

Division 35: Communities — Services 1, 10 and 11, Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering —
[12 noon]

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms N. O'Keefe, Deputy Director General, Disability.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr B. Whitehouse, Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Mr P. Payne, Deputy Director General, Professional Standards, Regulation and Legal.

Ms J. Herring, Executive Director, Commissioning and Contracting.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Disability Services.

Ms J. Houston, Senior Policy Adviser.

Ms T. MacDonald, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: My first question relates the line item “Seniors Cost of Living Rebate” on page 525 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. How many seniors received the cost-of-living rebate in the 2023–24 financial year? Can we get a breakdown of how many payments were given to singles and couples?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member for the question. In the 2023–24 financial year, 310 000 Seniors Card holders have shared in over \$28 million in cost-of-living rebate payments. It has been very well received by those seniors.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide a breakdown of how many payments were given to singles and couples?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, that breakdown is not available.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister know the percentage of WA Seniors Card holders who access the cost-of-living rebate?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member for the question. I am looking up that information. I am very pleased to say that as a result of our actions to inform Seniors Card holders of their eligibility, there has been a significant increase in the number of seniors who have been able to take advantage of the rebate. In March this year, I wrote to 83 362 members who had been identified as not yet registered for the cost-of-living rebate and encouraged them to do so by 31 May to be eligible for this year’s payment. Since then, over 40 000 members have registered to receive the payment.

Ms L. METTAM: To clarify, did the minister write to 83 000 members?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: Have about half of those people applied?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes. Since March, over 40 000 have applied.

Ms L. METTAM: Thank you. How many seniors are expected to receive the cost-of-living rebate in the 2024–25 financial year?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In 2024–25, 315 000 WA Seniors Card members are registered to receive the payment. I was very pleased to see that increase occur because we know that the cost-of-living rebate is just one of the measures that this state government is using to assist people with cost-of-living issues. I know from my discussions with seniors right around the state that that rebate is very valued and has been very well received.

Ms L. METTAM: I will go back a bit, but I am still on the question of the Seniors Card holders to whom the minister wrote. The minister stated that over 40 000 have responded and registered for the rebate. Is there still time for those Seniors Card holders to benefit from this payment; and, further to that, is there an expiration date?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The cut-off date is 31 May. Again, we encourage all members who may not be registered and who want to take advantage of the rebate to register. I certainly encourage the member to let people in her electorate know that the rebate is available and to sign up for it, if they choose to.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister doing that himself?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: He gets paid too much. He is not eligible.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister promoting this payment, or in what way is he continuing to promote the payment to those Seniors Card holders who are yet to register?

[12.10 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am always mindful that the opposition criticises us for advertising the eligibility for seniors and other people, but we continue, through the Seniors Card website, to encourage people to contact and register. I know that members right around the state are very active in promoting the rebate to constituents. That is certainly coming across in the direct contact that members have with constituents. The mail-out itself is a very significant investment to make sure that everybody we are aware of who is not registered will have the opportunity to get the information, understand what is required and then register. Might I make an additional comment on that, if I may, chair?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The WA Seniors Card Centre has been really active in conducting regional roadshows that take the full complement of support available to seniors out to the regions. That promotes direct discussions with seniors so that they can better understand. As the member for Roe would know, it is always a challenge to make sure that people in regional WA are aware of the opportunities. Those regional roadshows are also very, very well received, and they have been conducted at a number of locations around the state.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have the minister's comment about the website. Does the minister have any figures or information about the reach of the website given the fact that a certain section of the seniors community does not access computers and the like?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I might ask Mr Whitehouse to comment on the general approach to communication. The website is just one of many approaches, I might add, and I am aware that some seniors are very savvy. I have met with a savvy seniors group on a number of occasions, and it is out there encouraging people to get online and telling them how to better use the website. But there are seniors, as the member says, who do not use the website, and that is when those regional roadshows and other mechanisms come into play. I will ask Mr Whitehouse to give the member an overview of the communication agenda that we have for it.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, minister. Thank you, member. Thank you, chair. It is a multifaceted approach. Across the state, 95 per cent of eligible seniors are registered members of the WA Seniors Card. That is outstanding, and we are continually trying to improve on that. One of the ways we are doing that is we have a communications and marketing worker on the WA Seniors Card team. In this year, we will also employ an Aboriginal engagement worker, because we know that vulnerable people are often more difficult to reach, and it is a real priority for us to reach them so they can become WA Seniors Card members. As the minister said, 42 regional roadshows have been held since July. They were in the south west, great southern, goldfields, Esperance, wheatbelt, midwest, Gascoyne, Pilbara, Kimberley and Indian Ocean territories. They have been very successful in engaging with seniors and bringing the WA Seniors Card opportunity to many people out there. We also find that there is quite a lot of traffic through the website, which seniors are readily accessing. It is specifically tailored to seniors in that instance as well. We are really confident that the full reach of the WA Seniors Card is getting out there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is obviously a pretty comprehensive regional roadshow program. What about the metropolitan area? Is it more through seniors groups and the like that the minister puts that information out? What is the metropolitan equivalent of the regional roadshows?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Whitehouse to again give the member an overview of that. There is a pretty comprehensive program, and, of course, the WA Seniors Card Centre is based in the metropolitan area, but I will ask Mr Whitehouse to comment.

