



Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2026–2027 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026–2027

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Ms Chiaka Barry MLA

Addressed to: Ms Clare Doube, Official Visitor for Corrections and Official Visitors Board member

In relation to: April 2026 incident at Behavioural Assessment Unit Canberra Hospital

Hearing: 23 July 2026

Uncorrected Proof Transcript p 25

Transcript provided: 24 July 2026

Answer Due: 31 July 2026

Ms Doube took on notice the following question(s):

THE CHAIR: Thank you. And if it is okay, I can put my question on notice. I could read it out. So again, just going back to the Behavioural Assessment Unit, where a patient in distress became violent and held staff to hostage in the unit, I would like to understand what observations the official visitors made about the incident and then an opinion of whether the BAU is an appropriate environment to safely manage people experiencing an acute mental health crisis.

And also, are there lessons from that incident that should inform the design or operation of mental health assessments and treatment environments?

Geoff Dulhunty, Official Visitor Mental Health: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

The answers to these questions rely on two key factors. The first factor is one of environmental design principles. All areas that provide assessment and treatment for acutely distressed and potentially aggressive individuals should always have the facility of at least two points of access and egress. This principle ensures that in circumstances such as the above there is always an accessible egress for staff to exit the area without hindrance. Therefore, this was a fundamental planning error from the onset in the design of this unit. I am informed that CHS is aware of the design fault and that an architect has been engaged to provide advice regarding rectification as a matter of priority.

The second factor relates to whether the patient in distress was searched and screened for any potential weapon. This is a matter that sits with ACT Police and there seems to be an issue with this procedure being followed. I am further aware that since this incident metal detectors have been issued to security staff within that area of the unit.

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As to the appropriateness of the BAU it is felt that this area (while acknowledging the design fault) is a far superior area than has been provided in the past within the Emergency Department for this category of assessment and treatment. It should be acknowledged that it is not only mental health patients who may present as potentially aggressive but a range of other conditions which may involve aggressive behaviour and the need to be assessed prior to transfer to an appropriate inpatient unit. The BAU is therefore the most appropriate area for such assessments.

The inherent learnings in the above have been adequately acknowledged and are being addressed by CHS.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates

Signature:



By the Chair, Official Visitors Board, Peter Muir

Date: 29/07/2026