

**Division 35: Communities — Services 10 and 11, Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing, \$134 262 000 —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

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

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Ms M. Samuels, Deputy Director General.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr P. Payne, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality.

Mr C. Stewart, Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr R. Slattery, Manager, Strategic Policy.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Disability Services; Seniors and Ageing.

Ms J. Houston, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr C. Roberts, 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 fund. 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, 2 June 2023. 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.

[7.20 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the service summary on page 507. It lists funding for “Living Supports and Care for People with Disability”. There was \$104 million in 2021–22, but only \$58.9 million budgeted in 2022–23 before lifting to an estimated \$92.6 million. Can the minister please explain why?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The decrease represents a movement, mainly reflecting a transition of state clients to the commonwealth-administered National Disability Insurance Scheme, which has resulted in reduced expenditure and reduced state-administered disability service supports.

**Ms L. METTAM:** As I noted, this funding falls from an estimated actual of \$92.6 million to \$89 million in 2023–24. Then it increases in the forward estimates and falls again. Does that reflect the NDIS receipts?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I refer to Mr Millen.

**Mr W. Millen:** The 2022–23 budget settings for service measures are commonly based on the previous year’s spending patterns and are adjusted accordingly. In 2021, the state was yet to fully transition to the NDIS, resulting in increased costs for service measures at that point. The 2022–23 estimated actual presently reflects the expected demand for services for non-NDIS functions based on the needs of participants and the subsequent reallocation of indirect and corporate costs allocated across the services.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 516 of budget paper No 2 and the service “Supporting People with Disability to Access Services and Participate in Their Community.” I refer to a situation that has been raised as a concern by the member for Central Wheatbelt. It is regarding the withdrawal of the Activ Foundation from the community of Kellerberrin, which will result in the relocation of at least eight people who have been living in supported living in the community, along with the loss of jobs for 10 to 12 staff. Has the minister made inquiries with Activ about the withdrawal of its services in the wheatbelt? If not, why has he not?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, I have.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister enlighten us on the result of that interaction?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, I have spoken to people at Activ. They have explained what they are doing. They have explained what is happening with the people who are affected and their carers or families, and also their staff. We have spoken to the local member's office to make sure that we are covering all bases of any concerns from the local member.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On the withdrawal of services in the wheatbelt, is the minister aware there is a regional exit list held by the National Disability Insurance Agency, which documents the number of providers withdrawing services from regional Western Australia? If he is, does the existence of that list concern him?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** On the comment about the withdrawal of services from the wheatbelt, we are talking about a specific service in Kellerberrin. No, I have never heard of an exit list as such held by the NDIS.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When the minister spoke to Activ about its plan and the result for those people, can he say whether he found it acceptable that they will be unable to receive service in their own community?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am very reluctant to talk about individual people because it is a matter for their own decision-making. The NDIS and the principles of disability place choice and control at the heart of the values of the service. My understanding is that that was a negotiated outcome with the participants and their carers or families.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 501 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and administered transactions. How many group homes has the government enrolled under the NDIS specialist disability accommodation program?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We have not enrolled group homes into the NDIS.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Has the specialist disability accommodation program been activated in Western Australia, which the government indicated it would do as a short-term strategy in *A Western Australia for everyone: State disability strategy for 2020–2030*?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can I seek clarification on what line item the member is referring to in the budget papers?

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is administered transactions on page 501. It is under the grants and other subsidies.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There is, of course, supported disability accommodation in the private sector. The department is undertaking review work on the group homes that it operates and the houses it has within the community housing sector.

As I said, there is private sector specialist disability accommodation. We have not enrolled with any SDA group homes but it is under review within our department to see what the best outcomes are for participants. Participants in those houses receive NDIS-funded services.

[7.30 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further to that, can I confirm that there is also no funding for what was the community disability housing program? I have heard concerns from the sector that there is no specific allocation for disability housing this year.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There are 2 051 community disability housing program properties located across Western Australia. There are specific funding programs in areas of youth long-term housing and support and youth mental health homeless support.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can I confirm, firstly, that there is no specific allocation for housing? Secondly, does the community disability housing program still exist?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The program exists but it is operated by community housing providers. I will ask the director general to provide additional detail.

**Mr M. Rowe:** I thank the member for the question. As the minister indicated, the program has been operating for some time. Community housing providers operate the houses themselves. We work with them to collect the rent from people in those properties. There are a couple of programs budgeted going forward that the minister mentioned, one in relation to youth long-term housing and support programs and youth mental health homelessness services. The program is ongoing and there is some budget allocated to it in the future.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are these homes specifically for the disability sector?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, they are.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to page 505 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Paragraph 23 states —

Western Australia's population is ageing. In 2021, people 65 years and older made up 16.1% of the ... population.

How does WA compare with other jurisdictions and what is the percentage of regional WA residents over the age of 65?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Is the member asking me to specify the demographic of people aged 65 and over in regional Western Australia?