Mr B. Whitehouse: We highlight the regional roadshows because they have been going for two years and are relatively new, but the metropolitan roadshows have been around for a long time. They continue to be really popular, and we hold a number of them every year. The WA Seniors Card Centre is specifically located at one40william to be accessible for seniors. It is right next to the train station. We market through things like Have a Go Day and other mechanisms as well, so we are very confident that the message is getting out there.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 525, under “Seniors and Ageing”, and the line item “Vulnerable Seniors Peak Body”. In answers that were provided to previous questions as part of budget estimates, it was indicated that a procurement process would be undertaken by the department to determine the recipient of and long-term funding for a vulnerable seniors peak body. I also note that there is no funding commitment in this line item for this year or across the forward estimates. Has a procurement process been undertaken, minister?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am delighted that the seniors strategy work that was undertaken by the department, which consulted with over 2 500 seniors, has produced a range of outcomes. One of those, of course, is the development of a seniors peak body that can undertake research, provide advice to government and help inform on seniors issues. The procurement process is about to come to an end. I am waiting for final advice from the agency to finalise the tender process. As the member indicated, the vulnerable seniors peak body funding was very specific and dealt with the vulnerability of seniors through and post the pandemic, and that funding comes to an end on 1 July. However, funding is available for the peak body, and it is in the community services line item.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister clarify when the procurement process will take place and when the vulnerable seniors peak body will be formed?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As I understand from the advice I have received, the procurement process through the department is complete. The department will be in a position to make an announcement very, very shortly.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to that same area on page 525, the details of controlled grants and subsidies, and the line item “Elder Abuse Prevention”. Can the minister outline to me why the funding for this area has ceased?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The controlled grants ceased on 30 June 2023, and that funding is now reflected as a spending change listed as “WA Seniors Strategy”. Therefore, there is ongoing funding for elder abuse prevention services, but it is reflected under the WA seniors strategy.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister give me some detail on how much funding within the WA seniors strategy the elder abuse prevention section has and what are the strategies within that group?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We have a dedicated separate elder abuse prevention strategy, but I will ask Ms Caron Irwin to comment on the detail of that strategy, because some services are provided within the sector and some of them are provided through legal aid.

[12.20 pm]

Ms C. Irwin: Thank you. I am just trying to find the relevant paper that has the details. During the 2021 election, the McGowan government committed to deliver \$4 million to Legal Aid WA to establish the elder rights statewide elder abuse advocacy service. This initial commitment was provided over four years, equating to \$1 million a year. The elder rights service aligns with the priority areas of the WA government’s strategy to respond to the abuse of older people. The priority areas were raising awareness and early identification, prevention and early intervention, integrated and coordinated responses, and data and evidence. The spending change that the minister referred to is the funding that is now listed under note 7. There is \$6.3 million over four years to boost the Seniors Card program, and \$2.5 million has been allocated to support WA seniors and prevent elder abuse through funding to the Older People’s Rights Service and the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and information service.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 510 and the take-up rate of the Seniors Card. Can the minister please advise the total number of Western Australian Seniors Card recipients?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are 411 111 active Seniors Card members, representing 95 per cent of the eligible population. That is correct as at 31 March.

