload reduction taskforce	04/03/25
75	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Ainslie community garden	13/03/25
76	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Ainslie community garden 2	13/03/25
77	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Ainslie community garden 3	07/03/25
78	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing assistance fraud allegations	13/03/25

79	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing assistance fraud allegations 2	13/03/25
80	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing modifications	Not received as at 29/04/25
81	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing modifications 2	25/03/25
82	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing modifications 3	13/03/25
83	27/02/25	Minister for Homes and New Suburbs	Housing maintenance	04/03/25
84	27/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Case management	06/03/25
85	27/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner	05/03/25
86	27/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Establishment and Expansion Fund consultation	06/03/25
87	27/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations	06/03/25
88	27/02/25	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations 2	07/03/25

Appendix C: Gender distribution of witnesses

Beginning in April 2023, in response to an audit by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Committees are collecting information on the gender of witnesses. The aim is to determine whether committee inquiries are meeting the needs, and allowing the participation of, a range of genders in the community. Participation is voluntary and there are no set responses.

Gender indication	Total
Female	24
Male	21
No data	7