**Ms M. BEARD:** Yes, I am wondering what portion of the population is aged over 65 in the regions.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** In 2021, 16 per cent of the WA population was 65 years or older; and 78 per cent of the population aged over 65 years live in greater Perth and 22 per cent live in regional areas. Twelve per cent of the Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is aged 65 years and over.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Noting the numbers that live in the regional areas, has the senior peak body asked the government to increase the Country Age Pension Fuel Card? Similarly, has an approach been made to increase the patient assisted travel scheme allocation to support more equitable access to services for the group in the regions?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The Country Age Pension Fuel Card is operated through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, so it was dealt with in that division. I cannot recall very specific requests other than a general request to increase funding in a number of areas. Sorry, can the member repeat her question? I am getting information from all sides.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I was just wondering whether the seniors peak body or anyone has approached the government seeking an increase in the Country Age Pension Fuel Card or, similarly, an increase in the PATS allocation for the over-65 demographic in the regional areas who often struggle to access services in the metropolitan area.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that we have not received any direct representations on those matters.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 520 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and footnote (b) relating to 5 702 FTE for the 2023–24 budget year. How many vacancies currently exist in the department?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I ask that that question be put on notice to the coordinating minister.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can it be provided as supplementary information?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, that is fine. The supplementary information will be the vacancy rate. Does the member have a specific date?

**Ms L. METTAM:** For the following years—2022–23 and 2023–24.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Sorry, was that for 2022?

**Ms L. METTAM:** For the last financial year and this financial year.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We can only provide information for 2022.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is that for the financial year 2022–23?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Does the member want the vacancy rate for 2022–23?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I guess we are not there yet. The rate for 2022 would be good.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Is that for 2021–22?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, for 2021–22.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** By way of supplementary information, we will provide the vacancy rate for the financial year 2021–22.

*[Supplementary Information No A1.]*

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to service summary 11 on page 507 of budget paper No 2, “Living Supports and Care for People with Disability”. Can the minister outline what work is underway, acknowledging children and adults with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and the ability or lack of accessibility to secure diagnosis funding and ongoing support and whether that is covered off in here?

[7.40 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can the member repeat the question?

**Ms M. BEARD:** I was just asking what level of work may be underway to acknowledge children and adults with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and to secure diagnosis funding and ongoing support for that cohort?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am going to ask the director general to comment because there is a complexity with FASD. The National Disability Insurance Scheme will assess on the basis of functional capacity, not a diagnosis of FASD. I will ask the director general as there are some broader child protection matters.

**Mr M. Rowe:** I guess the main interface with this question is the clients that we support and work with would come into the child protection space. We do comprehensive health assessments of children who come into our care and to the extent that the child is exhibiting symptoms, we may be in a position to support them to have that assessment. We may also be able to support that child to access the NDIS, but, as the minister was implying, it is around cognitive functioning, not the diagnosis of FASD in and of itself.

**Mr H.T. JONES:** I refer to page 521 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2. About two-thirds of the way down is the heading “Disability Services” and below that is the line item “Sector Transition Fund—Australian Disability Enterprises”. Could the minister please provide more information on what the sector transition fund is being used for?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I thank the member and I thank him for his very active interest in the sector transition fund.

In May 2022, Activ Foundation announced its intention to close its large-scale workshops in WA where more than 750 supported employees with disability currently work. The Australian and state governments jointly established a transition task force to keep Activ Foundation’s worksites operating for an additional 18-month period to better support the transition of employees into new placements. The McGowan government also provided a funding pool of \$4 million to support Western Australia-based Australian disability enterprises to assist with the transition to the new federal funding model, providing equitable treatment of Australian disability enterprises in Western Australia. The McGowan government is committed to working with seven other WA Australian disability enterprises to find employment options that may suit some of Activ’s supported employees, should they choose to join another Australian disability enterprise.

As members will know, the employment future of the hundreds of people with disability employed by Activ was recently secured, with Activ Foundation to transition their large-scale worksites to Workpower. This incredible outcome not only secures important jobs for around 600 employees with disability across the state, but also ensures the families and carers of these employees are supported. The acquisition of Activ’s WA worksites to Workpower is expected to be complete and fully operational by 30 June 2023. It is a great outcome.

Workpower has a 30-year history of providing services and supported employment for people with disability in WA and is committed to seeing a smooth transition of Activ’s worksites, ensuring the supported employees’ employment and continued friendships. The Activ transition task force also included strong representation from Activ family members, which culminated in this positive outcome, which will enable supported employees with disability to remain in their usual employment setting. Alongside this achievement, the Office of Disability has continued to work with other Western Australian ADEs to build their capacity, develop contemporary service models and create work opportunities for future supported employees in the state. That work has been made possible through the McGowan government’s \$4 million sector transition fund, and this funding underlines the McGowan government’s commitment to people with disability and the employment sectors that support them.

The McGowan government has supported WA service providers to transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme through previous sector transition funding rounds. The STF funding has been designed to safeguard the sustainability and build the capacity of the Western Australian disability sector. This round of funding will assist other ADEs to provide sustainable supported employment services for their existing employees and extend opportunities to future employees where required. ADEs will be able to access grant funding where there is a demonstrated need and a viable plan to transition to sustainable supported employment services in the contemporary environment. Grants may also be used by ADEs to support the development of contemporary service models in which current ADE participants can participate, thereby moving away from the ADE model.

I assure the member that the government will continue to support people with disability, their families and carers to achieve the best possible outcomes and assist providers to continue to deliver and maintain the highest quality of supports and services in this great state of ours.

**The appropriation was recommended.**