Ms L. METTAM: I am seeking a breakdown. How many new Seniors Cards were issued in the 2023–24 financial year?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We will provide that as supplementary information, chair.

The CHAIR: Sure. For the record, the minister agrees to provide the supplementary information. Please state exactly what information will be provided.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member is asking for the percentage of new members in the 2023–24 financial year as opposed to the 2022–23 financial year. Is that correct, member?

Ms L. METTAM: I had a couple of further questions. I am seeking information on how many new Seniors Cards were issued in the 2023–24 financial year, and whether the minister has an anticipated number of how many cards will be issued in 2024–25 and 2025–26.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Mr Whitehouse might actually be able to provide that information now. I refer to Mr Whitehouse.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, minister. There are always ins and outs, because obviously people are turning 65 and people pass away. Between 30 June 2023 and 31 March this year, the number of WA Seniors Card members grew by 429. However, there would have been many more Seniors Cards actually issued, given that people come in and go out of the scheme, but the actual membership grew by 429.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 137 of budget paper No 3 and seniors and elders initiatives. It states —

This Budget provides a further \$8.8 million over the forward estimates period to provide additional resourcing to administer the WA Seniors Card Program as well as continuing several Seniors and Elders initiatives and grant programs ...

Can the minister enlighten us: is this funding for new FTEs, and how many are anticipated? This appears to be administration money.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: One factor we have seen over the last couple of years is the success of the seniors safety and security rebate. That scheme and the work we have been doing to increase senior enrolments and make sure that seniors get the entitlements for which they are eligible has increased the workload in the department, so a portion of that funding is to replace temporary FTEs with permanent FTEs. There are 13 FTEs in that sum, and then there is some additional funding to support elder rights, from memory. It is seniors and elders initiatives. There is a proportion of money for that and then a proportion of funding for those FTEs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I notice the last sentence states —

This Program will be delivered by the Department of Communities (\$21.3 million) and the Pilbara Development Commission (\$600,000).

Can the minister enlighten me on why the Pilbara Development Commission is one of nine development commissions that are part of these seniors and elders initiatives?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Within this division, there is no funding going to the Pilbara Development Commission. As we are in budget paper No 3, that may well relate to other initiatives. I cannot provide an answer on that \$600 000, but it is certainly not part of the division that we are dealing with.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister provide that as supplementary information?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think that the member might want to wait for the divisions that we are dealing with this afternoon.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The problem is that the Pilbara Development Commission is not listed this afternoon.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member can ask questions on any of the development commissions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay; I will make a mental note to ask that question in this afternoon's session.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer again to the take-up rate of the Seniors Card, but I have a different question. This is page 510 again. The minister released a press statement on 30 April headed “State Budget delivers \$8.8 million boost for WA seniors programs”. It details a \$3.6 million boost to support customer support for the Seniors Card program. Can the minister provide a breakdown of how the \$3.6 million will be spent?

[12.30 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Thank you, member. That effectively relates to the previous question from the member for Roe. That \$3.6 million is for frontline staff to ensure that the WA Seniors Card Centre is as responsive as it can be to seniors. I love getting asked the same question.

Ms L. METTAM: I wish I was listening more carefully!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Keep asking the same question, member! I am very happy with that.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to hear it again, can the minister provide some clarity on how many FTEs are currently employed to support the WA Seniors Card?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Whitehouse to confirm the FTE numbers.

Mr B. Whitehouse: There are now 26 staff employed by the WA Seniors Card as customer service operators. That 13 effectively doubled it from 13 to 26 permanent FTE. As I said previously, almost all of them are frontline call service operators. It is not administrative support; they are actually on the phone to seniors all day, every day. As

well, we are looking at ways through an Aboriginal customer support officer to engage more Aboriginal people to become WA Seniors Card members.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: If I might add to that, the centre provides a range of services related to the direct benefits that seniors can receive, but it also provides a lot of information and advice. It is a very supportive group of people who provide outstanding service. I get letters to my office that frequently comment on the care and respect that those staff show to seniors. Here in this room, I thank and acknowledge the WA Seniors Card Centre. I hope that the member is out there encouraging seniors to make contact and register for their Seniors Card.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question about Mr Whitehouse's figures. Are all those 26 people employed at one40william or are a few spread around the regions or in larger regional centres?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: They are all at one40william, but as I indicated earlier, there is an extensive regional connection program, and those members make regular contact with the regions.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 505 and the line item "WA Seniors Strategy". I refer to the breakdown of the \$1.2 million that was spent in 2023–24 on the seniors strategy and ask how that funding was spent.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am delighted to comment on this, chair. *An age-friendly WA: State seniors strategy 2023–2033* provides, for the first time, a cohesive single vision to support and promote seniors, harness community action and support older Western Australians to live the best life they can as they grow older. It includes \$180 000 a year from 2024–25 to 2027–28 for the operation of the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and information service; \$291 000 a year to support the operation of the older people's rights service; \$130 000 a year for the provision of WA Seniors Week community grants, Seniors Week awards, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day regional grants, and Seniors Week community grants; and \$50 000 for the age-friendly communities national forum, showcasing WA's opportunity as an age-friendly leader in the communities and city space.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a question regarding disability services. I go to page 64 of budget paper No 3 and the heading "Independent Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS Review) and Disability Royal Commission". It outlines that the redesign of the delivery of disability services across Australia will potentially change the roles and responsibilities undertaken by the WA government. What are the potential financial impacts of these changes?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As the member knows, under the previous government, the NDIS was growing exponentially and that caused some significant difficulties for its forecast growth potential. The NDIS review set out fundamentally to look at how the NDIS can better reflect the needs of people with disability and the sorts of roles the states might play in the future to support people with disability, given that we already provide \$1.3 billion to the NDIS and around \$1.1 billion of expenditure across other portfolios to support people with disability in this state. Western Australia makes a very significant contribution to support the needs of people with disability to live the best lives they can. There is still an awful lot of work to go, in discussions with the commonwealth, on how the NDIS review will be implemented, and those discussions ultimately need to take place with the sector itself. In terms of understanding what the final breakdown might be, we know that the federal government has targeted eight per cent growth in the NDIS, and we are looking at all options to improve efficiency within the NDIS to achieve those growth figures. The initial focus has been on dealing with fraud within the NDIS itself. The commonwealth put in place a number of steps to address that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With the changes the federal government is making, does the minister expect the cohort of individuals who can access the NDIS to increase or decrease?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The forecasts are for the NDIS to continue to increase. It is a matter of it potentially being at a slower rate. Certainly, from a WA perspective, our population is growing and, as a consequence of that, we would expect people with disability to continue to need to access the NDIS. Whether the NDIS is the most appropriate source of support for some people is the question that the NDIS review raised, and that is the discussion that the states are now having with the commonwealth to ensure the best network of services to support people with disability. Some people may very well need the ongoing support that the NDIS can offer. Other people may very well benefit from enhanced early intervention that might mitigate the need for long-term support through the NDIS. We are in a process of transition, so it is reasonable to take the view that we need to enable the practitioners in this area and sector to look at how that might develop in practice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have any figures showing how the numbers accessing the NDIS have changed from when the state signed on to the commonwealth model to, perhaps, now or the last year? Would the minister be able to supply those figures?

[12.40 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The scheme commenced in WA in 2019 and, at that point, there were around 24 000 participants. As of March this year, more than 56 000 Western Australians have individual plans, which is an increase of 32 000.

On the member's earlier questions about financial modelling, the commonwealth wants to negotiate the foundational supports, the framework and the costings in the second half of 2024. That may well be a question the member has for estimates in 2025.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If the minister returns to government, that may well be a question!

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 211 of budget paper No 3 and "Growing Our Communities: Supporting Thriving Regions and Protecting Our Environment". Regarding the first paragraph on disability services, can the minister advise how many disability service workers are currently working in the regions?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think that is a difficult question for the department to answer because every person within the Department of Communities has a responsibility for people with disability. As I said before, \$1.4 billion is going into services to support people with disability outside the NDIS. They are using services right across mainstream service delivery. It is difficult to identify the number of staff working solely with people with disability.

Ms L. METTAM: I can rephrase that or ask a different question: how many disability service workers are geographically based in the regions?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is that how many Department of Communities staff?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, disability service workers for the Department of Communities.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We have regional intensive support workers who are specialist disability service providers around regional WA. I will ask Ms O'Keefe whether she can provide the numbers for those, but I caution the member that a very large number of people have a job description that may not necessarily include disability support, but whose roles include provision of services to a whole range of people, a proportion of whom will have disability. In essence, that is about integrating services rather than defining people by a label. I will ask Ms O'Keefe to provide what information she can.

Ms N. O'Keefe: Approximately 40 staff have a dedicated disability role. They work closely with disability services and disability providers in the regions, as well as across housing and child protection. They really provide that expertise and support families and carers.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In addition to that, the NDIS framework supports a network of service providers across regional Western Australia. That is why this is a complex question. The department's role changed significantly with the adoption of the NDIS program.

Ms L. METTAM: How does the 40 staff compare with last year and the numbers pre-COVID?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We will agree to take that as a supplementary question to provide information over—how many years, member?

Ms L. METTAM: It is an indication of the number of staff last year and the numbers pre-COVID.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I suggest, member, that we limit it to make sure it is post the transition to the NDIS?

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Maybe for the last two years, specifically for the regional intensive support workers.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I undertake to provide supplementary information on the number of intensive support workers employed in regional Western Australia for the last two financial years.

[*Supplementary Information No B15.*]

Ms L. METTAM: Regarding Government Regional Officers' Housing, how many disability services staff are provided housing in the regions?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I ask the member to refer me to a line item?

Ms L. METTAM: It is in relation to page 211, where it states that the Department of Communities has approximately 1 350 staff in regional Western Australia.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: For GROH commentary, I will have to refer the member to the Minister for Housing. It does not fall within my division. Although staff may be a user of GROH, that is a matter for the Minister for Housing.

Ms L. METTAM: Are any staff able to obtain Government Regional Officers' Housing?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I ask the member to refer that question on eligibility to the Minister for Housing. Different agencies have different eligibilities and localities, so I refer the member to the minister.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the service summary on page 509. Service 10 is “Supporting People with Disability to Access Services and Participate in Their Community” and I presume service 11, “Living Supports and Care for People with Disability”, is the minister’s service area?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a general question around the minister’s observations as Minister for Seniors and Ageing; Disability Services and whether there is some work across the forward estimates or funding that could be directed towards supporting the development of this model. The minister may be aware of the Staying in Place model for aged communities out of Pingelly. Former minister Helen Morton has been involved. I am sure there has been interaction. I think there is opportunity for that to be expanded to provide services to members of our community who have NDIS packages but do not have access to service providers in regional communities. Are there opportunities for innovative models like that to work with government within the resources the minister has in those portfolios to see whether that model is applicable and could be expanded? The reason I ask is, although I see there is funding across the forward estimates for service providers to provide support and advocacy to people with disability, the challenge is accessing those services in regional communities, particularly outside regional centres, once they have that package, as the minister would understand. This model seems to have broken that nut, at least for the aged-care package and provision, whilst also creating employment locally. It is a bit of advocacy while I have the minister sitting in front of me, but I also wonder whether some funding within his department across the forward estimates could be directed towards looking at how that model might be integrated as part of that Staying in Place model.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I visited Pingelly and looked at the work of the community resource centre there, particularly in supporting the model. I was really impressed with it. I think it is doing excellent work, which goes to the heart of the place-based approach and looking at tapping into local community resources and leveraging that up in a way that the market does not provide. I understand that a number of community resource centres are now looking at that as an expansion option.

[12.50 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I think it is capacity and capability in any new initiative, without wanting to take a centralised approach. It just probably needs a bit of love.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, it is a bit organic.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, very, and I do not want government to come in and squash it, but some support and love in that space for capacity building, community communication and connectivity across disabilities and aged care would be good.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am very supportive of those models and how they merge. It is something I have been turning my mind to—how we can support that local, organic, place-based approach without having the heaviness of government contracting coming in over the top. I think there are some very good, skilled people who are able to tap into the existing National Disability Insurance Scheme and aged-care provisions and are using them very effectively in growing those sorts of models. I would be very supportive of the department encouraging that in any way it can, without actually taking away that local ownership, because I think that is the key to it. It does have love from me, but I think it has to grow organically and look at being a place-based, locally owned approach. I think it has great potential for small communities in our regions.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Who in the department would have responsibility for that, if it were to be considered a priority or at least of interest to the government, so that Lee Steel, Helen, I or others who are interested could further that conversation? Or can I have that conversation with the minister outside this room, and he can tell me?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think we could maybe have a separate conversation; I would certainly be keen to have that. It is a combination, because the CRC group within the department is incredibly supportive of CRCs. It might well be something that we work on through the CRC process.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: More money for CRCs! I did not even have to ask for it!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is a good model. It is really servicing the needs of the community in Pingelly and it is keeping people in place at home, which is great.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thanks, minister.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 221 of budget paper No 3 and the line “Volunteering Development Services”. Could the minister outline what volunteering development services provide?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are a number of organisations, particularly across regional Western Australia, but also in the metro area. They provide a number of functions. They assist people who are looking to volunteer to match up with volunteer organisations. They also provide support to volunteer organisations to improve their skills in how to best use and support volunteers. Given the range of volunteering that exists, having that understanding of

the volunteer ecosystem within a particular location really helps to build those linkages between people who want to volunteer and organisations that are looking for volunteers. We have new volunteer programs, with procurement underway, in the Gascoyne, Pilbara and wheatbelt regions. When I became Minister for Volunteering, I was very keen to make sure that our regional volunteer networks were supported and strong, given the diversity that exists across regional Western Australia and the very strong dependence we have on volunteers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister outline why the funding disappears in 2027–28?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is over the forward estimates, and that was a commitment we made in relation to the grant arrangements. That will be subject to future decisions.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 507 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and paragraph 14 under “Disability Services”, which makes reference to the Criminal Law (Mental Impairment) Act 2023. How many individuals over the past 12 months were found to have a mental impairment that impacted their capacity to plead?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is a question that will need to be referred to the Attorney General because I do not have responsibility for matters relating to pleas in courts. I have responsibility when the board refers a person as a potential client of the Bennett Brook Disability Justice Centre. With regard to the legal process itself, that is a matter for the Attorney General.

Ms L. METTAM: How many people are currently held at the Bennett Brook Disability Justice Centre?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are currently three people at the Bennett Brook Disability Justice Centre. As I indicated, people are referred through the court process and through a board process for consideration of placement at that centre. The new legislation will take away the open-ended nature of an order for placement at the centre. As a consequence of that, we would expect more people in the legal process to elect for an option to be referred to the disability justice centre.

Ms L. METTAM: I thank the minister. What is the maximum capacity of that facility?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is 10.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister advise what the average length of stay is for individuals at that facility?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We do not have information on the average length of stay; they tend to be quite long-term, but we do not have that information.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister provide an answer via supplementary information?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We can. The average length of stay at a very approximate estimate is two to three years. The Mentally Impaired Accused Review Board determines both placement and release, but if the member would like to have that information via supplementary information and can define the time period over which that average is to be calculated, we will endeavour to provide that answer.

Ms L. METTAM: Thank you. It is the average length of time of detention for the last term of government.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Since March 2021?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We will undertake to provide that information by way of supplementary information—that is, the average length of stay at the Bennett Brook Disability Justice Centre from March 2021 to date.

[*Supplementary Information No B16.*]

Ms L. METTAM: Have any inmates been absent without authorised leave over the past 12 months?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the annual operating budget for the centre?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We do not have that figure at hand for the member.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide that by supplementary information?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, we will provide that by supplementary information—that is, the current operating budget for the 2023–24 financial year.

[*Supplementary Information No B17.*]

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm