

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 5 - REGIONAL NSW AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES**

**Monday 14 March 2022**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas**

## **MULTICULTURALISM, SENIORS**

**CORRECTED**

**The Committee met at 9:30.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Robert Borsak (Chair)  
The Hon. Lou Amato  
The Hon. Scott Barrett  
Ms Abigail Boyd  
The Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane  
The Hon. Peter Poulos  
The Hon. Walt Secord  
Mr David Shoebridge (Deputy Chair)

### **VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. Mark Coure**, *Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Seniors*

## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 812  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**



**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the additional public hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 5 and its inquiry into budget estimates 2021-2022. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. I welcome Minister Mark Coure and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Multiculturalism and Seniors. Before we commence I will make some brief comments about procedures for today's hearing. Today's proceedings are being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the proceedings of the Committee.

All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In those circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide the answer within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. Minister Coure, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. The following witnesses do not need to be sworn as you have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee: Mr Michael Tidball, Mr Joseph La Posta and Ms Tanya Smyth.

**Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL**, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, on former oath

**Ms TANYA SMYTH**, Director, Women NSW, Seniors and Carers, Department of Communities and Justice, on former affirmation

**Mr JOSEPH LA POSTA**, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, on former oath

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. We are joined by the Minister in the morning and in the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.15 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes will be allocated at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions for Government questions. Thank you for your attendance today. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Welcome, Minister Coure. I think you have been in the position for about 10 weeks?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is 10 weeks. That is right.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Welcome on board. Thank you very much for coming this morning. Minister, I would like to raise an issue that I raised at the last budget estimates in November with regard to a COVID-19 multicultural strategy. Has the Government implemented the communication strategy to properly inform multicultural communities about the current COVID-19 restrictions and health orders?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Thank you for that question. Let me begin also by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today and, of course, Elders past, present and emerging. In terms of COVID and all things COVID, I want to begin by informing the Committee of some of the grants that we have provided in regard to COVID and I think this is significant and worth mentioning.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, I do not want to interrupt. You can talk about grants later on, but I just want to know whether there is a communication strategy in place for COVID-19?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Multicultural NSW has done an amazing job in implementing and disseminating COVID information to our community. It has collaborated with the Department of Customer Service and NSW Health, for example, on the New South Wales Government's vaccine rollout to diverse audiences, multicultural audiences by engaging with multicultural media, including print, radio, digital and, of course, social media. In addition to that, Multicultural NSW has translated more than 3,000 resources covering important public health information in more than 60 languages since the start of the pandemic. I will get Mr La Posta to add to this response in a second.

But if I could also add, not just Multicultural NSW but through other departments, they have also worked with SBS. I want to acknowledge the wonderful work of SBS in the last two years to translate the live daily press conferences during the height of the Delta outbreak. This was the first service of its kind anywhere in Australia and the community responses were terrific, I have to say. Certainly in my time as a member of Parliament and backbencher, the acknowledgements of the wonderful work of SBS have flowed even through to my office as well. There were more than two million views—and I am sure, Mr Moselmane, you are one of them—across 10 languages. Since June Multicultural NSW and NSW Health have conducted a weekly press conference with multicultural media, which has been vital in getting information and health messages to the community.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I did not know that Multicultural NSW covers SBS as well.

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, they work with SBS.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I thank you for that response. My question is specific, and maybe Mr La Posta can answer. I tried at the last occasion; maybe this time Mr La Posta can answer. Do we have a communications strategy for COVID-19, a multicultural strategy? Do we have a strategy in place? If we do, do we have a document that we can see?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Through the Minister, if you are okay with me answering that question directly?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Sure.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Good morning, Mr Moselmane. As I answered in the last budget estimates hearing, the whole-of-government communication strategy is led by the Department of Customer Service, which sits under the remit of Minister Dominello. Obviously we are heavily vested in that because, as you know, one in two of us was either born overseas or has a parent born overseas and one in three of us, almost, now speaks a language other than English at home. So it was critical that our agency advocated for all of those

non-English-speaking communities and also those who consume their media sources in potentially traditional forms that are not things such as online or social media and those sorts of things but we can engage through newspapers and radio stations, particularly our community radio stations. In terms of the strategy per se, which I think is the essence of your question—and I answered it at the last one—it is very determined and nuanced in terms of what we are facing. In terms of the work through Delta—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** You said, Mr La Posta, that there is a whole-of-government strategy. Is there a document that we can see as members of the Opposition, as members of this Committee? Can we see this whole-of-government strategy that you speak of?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, I said the whole-of-government communication is led by the Department of Customer Service.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Is there a document?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** That would be a question best directed to Mr Dominello and the Department of Customer Service.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Has the Department of Customer Service given you a document as to how you as Multicultural NSW should operate?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** We speak to the Department of Customer Service, depending on what the issues are, daily or weekly. We are having at the moment meetings three or four times a week to talk about—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** So there is no real document or strategy in place? That is my question.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, I get where you are going with your question. It is very determined on what the challenges are that we are facing. The challenges that we faced during Delta were different from what we faced during Omicron, which are very different right now in terms of what we are facing in the floods. They need to be nuanced accordingly. If you have a set-and-forget strategy that has been developed by somebody that does not necessarily relate to the specific issues, then my concern would be that it would not be appropriately nuanced and targeted to what the need of the day is. In terms of the whole-of-government strategy, again, that is a question better directed to Mr Dominello. But certainly, through the Minister and our agency, we are very focused on making sure that no multicultural communities are not communicated with.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** All right, I do not get an answer once again. Can I take you to—

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** He did answer you.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** —the funding of multicultural NGOs and community services providers? What are those funding cycles, Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** As I was going to say in my previous answer, for example, the New South Wales Government has provided \$38.9 million in grant funding to vulnerable communities as part of a \$54.7 million package to support vulnerable people in multicultural communities. The grants program over the last little while, for example—and I can just explain some of those—obviously we have seen that before the current Delta outbreak Multicultural NSW provided COVID support from June 2020, including a \$6 million crisis package delivered for migrant and settlement NGO services to support temporary visa holders, refugees and asylum seekers. Obviously there was money set aside for multicultural media as well.

There was \$1.95 million in COVID-19 community support groups across two rounds for grassroots organisations, some in your electorate as well. In addition to that, there was also funding, for example, to emergency relief and NGO support grant programs. There was \$5.5 million in emergency relief for temporary visa holders as well, as part of a round two. There was \$2 million, as I mentioned before, for multicultural media grants. There was \$3.4 million for the Empowering and Supporting Local Communities Grants Program to provide funding for community-led initiatives that support vulnerable cohorts—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, the reason for my question with regards to the NGOs—

**Mr MARK COURE:** I am still going.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** —and community service providers—

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** My time is limited.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Mr Moselmane, I think there is plenty of time today. We should let the Minister finish.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Thank you, Mr Shoebridge. This is very important and I think it is worth noting. There was a further \$10 million for an NGO partnership grant funding program to empower community groups and NGOs to enhance their existing delivery of local services and emergency support during the pandemic, focusing on, but not entirely, those 12 LGAs of concern, but obviously as it went on that became broader throughout Sydney. I understand Multicultural NSW was partnering with the Department of Communities and Justice on a \$4 million grant program for large NGOs to provide support to further multicultural communities. I saw a lot of this as I was visiting community groups, particularly in south-western and western Sydney. I note the NSW Council of Pacific Communities, based in Minto, was able to use this funding to provide wellbeing packs, translation of services, and food packs and food hampers for their communities. They did a wonderful job out there in the community. That is just one of many community groups that I went to—in fact, Mr La Posta was there as well. They did a wonderful job in ensuring their community got the help and the service that they needed.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Thank you, Minister. Is there a Multicultural NSW funding cycle? Is there a cycle that Multicultural NSW provides funding for various community organisations?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter. I am here to answer questions on policy, not implementation. Maybe Mr La Posta might be able to add to that.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The reason for my question is to give those community organisations some certainty as to when and how they are going to get their funding and for how long, so that they can provide the services that you want them to provide.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** There is nothing about the last two years, Mr Moselmane, respectfully, that has been normal. We do have normal rounds of grant funding. We have project grants that happen every year, which we publicise quite widely through all of our email links and so forth, and we have two rounds of festival and events grants. As I just touched on, we have seen extraordinary circumstances the last couple of years. So with a lot of those festivals and events, we have tried to support the communities by just letting them wait until there is a time when they are safe to run. Likewise with the project grants, there has been no issue that has been brought to my attention where we have not tried to roll over some of the grant programs because a lot of them obviously require face-to-face and community engagement, which has been difficult in the last couple of years.

Separate to COVID, and I am not sure if it is a COVID-related question, but yes, we have three rounds of funding grants each year. If there is anyone that you are feeling is not communicated to, please, you know that I am more than happy to take them on board and reach out to them so that they have access. A lot of what we are also trying to do in recent times, Mr Moselmane, is capacity build within communities. We do not want to just keep giving the same groups funding each time because they write good grant applications. We have been spending a considerable amount of time trying to build capacity within some of our new and emerging communities and some of our smaller community groups to make sure they have the skills and expertise, certificates of currency, public liability and all of the other things to be able to get government funding as well.

**Mr MARK COURE:** If I can add through you, Mr Chair, two points? Certainly a further \$15 million in grant funding will be administered to vulnerable communities and multicultural communities experiencing hardship during the Omicron outbreak across three grant programs. In addition my agency, Multicultural NSW, has been working very, very well with the community, religious groups, the not-for-profit sector and other government agencies to identify and assist members of multicultural communities who are struggling during this pandemic.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, do you think the annual funding, or the every three months' or six months' funding to community organisations, is sufficient to give them some certainty in their operations?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is a hypothetical. I think that is—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** No, Mr La Posta said that there is annual and there are—

**Mr MARK COURE:** As Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Seniors as well, I will do everything I can to ensure that our communities are looked after.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Mr La Posta, is there certainty in that short-term provision of funding to these organisations that run these programs that provide services to the community?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Minister, it is through you whether I answer the question or not.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Mr La Posta?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, I do think it is difficult for community organisations to get annual funding grants. Through this Minister—and I must admit Minister Coure has been excellent in terms of being an advocate and also having a deep understanding of the needs of a lot of our community organisations and multicultural groups—I would love to see more partnership programs where we can multi-year fund as opposed to single-year funding.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I appreciate that response. Minister, I take you to the issue of your budget. I can see cutbacks in your budget for 2021-22 with regards to employee-related allocations.

**Mr MARK COURE:** You have got the budget papers there in front of you?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Yes, I do.

**Mr MARK COURE:** What page are they on?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** This is page 7-32. It is headed "Multicultural NSW: Operating Statement". I will read it out to you if you do not have it in front of you, Minister. The employee-related expenses at Multicultural NSW are budgeted to reduce from \$16.732 million to \$15.319 million, a decrease of \$1.43 million or about 8.4 per cent. Is this because you are planning to reduce staffing levels, Minister, or is the Government planning to reduce staffing levels?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter. But I will speak, if I can, on the budget itself and then pass on to Mr La Posta, who will obviously give you more detail. The New South Wales Government continues to deliver a budget which delivers for the people of New South Wales, including our multicultural communities. Of course, in 2020-21 Multicultural NSW's overall budget was \$38.1 million. In 2021-22 Multicultural NSW's overall budget is \$98.7 million. I have since been informed it has now increased even further. That is a whopping \$60.6 million. Of course, in terms of other additional funding that the department has received over time through the Expenditure Review Committee, that has taken it beyond that \$98.7 million mark. What we are seeing here is a considerable increase to Multicultural NSW just in the last two or three years of \$60.6 million. In terms of the operational, to your question, I will get Mr La Posta to provide further comment.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** It is operational in relation to staffing levels.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes. Specific to our staffing expenses—and Mr Moselmane, I am not contesting the statistics that you have in front of you. They are the facts, they are from our annual report. That is fine. I think our agency in the past few years, particularly under the stewardship of myself and the current senior leadership team, has provided a strong and compelling case to Ministers, government, Premiers and others of the importance of investing in our agency. As the Minister just touched on then, I am incredibly proud that this Government has chosen to invest an additional \$60 million in our agency.

This year our staffing will increase because of the surge staff required to help support the community through COVID, so we will see an increase in our staffing. Next year, at the moment—and obviously I cannot talk to budget and so forth and new policy proposals, but the agency is trying to put the most compelling case it can forward to not reduce our staffing going forward, just because of the importance of the relationships that we hold with the community and stakeholders and so forth.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Why the reduction in the employee related staffing expenses?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** This year there was no reduction. What has happened is—you are talking about 2021-22 or 2021?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** No, 2021-22.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** So this year our staffing expenses will not have been reduced because they are in the vicinity of about 18 or 19. I can take the specifics of the question on notice, but we have certainly employed surge staff to help us through the pandemic and also make sure that our existing staff are cared for and supported as well because it has been an incredibly difficult time—24/7, around-the-clock sort of stuff, as you know.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** So you will be increasing the number of employees in Multicultural NSW—is that what you said?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, that is not a commitment I can make to you, but certainly as the head of the agency I will be advocating as fiercely as I possibly can for the appropriate number of resources to continue doing what we are doing. The other thing I would make, Mr Moselmane, is the point you sort of touched on before: Success of multiculturalism in New South Wales is not dependent on my agency; it is dependent on a whole-of-government response. The critical thing is our ability to cut across and work with other government



agencies and influence them. We have a shared focus—obviously growing the workforce of Multicultural NSW and our critical interpreters and translators and others, and obviously all of our community engagement staff, resilience staff and settlement staff, helping support migrant and refugee communities. But, equally importantly, it is our capacity to influence the big clusters right across the board to think more through the prism of non-English speaking or barriers to access and services and so forth.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The reason I ask that question is that there is a fear expressed by some that, as a result of those cuts, there could be cuts in the number of employees. That is why I raised it with you and asked whether Multicultural NSW staffing will be replaced with contractors.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, to the contrary, during my stewardship—and I have now had the privilege of doing this job for just over three years and numerous budget estimates committees.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Three years.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** During that time the workforce has only grown, Mr Moselmane, and that is my intention. I never came to Multicultural NSW to make cuts. I came, to be honest, to make sure that the relevance and the certainty of this agency during this time was never more important than it is right now. My aspirations are to grow the agency.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** How many staff do you have at the moment?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I can take the specifics on notice, but I think this year it is in the vicinity of about 70—sorry, 70 full-timers and about 1,300 interpreters and translators that are casual.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Are those casuals outsourced or are they paid by—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** They are paid by the New South Wales Government.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Paid by Multicultural NSW. I think my time has just finished, so I can hand over.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, nice to see you and nice to know it is all being recorded.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Nice to see you too.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Mr La Posta, Mr Tidball, Ms Smyth.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Congratulations on that *Sydney Morning Herald* article on Saturday.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Thanks. I do not know if congratulations is how I would view it.

**Mr MARK COURE:** It was a very good article. I was very impressed.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Nevertheless, thanks, Minister. Right at this moment the Ukrainian community and the Ukrainian diaspora in Sydney is really reeling. What additional resources has Multicultural NSW delivered to assist them at this moment, and what planning is there in place to deal with what will tragically be a surge of Ukrainian refugees?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is a good question. Thank you very much for this. What we have done is we have obviously—and you are familiar with probably the STARTTS program, which is the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors. Obviously that has been expanded to help those communities from Ukraine. As Minister for Multiculturalism, I am certainly very proud of New South Wales. We are a State that has come from 307 ancestries, speak 215 languages and dialects and follow 148 different religions. Certainly the New South Wales Government has joined with Ukraine. Firstly, the New South Wales Government has joined support for Ukraine around the world by lighting up the Sydney Opera House sails blue and yellow recently. New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet was joined by many community members to stand with Ukraine. The New South Wales Government has taken steps to provide additional support in the form of services and liaising with the Ukraine community, of which I have spoken to many of them on a regular basis.

As I said, Multicultural NSW has recently funded the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, STARTTS, to extend its counselling services to community members impacted by overseas conflicts. By midday on Monday 28 February, recently, STARTTS had pulled together resources to enable them to start a service for the Ukrainian community through the "witness of war" program, which my agency funds. Of course, impacted community members are obviously able to call that 1800 number.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, have you met with STARTTS themselves? I have been to at least 10 of their fundraisers. They never have anywhere near the money they need to provide the level of

counselling needed for trauma-impacted refugee community. Have you met with STARTTS to find out what additional resources they need?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, I have not met with STARTTS, but my—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will you meet with them?

**Mr MARK COURE:** What is that?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will you meet with them?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I am more than happy to meet with anyone.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** No, not anyone. STARTTS have been doing this work for 38 years.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I am more than happy to meet with STARTTS.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Alright. What was the level of support provided to STARTTS last year, and what increase have you provided now?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I understand that is an operational matter, and I will ask Mr La Posta to answer that if that is possible.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I can get you the specifics within minutes or an hour; I want to be accurate. Mr Shoebridge, you and I have had the privilege of sitting at some of those STARTTS dinners together. During my time, to be able to get an organisation like STARTTS and to support them with a stand-up hotline for the Afghan community and now a stand-up hotline for the Ukrainian community with supporting language is a considerable advancement from some of the challenges that Jorge and the team were having in terms of securing government funding. STARTTS have also played a critical role for us in supporting asylum seekers and our temporary visa holder cohorts in the last couple of years as well. There certainly has been an increase in terms of the specifics year on year. I will get that for you this morning.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Mr La Posta, have there been requests from STARTTS that have not been able to be funded? If so, what are they?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Not that I am aware of, but I can take the specifics of that on notice. There is certainly nothing that I am aware of. Jorge and I keep a pretty open and honest dialogue. He sits as a part of our joint partnership working group that advises myself and Professor Peter Shergold, our coordinator-general of settlement, in terms of the issues and challenges. Like I said, they have played a critical role in the last couple of years during COVID and now the patriation of Afghan and Ukrainian citizens.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, what forward planning is there to put in place the support that will needed, I think tragically, for a surge of Ukrainian refugees?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I think at the moment it is early days, but I have spoken to the Federal Minister for Immigration in regard to this space. Obviously we have communicated with our Federal colleagues in regard to wanting to take over and above our humanitarian cap from Ukraine. I read today in the Herald there were 2.6 million—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Correct.

**Mr MARK COURE:** What is that?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Correct, 2.6 million refugees.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, 2.6 million refugees, 150,000 of those each day. What is happening in Ukraine is horrific and as Minister for Multiculturalism I will do everything I can to help the Ukraine community both here and overseas.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Have you met with the leaders from the Ukrainian community to start doing that advanced planning and to hear directly from them what their needs are?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I spoke to and I have met with religious leaders and, of course, members of the Ukrainian Council, many of whom turned up to the Harmony Dinner two weeks ago. Again, as I said before, I will do everything I can to help the Ukraine community.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Have you organised a sit-down, distinct meeting with the Ukrainian leaders, the Ukrainian community reps? Have you organised a distinct meeting with them as apart from—and I am not dismissing meeting them in broader context?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Sure.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Have you organised that?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I have had a meeting with some of our religious leaders and community leaders—I do note that the chair of the Ukraine community council had COVID recently, but I look forward to meeting them very soon—together. I will pass you on to Mr La Posta, who could probably add to that response.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Thanks, Minister. Mr Shoebridge, we do not just want to meet people for the sake of meeting them—that is the first thing I would say—because settlement ultimately and supporting our refugee communities is a matter for the Commonwealth. What we have done is we have made sure that Professor Peter Shergold has met with people like Paris Aristotle and others that are working on behalf of the Commonwealth to meet with Ukrainian leaders and then to advise the Minister, myself and others on policy. What I would say, and something I am incredibly proud of, is within days of this the New South Wales Government, through our Premier, Dominic Perrottet, took a leadership position to the Commonwealth on the importance of settling people and was willing to do, obviously, our fair share and more. To have a State that is in that position, from my point of view, is a significant policy advancement from some of the challenges I have had historically in my role.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Indeed, having States being willing parts of the solution rather than part of the problem, but what I am exploring here is, apart from the statement, what actually has happened in terms of forward planning? Has there been a meeting with the Ukrainian Council of New South Wales?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Has the Minister met with the Ukrainian Council of New South Wales and started asking—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes, he has. But with respect to settlement, I just need to be very clear here. We work very closely with the Commonwealth through a forum or mechanism called the SOSPC, which is the Senior Officials of Settlement Planning Committee. We had a conversation in a meeting with them last week, which myself and one of my senior directors and also Professor Peter Shergold attended. We asked for clarity around the numbers of the Ukrainian citizens that were looking to settle here. Australia is a long, long way away from Ukraine. We also wanted clarity around visa categories. We want clarity around things like Medicare support, access to health care, access to services, employment support and all of those different things. We have not had that clarity from the Commonwealth yet, so it is very difficult for us. Whilst we need to listen to the community, it is very difficult for us to go into meetings when we are not equipped with that information to be able to actually practically and tangibly support them, which is different from the Afghan situation because we did have that clarity and we were able to move with leaders.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Yes. Have you in those meetings been an advocate for Ukrainian refugees having those rights—access to Medicare, the right to work—so as they can contribute?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes, Mr Shoebridge.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Could you provide on notice—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Because otherwise the costs sit with the State, and that is not in our interest.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** We see that on many occasions.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** We do.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** With really unfair—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Asylum seekers and others as well.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** —restrictions on asylum seekers. Could you provide on notice what information you have sought from the Commonwealth and what, if any, answers you have?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Okay.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, I am sure, like me, you have met with many other communities in the last few weeks and many of them who have suffered ongoing structural violence in their homelands, whether it is the Sudanese community, or the Kurdish community, or other groups like the Afghani community. They are immensely empathetic with the people of Ukraine. They welcome the calls for boycotts and sanctions and the removal of restrictions for refugees, but they are also saying: What about us? Have we been forgotten? Are we going to be put to the back of the queue? There is that very real anxiety in those communities that they are going to be forgotten. What you say to those communities—the Sudanese, the Kurdish, the Afghans, Myanmar? What do you say to those communities right now?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Firstly, you are aware, of course, of the Premier's letter to the Prime Minister three weeks ago that the Ukrainian number of refugees is over and above the cap. Of course, I have also spoken to Mr Hawke, who is the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, and also told him of the same thing.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But they have seen the practice of what happened previously with refugee intake for Afghanis fleeing the violence and terror where it came at the expense of other refugee communities. You can understand their concern, can't you, Minister.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I certainly can, yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** So will you be meeting with those communities telling them of your advocacy and making it clear that the New South Wales Government's position is, yes, of course we all want to reach out and help the Ukrainian community, but it must not be at the expense of other communities around the world who also desperately need our help or protection?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Look, myself and Mr La Posta have met with many multicultural leaders on a regular basis. In fact, you are probably aware that every week I have a multicultural—at the moment it is a Zoom; hopefully it is face to face every week—with both multicultural media and independently to that multicultural community groups and religious leaders every week, without fail. That enables me, obviously, to pass on any issues or concerns that they have onto relevant government departments—Mr La Posta, et cetera. But I will do everything I can to help our communities right across New South Wales, including those that have just arrived.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** All right, on a help one help all basis, not on taking from one and giving to another—

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, no.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** —which we saw with the Federal Government's response to the Afghan refugee crisis.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Correct.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** All right. Could you provide, table any documents you have about making these representations to the Commonwealth in writing, any representations you have made to the Federal Minister in writing to this effect? Are there any?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will come back to you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, my office has received disturbing reports that certain trucks, which are owned by members of the broader Sikh community in New South Wales and which can be quite visible and identified on the streets in Sydney, have been the subject of sabotage, having brake lines cut and having other safety measures in their trucks being actively sabotaged. Have you heard of any of these concerns?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Not that I am aware of, but I am more than happy to report back to this Committee, unless Mr La Posta would like to add to my response?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I might ask Mr La Posta.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Shoebridge, when were you made aware of these concerns?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** In the last few days, and I am seeking some further detail about it. That deeply troubled me.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** As the additional detail comes to hand, I will provide it across.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Please do because—and I do not need to tell you this, potentially this is where some of the conversation may be going today.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** There may well be other Ministers and agencies responsible, including those who wear blue.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** No, they have got a really important role to play. There are no ifs or buts about it. I met with one of the senior leaders of the Sikh community on Friday to wish them well, seeing as when I was up on the North Coast the other day I saw one of their vans driving up to provide food. I went in there the other day to just wish them well with all of their pallets and things and the matter was not raised with me. But I take that incredibly seriously. All of our communities should feel safe in Australia and that is a criminal act, if correct.

So please escalate it to my office and we will work as quickly and as closely as we can with law enforcement agencies and others.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** And, Minister—

**Mr MARK COURE:** If I can just add—sorry, go ahead.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** —I am seeking as much detail as I can. These were very real concerns, though, that were conveyed to my office. Will you meet with the community face to face to discuss these concerns? You can imagine their concern.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I certainly will meet with them face to face. I am more than happy to work with you on these issues as I have spoken to many, both in The Greens and other political parties, both in the lower House and some in the upper House as well. I am more than happy to work with you on this issue. This is a very serious issue and I am more than happy to either have this conversation after this, immediately after this budget estimates meeting.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, I welcome that approach and, in fact, I would not have expected any different.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Thank you.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Speaking about Turbans 4 Australia, who are at the moment up in Lismore, having taken food, aid and assistance and provided their own trucks, their own transport and their own distribution facilities up there—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** They have also been providing that extraordinary service for the last two years to much-needed parts of the community in western Sydney and we have seen that organisation respond around the country in moments of disaster. Yet their primary grant application with Multicultural NSW was not successful. Can you explain why?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is a question to me?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Yes.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Firstly, I have met with Turbans 4 Australia. I have been to many of their events. In terms of their grants, I will probably take that on notice, if I can.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Yes. Minister, I think they like politicians coming to their events and supporting their work, they welcome that. But what they really need is financial support because they are doing work that nobody else is doing. I think we all appreciate and celebrate the work they are doing, but when they ask for funding they keep getting knocked back. They get very small, tiny grants but their primary funding application is rejected.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Sorry to cut you off. Their last event that I attended at western Sydney, in fact Rydalmere I think it was, from memory, I know for a fact, from memory, from that brief that there were grants that they were successful with. But I will take that on notice. Turbans 4 Australia do an outstanding job in our community. In fact, the chair of that organisation was awarded Parramatta Citizen of the Year.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** We will put his name on the record. It was Amar Singh and the extraordinary work he and his team do.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Exactly right.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But what they are asking for is structural financial support from the Government. Did you say you will come back on notice about that or you will provide some additional information?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will provide some further additional information in terms of the grants that they were successful with over the last few years, and any other relevant information.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** That is all of my questions.

**The CHAIR:** Mr D'Adam?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Thank you, Chair, and welcome, Minister. Can I clarify your role as Minister for Seniors? Is it fair to say that your role is to be an advocate for seniors in the Cabinet and make sure their interests are being considered? Is that a fair summation?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is a fair estimation. As Minister for Seniors, my priority is to ensure seniors across New South Wales are safe, have access to the best possible services and are able to live happy, fulfilling and healthy lives.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, can you tell us what short-term relief the New South Wales Government has delivered for older residents of New South Wales, particularly those in the north of the State who have been affected by floods, to ensure supplies of medication and access to medical treatment is maintained during the current crisis?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Resilience NSW is the lead agency for the disaster recovery and management. First and foremost, my heartfelt condolences go out to anyone who has had family members lose their life during the very difficult time in these floods, as you mentioned. The last three years—with bushfires, COVID-19 and now floods—have been incredibly challenging. That fact is not lost on me. Our agencies have already begun collaborating with DCJ, and DCJ has currently seconded a number of staff to Resilience NSW to work on evacuation centres in affected areas. In regards to disaster welfare assistance, more than 240 DCJ staff are currently involved in providing disaster welfare assistance to support communities across the State impacted by floods.

In regards to vulnerable people, the Department of Communities and Justice, on behalf of Resilience NSW, are providing emergency accommodation to any person displaced by floods. As of 7 March 2022, there have been 913 disaster-affected people assisted with emergency accommodation due to the recent floods, with 582 people currently in accommodation. I have been in contact with affected MPs and their offices—Janelle Saffin, Tamara Smith and Robyn Preston, just to name a few—and I have also spoken and received advice from MACA members, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, including Roy Starkey, who lives in Lismore as well. I might throw you to the secretary, who might add to my response.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Just in relation to the website that has been established for the purpose of the floods and specifically in relation to your question, I believe, about telehealth and prescriptions, it is a first port of call for advice on a number of things, including telehealth and prescriptions. It also covers financial assistance; emotional and trauma support after a flood—and these are specifically targeted to seniors—flood and storm advice in community languages; emergency, legal and insurance support; emergency help for homeowners in a flood; landlords and tenants rights in a flood; and, in relation to telehealth and prescriptions, it deals with support to access ongoing healthcare and medicines. In terms of the specifics of that, I will be very happy to take that on notice and report back quickly.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Turning again to the floods, obviously the floods have caused an already acute rental shortage, and the North Coast has become much worse. That has a particular bearing on our senior residents. Can you perhaps advise what advocacy you have undertaken, Minister, in relation to taking steps to try and address this rental shortage for seniors?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I have reached out personally to the Minister, Stephanie Cooke, along with appropriate Ministers in regards to this space. We stand ready to help in any way we can. In addition to what the secretary has added, if I can also say that DCJ staff were deployed to assist frontline support at evacuation centres, disaster welfare access points, administering emergency accommodation and providing administrative and coordinated support to those on the frontline. I am in weekly, if not in some cases daily contact with members of Parliament up there. I have offered my support to the likes of Janelle Saffin, Tamara Smith, Geoff Provest, Robyn Preston, Chris Gulaptis and even Catherine Cusack in the upper House, offering anything I can do to help those communities.

DCJ Housing is continuing to actively source any available accommodation in flood-impacted areas surrounding towns to use for emergency accommodation. Of course, the department is liaising very closely with NSW Land and Housing Corporation property assessors to ensure that public housing dwellings occupied by seniors are inspected for damage and required to repair as a priority. As Minister for Seniors, I will do everything I can to make sure it is a priority. The purpose of this is to ensure tenants have necessary supports in place to assess any further needs that need to be met to ensure tenants are safe in their home. As I mentioned before, I have already spoken to members of my ministerial advisory council who live in Lismore and are on the ground providing me up-to-date information about the situation on the ground. Furthermore, I have called—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What are they telling you, Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will get to that in a second. I will answer that. Furthermore, I have called a number of peak bodies to keep an open line of communication during this extremely difficult time. A number of these bodies have also written to me directly. I have instructed my staff to action these immediately to the relevant

Ministers and to follow these up. These have included representations to the Minister for Planning, Minister Roberts, and, of course, Minister McLaren-Jones and Minister Farraway.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You were going to elaborate on what members of the advisory council in Lismore are telling you. What specifically have they been—

**Mr MARK COURE:** Let us not beat around the bush here. This is a significant problem for Lismore. Of course, my agency DCJ and, in fact, Multicultural NSW are doing everything we can to get people back in their homes or to find alternative accommodation as quickly as possible.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, obviously, extreme weather seems to be the order of the day now. There have been many natural disasters in the past few years. What is your Government doing to ensure that older residents in the State are not negatively impacted by the effects of climate change, including things like heat stress, given the number of natural disasters we are experiencing?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I guessed, actually, sir, that you would ask me that question. That is probably more directed to the Minister for the Environment, James Griffin, who is doing a remarkable job as Minister for the Environment.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** But, obviously, Minister, there are acute impacts on older residents, given their vulnerability. What advocacy have you undertaken in relation to making sure that we are addressing the impacts of climate change?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is a significant issue. As Minister for Seniors and Minister for Multiculturalism, I will be working across Government and through government departments and agencies to ensure that our seniors across New South Wales are safe.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Perhaps you might be able to tell us about the consultative strategies that you are adopting around addressing the needs of older Australians arising out of the floods?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will take that on notice, if I can.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You are not aware of what consultation you are engaging?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I might throw to our director to answer that.

**TANYA SMYTH:** I believe the Minister answered that when he talked about engaging with each of the peak agencies regarding issues related to the floods and also the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, in particular member Roy Starkey, who is a member of the Lismore community. The Minister also meets monthly with the seniors and also the carers peaks. That meeting also includes the Ageing and Disability Commissioner and the chair of the Ministerial Advisory Council, Kathryn Greiner. They are the formal governance processes that are set up. But, as the Minister just discussed, he had been speaking with those peak agencies and MACA members more frequently.

**Mr MARK COURE:** If I can add to that response—and you would have seen the media on this over the past few weeks—obviously we have established a community recovery centre to help flood-impacted residents find support, financial assistance and, of course, information was made available. We have also waived the waste levy for over 10 flood-affected LGAs. Of course, my department, as I mentioned before, is already working very closely with NSW Land and Housing Corporation property assessors to ensure that public housing dwellings occupied by seniors are inspected for damage and required repairs are a priority. As the director has mentioned already, I have been in contact with members of MACA on a regular basis, particularly Roy Starkey, who lives in Lismore, who is able to tell me on the ground how bad the situation is.

Furthermore, I have called a number of our peak bodies to keep an open line of communication during this extremely difficult time. I have reached out—of course, as I mentioned on two separate occasions—to all the members of Parliament up there, right across the political divide, and offered support to them and to their communities. I mentioned on more than a couple of occasions that my office, department and agency stand ready to help.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Smyth, I want to ask you about the structure of the seniors portfolio. You are the director of Women NSW, Seniors and Carers. How is the seniors element of the portfolio structured within the department? What kinds of resources are allocated to this part of the portfolio?

**TANYA SMYTH:** I am responsible for the policy team that implements the seniors strategy, Ageing Well in NSW. There are additional resources who work on seniors in our events and comms team. There is also a card operations team that manages both the Seniors Card and the New South Wales Companion Card.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How many staff are we talking about in total who would have exclusive responsibilities within the seniors portfolio?

**TANYA SMYTH:** It is a little bit difficult to split that up. In terms of the policy team, there are six FTE. Regarding communication and events, that team is quite blended to work across a range of inclusion portfolios. And the Seniors Card and Companion Card team—again, it is interchangeable across those two programs, and it also provides support to Tech Savvy Seniors.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. So there is not a clear delineation of functions allocated to the seniors portfolio?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Just for the seniors strategy.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Six FTE is effectively the allocation. Is that right?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there a discrete budget allocation for seniors within the portfolio? How is it resourced?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes, there is a discrete budget for those activities under the strategy. But looking at the first action plan of the Ageing Well Strategy, it is clear that the majority of those actions—there are 90 actions under the ageing well action plan—are delivered by other agencies—

**Mr MARK COURE:** And departments.

**TANYA SMYTH:** —and departments. And the budgets associated with those activities do not pass through the seniors team in the DCJ.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. Minister, can you update us on a commitment made in 2019 about increasing the number of aged crime prevention officers? Where are we up to in the roll-out of that commitment?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I might take that question on notice at this stage and report back, if that is possible. Give me one second.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I am happy for you to come back later in the session, if that is a possibility, Minister.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will report back, if I can, in the session.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Okay. I will ask about the relationship with the Ageing and Disability Commission. It has a role in the investigations of elder abuse. Are you able to advise how many staff are dedicated to those investigations? Perhaps this is something that Ms Smyth might be able to advise on.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will ask Ms Smyth to advise, if that is possible. But, if I can add, yes, obviously the commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald, who we recently appointed and I had the pleasure of meeting, was appointed as commissioner in July 2019. You were right about the functions of the commissioner. I will turn to the director, Ms Smyth, to add further to that comment.

**TANYA SMYTH:** The Ageing and Disability Commission is a statutory independent appointment, so questions regarding staffing will need to be redirected to the commissioner. The Commissioner produced an annual report for 2020-21. There is some detail in that, and that report was presented to Parliament.

**Mr MARK COURE:** To add to that, if I can, the commissioner's second annual report was tabled in Parliament on 26 October 2021. All the information that Ms Smyth just mentioned is outlined in that report. It is a statutory independent appointment, so obviously questions relating to internal budget decisions should be directed to the commissioner.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, I want to ask you about the New South Wales steering committee for the prevention of elder abuse. Has there been a meeting of that this year, or while you have been the responsible Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Let me triple check on that, if I can.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Smyth, you might be able to tell us. Did this committee meet in the 2020-21 period?

**TANYA SMYTH:** There is a steering committee with multiple working groups that I am involved in with other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth. Yes, they have met multiple times in the last financial year.



**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you able to provide details on notice of the dates when it met?

**TANYA SMYTH:** No problem.

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will take that on notice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can you also provide them for the 2019-20 period?

**TANYA SMYTH:** We can.

**Mr MARK COURE:** We can take that on notice as well.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, are you able to advise us on where we are up to in addressing the needs of elder New South Wales residents in relation to social housing?

**Mr MARK COURE:** In regard to social housing, through the Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021–2031 I can provide that living in aged-friendly environments is a focus of this new strategy. I am sure that you have read this strategy. Undertaken under the strategy, the Government is working towards increasing housing options for older people that are age-appropriate: affordable, accessible, close to transport, recreation and, of course, community services. As part of this 10-year strategy, the Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW strategy is the biggest social housing build program of any State or Territory across the country. What we are seeing under the Communities Plus program, which has delivered 23,000 social housing, 500 affordable housing, part of 40,000 private dwellings over 10 years, is also the \$1.1 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund, which is also delivering social affordable housing dwellings throughout New South Wales over a four-year period.

In addition to that—and this is probably a follow-up question, if I could predict that—we have also seen included in that \$34 million funding to prevent people from experiencing homelessness: \$14 million for emergency accommodation to enable people to self-isolate and \$20 million for rental subsidies to enable people to access and sustain private rental accommodation during this challenging time. This, of course, includes a little over \$6 million for Rent Choice Start Safely and \$10.5 million for Rent Choice. Throughout 2021 there was a further \$20 million in funding for Rent Choice. We are addressing the housing needs right across New South Wales. My priority is to ensure that seniors have safe, secure housing that meets their needs.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Now I know why Mr Shoebridge said I have plenty of time: Their member is not here. You can take your time now, Minister; I will ask you some questions. With regard to your predecessor, Ms Natalie Ward, she said that she supported maintaining interpreting and translating services within Multicultural NSW. Is there a danger of losing the interpreting and translating services within Multicultural NSW, Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter and I will turn to Joseph La Posta.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I hope not. The reality of the situation is, Mr Moselmane, that probably about 15 years ago private providers started to move into that space. We are quite unique in a sense. It comes to your question before, which was really pertinent: Are they employed by the New South Wales Government? The answer in our instance is they are. With that come entitlements and rights and protections by being a New South Wales Government employee—in my opinion—as they should. The challenge is we are competing with private providers. It is fundamentally about turning a profit as opposed to necessarily doing the things that we need to do to make sure that there is a sustainability of languages. Even in the Greek community right now, there are some challenges as that community and the demographics get older. We need to invest in the next crop of Greek-Australian interpreters in that space.

That is probably the long-winded answer of saying that my intention is absolutely not on my watch to see that service fail and that is why it was so important that we undertook that industrial action and worked with the Public Service Association to get the reform in the legislation for interpreters and translators last year. You touched on Minister Ward, and I think that was her predecessor, Minister Lee, who was able to see that process through to a point where the union did not object to the changes that were proposed. My intention now is really proudly to grow that service. I am going to work incredibly hard with secretary Tidball and all the secretaries right across the Government to try to create the most compelling case we can for them to use Multicultural NSW interpreters and translators and try to regain the market share wherever possible.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Interpreting and translating is really the core project of Multicultural NSW. It is a core service.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** It is one of the core services, so is our policy, so is our advocacy, so is building capacity and capability within our communities, and settlement, to the examples Mr Shoebridge used before. It is very important; it is one of probably the three or four most important pillars. That is why it is called out as our first strategic priority in our 2021-25 Stronger Together plan.

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is such an important role for Multicultural NSW, and we saw a million examples of that during the pandemic over the last two years. The vital service of translating working in with government departments, NSW Health, other agencies, in translating and interpreting that really important information, that health advice, to your Arabic communities, the Chinese communities, right throughout, and not just those two communities but many others right throughout New South Wales, as I said before, translating in 60 different languages. I think we are up to 6,000 bits of material. It is such an important tool that they performed across New South Wales. We thanked and I acknowledged our frontline staff earlier today in health, education, police and emergency services. I also want to thank the staff that translated all of that material because it was vital; it was absolutely critical and vital. You and I have walked the same streets and the same roads and visited the same community groups.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Many times.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Those community groups did a wonderful job in getting that material, once translated, to send out to their own members. They played such a vital role for that because it was very hard to get into those community groups.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I could not agree more with you, Minister, but, as you have heard with Mr La Posta—you say it is operational but really it is a policy position of the Government whether to privatise or outsource or not to outsource. It is a policy position. Can you guarantee, Minister, that it will not be outsourced or privatised under your watch?

**Mr MARK COURE:** What I can guarantee is that translation service will always be there in Multicultural NSW under this Government. They have performed a remarkable job in not just interpreting media releases and other important government information but face-to-face, video and telephone. There are many modes of interpreting and translating right across government in every government department. It is an important, significant partnership these guys have with Service NSW to provide that translation through bookings, for example, for clients, through many of the 100-plus shopfront locations, considerably looking at helping those that need that. Police and courts are examples of that as well. In my remit as Minister for Multiculturalism, translation services will be front and centre right across government.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** You touched on courts there, Minister. What funding is the Government providing the New South Wales courts and police for this purpose?

**Mr MARK COURE:** The Attorney General is up on Wednesday; you can ask him that question then.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I will, but in the meantime you have raised the fact of the translating services provided to courts and police. Perhaps you can either take that on notice or Mr La Posta can answer that question.

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will probably take that on notice.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** What funding is the Government providing multicultural language service to provide interpreting and translating services to other government agencies? Is there a breakdown, Mr La Posta, of what service provision you have with health, for example, education, roads and other services?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will throw to Mr La Posta, who will have a detailed explanation.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** That is a very good question.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Thank you.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** We just need to be careful because we are in an open tendering market, Mr Moselmane, so the business and the merits—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Sure—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** But the business and the merits of our language services agency has to stack up for itself in terms of quality and price and others and it needs to be independent and separate from the policy-related work that you are talking about at the moment. That is why our teams are quite separate in a sense. The language services division has to make a dollar for itself and then any dollar that we make gets reinvested back into, say, the scholarship programs and other sorts of things that we do to help support new and emerging communities.

That is quite a different role from our policy team that needs to work with some of the other government agencies that you are talking about—and does—to make sure that when we are communicating material during crises or when we are making changes to transport routes or these sorts of things, they are considered and that we

are not just thinking through the prism of English-speaking networkers or community members or participants but we are thinking through all of the other different communities that need to be considered as part of any change. Our policy team does work specifically on language. Right now we are doing extensive work with the Department of Education to think about the role of language in schools and all of those things, but it is quite separate from our language services division.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Is there specific funding for those services to other government agencies that you have under Multicultural NSW?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** We do not fund other government agencies to do interpreting and translating; that is the first thing. They need to have a budget per se that is set out.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** That is their budget.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** The Government requires, under one of its mechanisms—I can get the specifics on notice—that a minimum of 6 per cent of all government necessary advertising and spending needs to be spent on communities as a minimum as well. Really pleasingly, under the stewardship of the Department of Customer Service and Minister Dominello and Minister Coure and others, in recent times, particularly during the pandemic, we have seen that shift up to 11 per cent or 12 per cent, which is pleasing because that is what the Minister was touching on before. That is what has helped us unlock all of the community radio stations and local print and all of the others to be able to make sure they get all the COVID-related material.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I was going to add, certainly in my role as Minister for Multiculturalism, as I mentioned before—and as you would have heard—we have weekly meetings with multicultural media and community groups and religious leaders on separate Zooms to ensure that information is passed through to them as well because they are, at the end of the day, doing a wonderful job, as you know. You have your own multicultural awards, from memory, which I have attended.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The previous Premier took it over and made it the Premier's multicultural media awards.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Success has a million fathers.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, following up on what Mr La Posta stated with regard to other agencies, for interpreting and translating services, using Multicultural NSW, is there a danger of those other agencies then going out to tender and using outside sources as opposed to Multicultural NSW?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I might throw to Mr La Posta on that if I can.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Sure.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** There is a danger?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Yes, there is.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** What is Multicultural NSW doing about it?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** The first thing we did was transform an award that took me 2½ years to modify so that we could be cost competitive with the private providers. That is the first thing. Again, I want to acknowledge the contribution and input of the Public Service Association to get to a point where they did not object to that award. It took significant, robust conversations to get to a point where we were all pretty comfortable and everyone gave a little bit. Now that that award has been modified—whilst we still pay a little bit more—I will back the quality, the experience and the brand of the New South Wales Government to be able to go in and get the work that we need to. But as you know, and as everyone knows, it is a free and open market.

We cannot manipulate or require other government agencies to use our agency. We have to put our best foot forward and compete with those private providers. That is the focus of that very dedicated team, which has now grown to being about 25—which is one of the areas we have invested in with our headcount growth—to create the most compelling and strong argument to be able to get more business from Service NSW, more business from Transport, more business from Health, more business from all of the other departments to be able to grow our workforce, to grow job creation opportunities within Multicultural NSW for our interpreters and translators and, ultimately, whatever funds we can make, we can then reinvest back into scholarship programs, employment programs and other things to grow the next wave or generation of interpreters and translators.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** But the pressure is on you at the moment.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Sorry, can I jump in?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Yes, sure.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr La Posta, can I clarify, are you saying it is not possible for the New South Wales Government to mandate that agencies use your translation service?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I am happy to take the legalities of that question on notice, Mr D'Adam, but the advice that I have been given to date is, no, it is not possible to mandate them to use us. I would certainly be happy if that was the case, but the advice that we have been given to date—sorry, I can take the specifics of that on notice, but my understanding at this stage is no.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** What is the Minister's view?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, is that something you would be prepared to take forward as an option for a whole-of-government position, that excellent translation services offered by Multicultural NSW be mandated across government?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Firstly, it is an excellent translating service. They have done a wonderful job, particularly in the last two years during this pandemic. It is a question that I will take on notice, but I will do everything I can to help our multicultural communities right across New South Wales.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, continuing on that point, when competing with the cheapest outside providers are we lowering the potential quality or services that Multicultural NSW interpreters and translators can provide?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Again, I will take on notice that question about translating services.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Mr La Posta, isn't it clear that if we are competing with cheap-quality providers in interpreting and translating, to be able to compete we will have to then employ or pay cheap interpreters and translators? Wouldn't that be the case?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Can I add to that? I will get Mr La Posta to add to my comment in a second. Multicultural NSW has done an excellent job in launching a telephone interpreting service a few years back, expanding the options available through Multicultural NSW for remote interpreting. This has enabled interpreting to deliver, as I said before, face to face, video and telephone. Telephone interpreting is particularly relevant for people living in regional New South Wales. They have formed a significant partnership with Service NSW already. You would get the multicultural toolkits on a regular basis that either my office sends out or Multicultural NSW sends out, and we also send that out to councils as well—a recent translation of important government messaging. But Multicultural NSW has formed that significant partnership to provide translation bookings to help Service NSW centres right throughout New South Wales. In addition to that, the language services forum meets quarterly, and their next meeting is next week. They have done a really good job right across government in ensuring that Multicultural NSW recruits interpreters representing more than 100 different languages. Mr La Posta may want to add to that.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Sorry, Mr Moselmane, what were the specifics of your question?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The specifics of my question were that you indicated earlier that you may go into the public tender and compete with cheap outside providers. Wouldn't that lower the quality of the service that Multicultural NSW would then provide?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I do not want to throw the rest of the service under the bus by calling them cheap in terms of their quality. From a pricing point of view—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** No. If you do compete with that service.

**Mr MARK COURE:** To be fair, that sounds like a bit of a hypothetical.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** But it is a hypothetical based on a potential that, once the service is tendered, then it is real, isn't it, Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I do not know the basis of what you are trying to get at, unfortunately.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** You gave me an answer before with regard to the quality of the service.

**Mr MARK COURE:** We have answered the question a few different times.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Good morning, Minister, and good morning to all of the officials.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Good morning, Ms Boyd.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Good to see you. I understand you have already answered some questions around your role as Minister for Seniors and what that involves. What do you see as your role in relation to aged care, given that it is funded federally? There is obviously a part for State Government to play.

**Mr MARK COURE:** As I mentioned—in fact, earlier today when we got our rapid antigen tests—while the Commonwealth Government is primarily responsible for aged-care policy, certainly my role as Minister for Seniors is to ensure that seniors are safe, have access to the best possible services and are able to live a happy, fulfilling and healthy life. That is something that, in fact, I mentioned to you earlier today.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** When it comes to, for example, decisions by your Government to relax COVID restrictions or take other measures that disproportionately impact older people, do you see your role as advocating to step into any gaps that are left by the Federal Government?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Firstly, to the nature of your question, I extend my sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones during the COVID-19 outbreaks. I publicly thank our nurses, our aged-care workers and other frontline workers who have been at the forefront protecting seniors right across New South Wales. I did mention to you earlier today about the situation in aged care that I hear a lot with my own mother-in-law, who is in an aged-care facility at the moment. As I said before, while the Commonwealth Government is primarily responsible for the aged-care policy, I do understand that Minister Hazzard has asked each local area health district to reach out to their respective aged-care/nursing home facility provider to ensure that there is an open line of communication, and I think that is really important should they require any assistance.

At the end of the day, aged-care providers are responsible for managing outbreaks in their facilities and the Commonwealth Government leads many aspects of the outbreak management, as you and I have spoken about before, as they are fully funded and have the regulatory responsibility for the aged-care sector. However, NSW Health has played and continues to play an important role in supporting aged-care providers to manage those outbreaks and setting public health measures. Certainly at the request of the Commonwealth, NSW Health has supplied more than two million PPE items to assist over 100 residential aged-care facilities experiencing those outbreaks and supply shortages since the Omicron outbreak.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** To summarise, then, from what I am hearing, you do think that there is a role for State Government to play in filling the gaps that could be left by Federal Government?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Working together to ensure that seniors right across New South Wales, particularly those in aged care, are safe. As I said to you earlier today, I have personally spoken to the Federal Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services, Richard Colbeck, to make it clear my door is always open.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I understand the Ageing and Disability Commission has seen an extraordinary rate of contact through their abuse helpline since they were established, which is as you would expect. The commission was established, it was advertised and there was a bit of word of mouth. As that becomes available, more and more people are reaching out in order to access those services. Has consideration been given to allocating funding to the commission based on the demand they experience so they can ensure that none of those contacts goes unanswered?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is a very good question. Obviously, as you know, we established the Ageing and Disability Commission to safeguard the rights of older people and adults with a disability either living in their home or within the community. I do not know if you were here for that, but Robert Fitzgerald, AM, was appointed in 2019. There is a helpline; you are absolutely right. Of course, I condemn all abuse, neglect and exploitation in any form. In regards to the second part of your question, I might throw to our director.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Currently the Ageing and Disability Commission is funded for \$13.9 million over four years, and \$6.89 million in 2021. Some of that funding did exist in the NSW Elder Abuse Helpline resource unit, and that function transferred over to the Ageing and Disability Commission. There was an increase of calls following when we came out of lockdown. The annual report indicated that possibly that was people being able to see older people and people with disability again and identify issues that had arisen during that lockdown period, or also that that lockdown period provided an opportunity for people to perpetrate abuse.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I understand that the number of calls to their abuse helpline was 25 per cent higher in 2020-21 versus 2019-20. We did have COVID lockdowns during both of those financial years. Is it not the case that as the service gets better at responding, and people become more aware of the service and their reporting options, we will see more and more demand? Is there not a need for an increase in funding?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Certainly in my role as Minister for Seniors I will keep monitoring that. You are absolutely right that there was an increase but, of course, that was over the last year because of the pandemic. We

will continue monitoring this and we will do everything we can to ensure that it gets the necessary attention and resources it deserves.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. I may pick up—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Can I add to that?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Please do.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** There is always an issue around forecasts with these things. I am relatively new to my role but I know Robert Fitzgerald very well and I am intending to meet with him in the very near future. I have asked for a meeting to be scheduled so I will certainly open a dialogue with him about this.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Excellent. Thank you. I will pick this up again in the next series of estimates once you have had more time to get into your role, Minister, to see where that is up to.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I add that I have also met with Robert Fitzgerald, AM.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Excellent. The understandings of the prevalence of elder abuse and the way it manifests are still evolving. I know that there is now quite a bit of work going into understanding the nature of coercive control when it comes to elder abuse as well. Has any funding been allocated for dedicated work into understanding and addressing elder abuse?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I might have to take that question on notice if that is okay, unless, of course, the director—

**TANYA SMYTH:** I am happy to talk about it. There is a Commonwealth elder abuse research project and New South Wales has contributed funding to that project. It is around establishing a common dataset that will work across all of the jurisdictional elder abuse helplines so that there is better opportunity to do analysis on that data.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. Finally, turning to the concept of ageing in place, increasingly we are seeing evidence that, where possible, it is preferable for older people to age in place rather than being put into aged-care homes. What is your position on ageing in place, Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** In terms of ageing in place, we have got the *Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031*, which talks about housing options for older people that are age-appropriate, affordable, accessible, close to public transport, close to community services, the doctor, recreation et cetera. We have a 10-year plan to drive better outcomes for, in particular, social housing tenants as well. We have got a number of programs in place. I mentioned already about the COVID-19 packages we announced over the last two years—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Sorry, if I could bring you back to the question, you are supportive of the concept of ageing in place?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Very supportive. Certainly my priority is to ensure that seniors have safe, secure housing that meets their needs.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Do you think, then, that we should be ensuring that the new homes we are building should be built to a standard that allows a greater number of older people to stay in their lifelong homes?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is a very good question. That is probably a question more suited for our Minister for Planning, who is probably best suited to provide an answer in that regard.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Is it something, though, that you will be advocating for in your position as Minister for Seniors?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Certainly it is something I am looking at, absolutely. I have spoken to representatives of our MACA board on a number of occasions in regards to that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Are you aware that Victoria, Queensland, the ACT, Tasmania and the Northern Territory have all adopted the 2022 National Construction Code minimum accessibility standards, and more than 60 ageing, disability and social service organisations across the country are urging New South Wales to follow suit?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, I am aware of that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Will you be advocating for New South Wales to change its position on that?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will certainly be asking the Minister for Planning to look into this.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. That is all for me. I will pick up on that again at the next estimates.

**The CHAIR:** At this juncture we will take our 11.00 a.m. break and come back at quarter past. Thank you.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** We are on air.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, I have not said this officially but congratulations on your appointment.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Thank you, Mr Secord.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I have been watching proceedings today and you are clearly a person who takes pride in the position that you have assumed. On that note, I can tell from today's proceedings that you take pride in reaching out to various community groups and leaders. Since your appointment on 1 December 2021 and up until yesterday, how many groups, leaders and organisations would you say that you have met with?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I cannot put a definite answer on that. Certainly, if I can just quickly add, there was as of last week 90—sorry, 65 separate community groups, but that does not add the weekly multicultural community group forum that I have, with anywhere from, say, 80 to 145 community groups on Zoom, and the multicultural media forum that I have every week as well. These are weekly engagements. I think if you add a lot of those, you are looking at probably close to 1,000 multicultural groups. In fact, I have a figure here—1,289 in attendance, with a combination of forums.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** One thousand, two hundred and eighty-nine.

**Mr MARK COURE:** One thousand, two hundred and eighty-nine, with an attendance. That should also include, of course, western Sydney and western mayors throughout Sydney that I have met on one occasion. There is, as you would appreciate, a number of stakeholders that I have met each and every day. As I have said before, I think it is one of the best jobs in Government, and it is something that I take very seriously.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Who undertakes due diligence on organisations and individuals who are invited to those gatherings?

**Mr MARK COURE:** A lot of that is through Multicultural NSW.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Mr La Posta, would you in fact be the person responsible for due diligence? Would you in fact sort of say, "Well, I'd be reluctant to meet with that organisation," or, "Yes, you should meet with that organisation," that kind of stuff?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** In terms of structured meetings, that comes through the Minister's office. Then there are times when our counsel is sought specific to who the Minister is meeting with. With regard to the forums, that is a bit of a different one, Mr Secord, because what we have tried to do is make the online forums as available and accessible to the largest audience possible, just because it has been about critical health information relating to COVID or floods or things like that.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I will not ask you to reveal, but have there been groups that you have declined to meet since becoming a Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I am going to have to take that question on notice. As Minister for Multiculturalism, you would appreciate and understand there are 315 ancestries out there. They speak 200-plus languages, worshipping and believing in 148 different religions. Certainly my job as Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Seniors, for that matter, has and will always be about putting people first.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, who manages your social media, your ministerial press releases and your local press releases? Who does that?

**Mr MARK COURE:** A whole group of people.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Do you get involved in suggesting what goes up and what goes down, that kind of stuff?

**Mr MARK COURE:** At times, yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Have you recently instructed your staff to remove press releases that were issued when you were Assistant Speaker and held other positions before you became Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No. We have actually got a brand new website that went online only two weeks ago.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You have done interviews about going to China, undertaking trips to China and things like that. You know from estimates that when you ask a question, a lot of times the person asking the question knows the answer before. If you clicked on a website from your activities involving China, would they still be there?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I have got no idea. The website only went online two weeks ago.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Maybe you will take this on notice or you can answer: Did you instruct your office to remove all links to—now you can remove them in the short term but you cannot take them from the history. Did you instruct your office to remove all your press releases that related to your trips to China?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, not at all.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Then why for the last three days, when you go onto the website to get them, have they all been removed? You cannot remove the fact that you posted a reference to them originally.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, sure.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So did you instruct your office to remove all references to your repeated trips to China?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We have a new website, which has just been uploaded in the last two or three weeks.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you telling me that in the last two to three weeks you are unaware that all of your activity involving China has been scrubbed? The only thing that you get is an "HTTP 404, not found". When you go onto the internet, you can actually look at when things were originally posted, but if someone has removed them—you cannot remove the original posting, but you can remove it—

**Mr MARK COURE:** We have a new—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Who did you instruct in your office to remove all references to China?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I did not instruct anyone. We have—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Then did the chief of staff or did a staff member take it upon themselves to whitewash this?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We have a new website, as you would expect, an updated website that literally over Christmas is now online. We have gone from one company to another and that website has media releases that are current and old, but it is a brand new website with a different brand-new company.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Mr Chair, I seek leave to table three documents: a photograph with the President of China, which has been removed; the original posting referring to the Minister's trips; and the reference to the removal of those documents. Thank you. Now, I want to take you to your trips to China. How many trips have you taken to China since you became a member in 2011?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will take that question on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Well, I do not think you should take that on notice because in many interviews—

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Point of order—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Sorry, is there an objection?

**The CHAIR:** Are you taking a point of order?

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Yes. The Minister said he would take it on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Okay. I accept that the Minister will take that on notice but just to assist—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** To the point of order: The Minister does not have the option of taking a matter on notice that is within his immediate knowledge. If he is capable of answering the question—and he should be capable of answering that question—he does not have the right to take it on notice. He needs to answer the question.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Thank you, Mr D'Adam.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** To the point of order: It is abundantly clear that, had the Minister known the answer, he would not have taken it on notice in the first place.



**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Chair, may I make a contribution? To assist the Minister, his parliamentary declarations from 2011 until now, the most recent, show that he had made five trips to China. However, in an interview with the Chinese media called South East Net Australia website with a journalist identified as Han, published on 8 April 2016, he said that he has made at least eight trips to China. I am very aware—to what Mr D'Adam said—that very clearly the Minister would know how many trips he has taken to China since 2011. In his declarations he says five and in printed media he says eight times. I suggest that he answer the question.

**Mr MARK COURE:** As I said before, we will take that question on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, have all your trips to China been fully declared?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, I believe so, but I will take that question on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You are taking that on notice but you understand that there is a discrepancy.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** In your parliamentary declarations, it appears five visits, but in an interview translated into English it says that you have in fact had eight separate trips. Now, why are you taking it on notice? Is it because you do not remember? You have gone there so many times that you do not remember, or you want to provide an exact figure? What is the reason?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I want to provide an exact figure for you and for the Committee.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So you think there is a discrepancy between your declarations, five times. Were you, in fact, just embellishing then in the Chinese media interview?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I do not remember the interview but I will take it on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you familiar with an organisation called the Australia China Economics, Trade & Cultural Association?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, I am.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** That is the association where you were, in fact, a keynote speaker. Is that correct?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, among other things.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** And what were the other things?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Among other people, that is.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Oh, among other people. What year was that?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You will take that on notice?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Where did that occur in China?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Again, I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You do not remember where it occurred?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It would have been somewhere in China, but I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you familiar with something called the Australian Strategic Policy Institute?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No. No, I am not.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You are not?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No. I do not think so, no.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It is a very, very, very famous think tank. They have made scathing remarks about the Australia China Economics, Trade & Cultural Association. Do you remember now?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Of the think tank?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** No, the time you addressed the Australia China Economics, Trade & Cultural Association.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes. Yes, I do.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What was the subject of your talk?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Of my address?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Yes.

**Mr MARK COURE:** It would have been infrastructure and our relationship with China.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Was that where you met the President of China? There is a photograph.

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, no. That was here in Australia.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** That was here in Australia?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Oh, okay, good.

**Mr MARK COURE:** With a number of members of Parliament, including the Premier, Mike Baird.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Yes. I remember that. Back to the press releases, are you now—you seem to be quite an interventionist Minister. You are quite active in what is happening in your local electorate. I see that you engage in doorknocking and local activity—that kind of stuff. I will ask you one more time: Did you instruct your office to remove all press releases relating to you in China?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, not at all. There is a whole bunch of media releases, current and former, that for whatever reason are slowly being uploaded onto our new website. It is a brand new website. The bill was only paid three or four weeks ago.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you confident that all of your declarations involving China are up to date and accurate involving the Parliament?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, I am, but I will report back to you.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you report back this afternoon?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will report back to you.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I might come back to Ms Smyth. Earlier you said that the Ageing and Disability Commission, which is obviously a statutory office—are you aware whether it employs staff directly?

**TANYA SMYTH:** My understanding is that the commissioner is a statutory appointment. The other staff that work in the Commissioner's office are DCJ employees—the Department of Communities and Justice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What role does your office have in relation to the age intervention of the role of the commission?

**TANYA SMYTH:** None. We have a relationship with them, obviously, because of elder abuse being significant to the strategy, but definitely I have no oversight over how the commissioner operates his office or the employees in that office.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Was your office involved in the development of the legislation that established the commission?

**TANYA SMYTH:** I was personally. It was not specifically the team that exists now.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. So in terms of the staffing arrangements, you provided recommendations around how the staffing structure to support the work of the commissioner would be established?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes. At the time there would have been a submission around the resourcing that the commissioner would require.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So, was there a question of support for elder abuse investigations ever considered in terms of the staffing that would be supplied by the Department of Communities and Justice to support the work of the commissioner?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes. All of the requirements under the Act that the commissioner is responsible for would have formed a part of what resourcing was requested for the commission.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So you had no role around recommendations around the types of support that Communities and Justice provides to the commissioner?

**TANYA SMYTH:** It is not as simple—I suppose it is not as straightforward as DCJ providing staff. The staff sit within DCJ administratively and then can use shared resources with the department, but we do not provide staff as such to the commissioner. They are part of the establishment and administrative systems set up for managing employees.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So there is a clear demarcation between the work of the commissioner and the staff that support their work and DCJ's employees.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Correct. So, for example—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is that correct?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes. Staff from my seniors team would not, for example, be deployed to work in the commission.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Okay. I might come back to the Aged Crime Prevention Officers commitment. Minister, were you able to get some further information in relation to that commitment and where it is up to?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, I certainly can. At the 2019 election the New South Wales Government announced it would deliver 1,500 new police officers over four years, including every command appointing an Aged Crime Prevention Officer. The Ageing and Disability Commission is provided funding by DCJ and works closely with Aged Crime Prevention Officers. I look forward to continuing to work with the commission to ensure that seniors live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. We will also work closely with the Minister for Police to continue the roll-out. In terms of particular numbers, in terms of what has been delivered, I will take that on notice, if I can.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. So you do not have specific information about how many are actually in place?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Let me just double-check on that. We might have that through our director of ageing.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yep. As far as I understand, I believe there are 12 currently in place.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I might move to another item. Minister, are you aware of the Legal Pathways program that is provided by COTA?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I might take that on notice, unless the director of ageing has any information.

**TANYA SMYTH:** I am aware of that program that COTA NSW administers.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What is the status of its funding? First of all, is it funded through DCJ?

**TANYA SMYTH:** It is not, no.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It is not funded by a direct grant.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Not currently, no.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is it a State government-funded program?

**TANYA SMYTH:** It has been in the past, but I understand that COTA NSW has continued that program with other funding. I am not exactly sure. I would have to take it on notice. It is possible that they use some of their annual peak funding that is provided by the department for that service.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. So there is no ongoing funding from DCJ to continue that service, as far as you are aware?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Not specific for that program. That is correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, this is a program that provides support to older people in relation to wills and creating enduring power of attorney. Do you think it is appropriate that the New South Wales Government should be providing financial support to an organisation to deliver a service like this?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It sounds like a very worthwhile organisation and I will take that on notice unless, of course, the director of ageing wanted to add anything further.

**TANYA SMYTH:** There are comparable programs that I believe the Trustee and Guardian provides, where we have directed people who are on low incomes to use that service. I understand that COTA NSW does charge a fee to the older people that use their service. So they are comparable in what they provide but, I suppose, targeted to different cohorts.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Smyth, can you tell me, what is the priority age for social housing?

**TANYA SMYTH:** For older people, I believe that is 80.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** For older people, sorry, yes. It is 80, is it?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Why is it that? Why is it so old? Why is it set at that level and that age? Why not at 55? What is the basis for the decision to set it at 80?

**TANYA SMYTH:** I think that is a question that would probably be best put to the Minister for Families and Communities or the Minister for Homes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Does that concern you, Minister, that the priority level is set at such an age as 80? It cuts out a lot of people. Is that something that you have made representations on or been an advocate to change in your role as Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** If it is okay with you, we will take that on notice and will refer that question directly to the Minister for Families and Communities and the Minister for Disability Services, the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, who is the Minister responsible for this area.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, are you aware about the Victorian Government's pledge to build social housing for seniors as part of its Big Housing Build?

**Mr MARK COURE:** No, I am not.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Do you think there is a role for the New South Wales Government to provide direct support to increase the supply of specialist senior housing for people in New South Wales?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Certainly, under our strategy, as I mentioned before, the Community Plus program is delivering 23,000 social housing, 500 affordable housing and 40,000 private dwellings over 10 years. This is a \$1.1 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund, which is delivering—sorry, in addition to that, the \$1.1 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund is delivering 3,400 social and affordable housing dwellings throughout New South Wales over the next four years. In addition to that, of course, over 40 per cent of dwellings are targeted for tenants aged over 55. Of course, we also provided, as I mentioned before, \$34 million in funding to prevent people from experiencing homelessness and \$14 million for emergency accommodation, in addition to \$20 million for rental subsidies to enable people to access or sustain private—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Could you just repeat the homelessness figure? How much was that?

**Mr MARK COURE:** In March 2020 the New South Wales Government released the second stage of its economic package in response to COVID-19. This included \$34 million in funding to prevent people from experiencing homelessness and \$14 million for emergency accommodation to enable—as part of that \$34 million, I should say. That is \$14 million for emergency accommodation—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask you about that \$34 million then? How much of that is directed towards programs to deal with homelessness amongst senior New South Wales residents?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I might pass this on to the director of ageing, if I can.

**TANYA SMYTH:** I might take that on notice, thank you.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You are not aware of how much of that substantial program is in your belt, Ms Smyth?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will reach out to the Minister for Families and Communities and the Minister for Disability Services, the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, for a more detailed response, unless the director of ageing has further information.

**TANYA SMYTH:** I have got a little bit more information. There was \$183 million dedicated to fast-track more than 1,400 new homes. Some of that is around the delivery of 2,800 homes, including 1,000 social homes to be built in western Sydney, Wagga Wagga and Coffs Harbour through the Community Plus programs, and 290 new social housing houses in partnership with community housing providers through the innovation fund. There was \$30 million for 80 new small-scale social housing programs. Older people—older women especially—have told us that those smaller scale housing projects are what they are interested in, in terms of avoiding homelessness. So some of those are being delivered through that broader program.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It does not sound like there is any clear and discernible dimension that is focused on homelessness and housing for seniors. Why is that?

**TANYA SMYTH:** As part of 3,400 social and affordable houses, 1,414 are targeting older people 55 years and over, or 45 years and over for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As of 31 March 2021, 1,368 of the 2,792 people living in homes delivered through the Social and Affordable Housing Fund are older people and, of these, 864 are older women.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, are you aware of an organisation in Victoria called Housing for the Aged Action Group? They run a program called Home at Last. Are you aware of that program?

**Mr MARK COURE:** They are running a program called?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Home at Last. It is a diversion program to try to help older citizens to find homes.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Is that a peak organisation?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I do not believe so. I think it is just a community organisation. Ms Smyth, are you aware of that program?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes, I am vaguely aware of that program and recent reports.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there any contemplation being given to either establishing or funding a similar program in New South Wales?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Again, I think that is a question for the Minister for Families and Communities. But I understand that it is an information program to help older people navigate the housing and homelessness services in Victoria. New South Wales has comparable services but, yes, I think it is better answered by the Minister responsible.

**Mr MARK COURE:** If I can jump in, we will reach out to the Minister for Families and Communities and the Minister for Disability Services in regard to your question and that peak body or community organisation in Victoria. We will have an appropriate response for you.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It seems that a lot of work within this portfolio is really delivered by other agencies. I am having trouble understanding where the value-add is coming from in this portfolio. Minister, perhaps you might be able to explain the intervention points where this portfolio has some impact on the overall policy direction of the programs that are directed towards addressing senior needs that are being delivered by other agencies. It is not really clear to me where the value-add is being provided by the agency.

**Mr MARK COURE:** In terms of the agency and in regard to a couple of points, let's talk about our grants program. Certainly, the Government is committed to the aims of, firstly, the Ageing Well strategy; we talked about that before. One way of doing that is by administering grant programs that benefit seniors right across New South Wales. Our record includes \$200,000 this year in the Seniors Festival Grants program space; \$600,000 in the 2021-22 round two of the Reducing Social Isolation for Seniors Grant Program, backed up by another \$600,000 in round one of that program; and, in addition to that, \$700,000 for combating social isolation for seniors during the COVID pandemic.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, are these grants programs actually administered by Ms Smyth's office, or are they run through another agency?

**Mr MARK COURE:** In terms of the programming?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Smyth, perhaps you can provide some information about the role of your office in relation to the grants programs that the Minister is describing.

**Mr MARK COURE:** In terms of the grants program? Yes, I understand your question. In terms of the grants program, I will pass to the director of ageing, who will be able to add further to my response.

**TANYA SMYTH:** The Reducing Social Isolation in Seniors grants are managed within the Ageing team in the Department of Communities and Justice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is that the only grants program that they administer?

**TANYA SMYTH:** There is also a Seniors Festival Grants program for organisations and community groups to run activities during Seniors Week.

**Mr MARK COURE:** In addition to that, obviously there is the Seniors Staying Social Grants Program and there is the NSW Grandparents Day grants program, and I think we touched on the Tech Savvy program, didn't we? That is another additional program, which I am sure you are aware of. The Seniors Festival Grants program has funding available for local events and activities across the State. The combating social isolation for seniors grants—the risk of social isolation for seniors—that funding program has been delivered: \$700,000 has been awarded to 24 organisations. A lot of this, of course, is publicly available. But this is funding directly to councils and community groups to people in need right across New South Wales. As you know, we have the Seniors Festival, which is coming up at the end of March, which is a huge event in Darling Harbour and across New South Wales.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I will pass to my colleague and come back to you later on in the proceedings, Minister.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Mr La Posta, I will take you back to my questions with regard to interpreter and translator services. I note a letter from Michael Coutts-Trotter, the secretary of the Department of Communities and Justice, in May 2021 with regard to interpreter and translator services, where he effectively threatened to outsource them if you do not provide services on cost-effectiveness and value-for-money bases. What was the outcome of the discussions? Has that been met?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Through the Minister, if that is okay?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, I am very pleased to advise that the outcome was very positive. We reached not a consent agreement but there was no objection from the Public Service Association with regard to modifications. I believe Secretary Coutts-Trotter—and I am very grateful for his leadership in this space—subsequently sent a letter addressed to myself which confirmed that should the proposal be agreed to with the Public Service Association—and I have already spoken to Secretary Tidball about this—that will ensure that the New South Wales courts space will stay with Multicultural NSW and guarantee that work for our interpreters and translators for the next three years. So a positive outcome, Mr Moselmane.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** That sounds excellent. I am pleased with that because my next question was what steps are you going to take to ensure that DCJ will continue to use those specialist services. So you have them for the next three years.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Sorry, the courts.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The courts, yes. Okay. That was Mr Coutts-Trotter's letter with regard to the courts specifically. Is that as I understand it from you?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** If we are reading the same letter—or if you are referring to the letter. I do not necessarily need you to table it because I am familiar with the letter. I am mindful that you said DCJ before.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** That is correct.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I did not want there to be a misunderstanding that the entirety of the interpreting and translating services from DCJ were a part of that letter. That letter was very specific relating to the courts. Secretary Tidball has ensured continuity, and his team and mine are already working to sign up the new three-year agreement.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** He mentions there "at least for the next three years", and you have indicated that.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Hopefully many more, Mr Moselmane.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** That was accepted. Can I ask a few broad, general questions, first about the significance of multicultural media?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Sorry. Chair, through you, do questions need to be addressed to me or should they be addressed to the Minister?

**Mr MARK COURE:** If they can be addressed to me, if that is okay?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** They are through the Minister, obviously. If the Minister wishes to then pass them on—

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will have a crack.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, can you tell me how critical a role multicultural media plays?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I cannot express enough the significant role that multicultural media has played, and will continue to play. As I said before, we have multicultural media press conferences. In fact, I have one this week, as I do every other week. You and I both know the importance of multicultural media. I regularly see you in the multicultural media, Mr Moselmane.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Correct.

**Mr MARK COURE:** My message to members, both upper House and lower House, is to use multicultural media more. It is there. They want information; they are eager for information. Of course, they have done a brilliant job, in particular in the past couple of years, getting important health and government messages out. We have seen the evolution of media change in the past 20 years; now it is mostly online. But many of these print media newspapers have been around for decades, run by mums and dads. I am in a lot of the multicultural media, but in particular I was in *The Greek Herald* last week—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Wonderful story.

**Mr MARK COURE:** —talking about the importance of multiculturalism in Australia. As you know, we live in one of the most multicultural cities anywhere in the world. I cannot praise multicultural media enough; they do a wonderful job. In addition to that, Multicultural NSW has also done an amazing job through its translation of over 3,000 resources covering public health information in more than 60 languages. It has worked closely with multicultural media like SBS to translate those lively daily press conferences that we have all seen into over 10 important languages. I do believe the first one was, in fact, in Arabic. That was huge for the Arabic community across Australia but particularly in New South Wales. As you know, my mother-in-law is Lebanese. Certainly her family clicked into that, because it is important for them to hear that and to see the messaging and the importance of the health advice and so forth in regard to COVID-19.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** They are, no doubt, very significant and very important to our multicultural society, providing the very important information in languages that multicultural communities can understand best. Following on from those comments you made, Minister, do you have a specific budget for multicultural media? For example, your Multicultural NSW budget is, say, \$70 million. Is there a 10 per cent budget for multicultural media? Is there a particular percentage?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We might have answered that already, but because it is an operational question, I will throw to Mr La Posta.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** No.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** You can see, Minister, the significance of multicultural media not only print but also online, and online is growing as well. There is a great source of service providers out there in multicultural media, service providers to multicultural communities. Would you consider looking at providing a specific budget? Because, as you said rightly, Minister, these media outlets survive on the smell of an oily rag, as they say—the mums and dads or one or two or three staff that run a newspaper. It is important that there is funding from New South Wales to ensure their survival because through them, by ensuring their survival, you are ensuring that the information that you want to pass through to those communities is well received.

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is a great suggestion. I will take that on notice. But if I can just add to that, 74 multicultural media groups were awarded part of a \$2 million program for multicultural media outlets through a competitive multimedia grants program. In addition to that, since the Delta outbreak of COVID-19 in Sydney, a total of \$13.1 million of funding for communications and incentives were secured. This funding included emergency communications, multicultural media grants, translations, advertising for vulnerable communities. There certainly is money available, but I might ask Mr La Posta to add to that response.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Thanks, Minister. Mr Moselmane, I think there are two roles the agency needs to play. The first role is to advocate and sometimes remind the rest of government of the value of exactly what you spoke about before, which is they engage a specific and different audience from a lot of mainstream media channels. So many of us in this room have got a lived experience of connecting with media sources that are not our traditional sources and understand the value, particularly for some of our older demographics, around new

and emerging communities that is their source of truth and it is a different source from what a lot of us turn to on the TV every day or on social media.

Part of our role is to say to the rest of government, "Hang on, don't forget these people or spend the absolute bare minimum with them. Build partnerships and relationships that can truly help you understand how to connect with this audience and, therefore, potentially do better work than we have done before, or create new and interesting ways to be able to engage these groups to see a part of themselves through government policy or through the work of government or some of our programs or some of our initiatives." I think of things like the Active Kids voucher and the learnings for government the first time that voucher came about and then thinking about how we got better at targeting communities in western and south-western Sydney and to see the lift in culturally diverse families that then took that voucher up in the second and third generation.

Part of our thinking is about how we work to build an awareness or a cultural competency across government to the value of multicultural media and the different players that are in that space. With respect, I think the Minister said that we understood the value of partnering with those 74 organisations during COVID. Like all of us, we have competing priorities for our time and our funding, but my hope is to use that as a bit of a springboard to continue to nurture those relationships and support those multicultural media players. *The Greek Herald* is a great example where it has gone through different generations—father passing it down to two daughters who have run with that and brought it not just to be in its traditional print form but brought it into an online sphere to engage a different audience as well. We cannot lose them because they are critical to underpinning a lot of members of our society. My great fear is that if we do not nurture them and the Government does not invest in them, then we may see some of them fall away.

**Mr MARK COURE:** If I can just add to that, that is the key. They have been passed on—the Greek papers, the Greek media outlets, the Arabic media outlets, the Chinese media outlets, even *The Maltese Herald*—a lot of them have been passed on from generation to generation. As part of my remit as Minister for Seniors and Minister for Multiculturalism, I want to make sure that no community is left behind. That is why this funding block is so important and the regular outreach from me as Minister and Multicultural NSW every week—not set-and-forget once or two or three times a year—to engage with these communities and to provide them with the much-needed information, not just from me or from what I am doing but across New South Wales in terms of NSW Health and so forth.

We also have—and it is a very good point—the Premier's Harmony Dinner, which was two weeks ago, where we acknowledge multicultural media awards as well. In that Harmony Dinner we were able to award very good organisations who have done an outstanding job, particularly over the past year or two. Members like yourself, Mr Moselmane, understand as well the importance of multicultural media. You and I have been to many events over the years and see that importance. My message to all members of Parliament on both sides of the political fence and in both Chambers is, get to know multicultural media. It is a very good tool to get out very important information for respective communities.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** That is the core point—get that information to those communities where they can read it, understand it and assist the Government in their initiatives or projects. You mentioned 74 organisations. I know that there are many established organisations. *El Telegraph*, for example, has been around since 1979 and others have been around for a long time. These days, a lot of them are going digital and there are new digital services out there that can be of significant assistance to Multicultural NSW as well as through them to the communities. Are you reaching out to these organisations? The other day, as an example, I met with the Bangladeshi community and visited a bookshop. People told me there are at least 10 new online Bangladeshi outlets. There are a growing number of outlets out there. Is there a way or policy that your department, through you, Minister, to Mr La Posta, is reaching out to these organisations or these newly established media outlets?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Mr La Posta.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, two things: The first thing is we need to ensure the sustainability of our existing media players, and I think a lot of our communities at times get quite ambitious about their standing within the community—and there is nothing wrong with that—and then set up a communication platform or a channel that can often be very well meaning but we need to make sure that it connects and reaches with the audience that some of them profess to reach as well. Like a lot of us, you get a click or a like on something. That does not necessarily mean it has been read or digested or understood.

The premise of your question is very sound. What can Multicultural NSW continue to do to work with multicultural media outlets? As the Minister said before, we have taken a lot of learnings from the partners that we supported through that multicultural media grant, of which there were 74. But the investment of that grant program was very much about helping to support the sustainability of those organisations during COVID, knowing



they were losing a lot of advertising revenue and having to stand staff down—all of those things. What the Government thought was, it is critical that we continue to nourish this space because what we do not want is *The Greek Herald* not printing its paper or what we do not want is *La Fiamma* or some of the other papers stopping because they do not have the workforce or they do not have the support in place.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** *La Fiamma* did stop, did it not?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I need to check with Julius on the specifics of these things, but the whole premise of the grants was to help support them and underwrite and enable them to continue during the pandemic. The essence of your question is: How can government ensure that it continues to fund and engage with these players? That is why during the pandemic there was over \$13 million that this agency directly oversaw, which was about advertising revenue to support the Department of Customer Service so that we did not lead it but to help fund them. During Delta, for example, every single community radio station in western Sydney was supported with advertising to ensure the stay-at-home messaging was nuanced to each of the different communities and that each of the communities understood what it meant to stay at home and who could be in the house—not extended family but immediate family. There are some really good examples, and my hope is that we take some really good learnings out of COVID and then apply them right across the board into all of BAU for government. One of the key learnings was the value and the importance of different media channels including multicultural media.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Subsequent to that, Minister—

**Mr MARK COURE:** Just to add to that, if I can; certainly as a member of Parliament I have, over many years, engaged with multicultural media even for advertising, to your point, with Ramadan that is coming up, and I believe we have put an ad in for Harmony Day that is coming up. Again, we have put an ad in—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** That is how they survive.

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is how they survive; that is exactly right. We have just had Lunar New Year. It is the Year of the Tiger and, of course, we had Lunar New Year where we put ads as well in some of the Chinese papers, one or two of them. Advertising is so important, and if it is not me as a member of Parliament, it is government departments and agencies, and not just the print media but SBS, SBS Radio, SBS online as well and local radio too. I mean, this is the other thing. Local radio, not just for multicultural communities but local radio that targets every community—certainly over the years I have put a radio ad in our local radio station that covers St George and south-west Sydney with 2NBC. They do a great job.

I am a big supporter of local radio right throughout New South Wales. I think they do a wonderful job. Unfortunately there is no idea of how many listeners there are for local radio because it is not calculated but, still, certainly as a member of Parliament, we have backed up my words with actions by supporting our local radio and our multicultural print media and radio as well. On a separate occasion a few weeks ago, I was on 2AC from memory—or 2OR, but I think 2OR is coming up—and *The Fiji Times*. They play such an important role in terms of getting very important health messages out, and not just health messages but government messages as well.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I will ask one more question with regard to multicultural media, and that is with regard to newer communities that are coming in. For example, *El-Telegraph* is an Arabic newspaper. The Iraqis read Arabic, so they can read *El-Telegraph*, and so are the Syrians. But the Syrians and the Iraqis, for example, have their own concerns and therefore they will be producing—I am not sure of the exact name of their newspapers—their own newspapers. If we continued just to support the established ones, we would never grow the new ones that are coming on board that address concerns of new migrants, new refugees coming through from Syria and maybe Ukraine and others that would need direct assistance.

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is a very good point. I think it is very important that, certainly as Minister for Multiculturalism, we look at all the newer communities and the multicultural media that they have created over the last short time. It is something that I know Multicultural NSW is looking into on a regular basis because, you are right, they are newer communities, very important communities. They will have their own print media or they will have their own social media where a lot of the media these days, as you know, is going online. It is very important to be looking at these newer communities like, for example, you mentioned before the Bangladeshis and the Nepalese. They are relatively new to Australia, but big numbers.

Certainly newspapers, print media, social media, websites, the Bangladeshis have exploded in terms of media—and very good media, too—and reporting regularly in terms of what is happening in Sydney and New South Wales. A lot of it, as you know—I have had a lot of dealings with Bangladeshi media over the years. That media with that community group have done an outstanding job. Certainly I am here supporting that media group. The Bangladeshi community is a very important community in Sydney, particularly in south-west Sydney. I went to a Bangladeshi event last Friday night with the member for East Hills.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Thank you for those responses, Minister. I noticed an issue with regard to the Multicultural NSW EmailLink service. What does the Multicultural NSW EmailLink service provide?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter, so I will turn to Mr La Posta if I can.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Didn't you ask me this question last time?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Yes. I am asking you again.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Didn't we clarify it last time?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Well, no. I do not think I asked you this one, but I am asking it now.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Okay. EmailLink has been refreshed and reset. What we did with the EmailLink was we did a good clean of the database, which was the first thing, because I think through one of these hearings you or one of your colleagues raised some concern about receiving an advert for a job opportunity at ABC or somewhere like that. So what we did was we ceased a lot of the corporate contracts that we had with people that were helping subsidise and underwrite the service and we just made sure that it was very much focused on critical government information: Health information, updates around the pandemic, grant programs, opening and closing, vaccination messaging—all of these sorts of things where it was very much defined on what are the key things our religious community leaders, members of Parliament such as yourself and others need to know, and how can we try and package that up as effectively as possible. I am really proud of some of the things that have happened—things like the MP packs and some of the other things—which have actually given so many of our members, such as yourself and others on the ground, really tangible and helpful information to forward straight on to the community. I am pleased that my team advises me that that database is again growing organically because of the value that it provides.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Can I add to that?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Yes.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Those MP packages are something that I really pushed for, both as a member of Parliament and now as a Minister. They are coming out almost every week, if not every week.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** They are, yes.

**Mr MARK COURE:** And it is not just members of Parliament on both sides; it is right across the Parliament and it is also councils as well. I want to acknowledge the wonderful role the local government plays in getting messages out to multicultural communities. We push very hard, and I want to acknowledge the great work of Multicultural NSW, DCJ and NSW Health in making sure that that material is translated as quickly as possible. Certainly when we took over in the last week of December, from memory, we made sure we worked very hard behind the scenes to make sure that material was translated very quickly. Because as you would understand, you might be making a Health announcement on the Monday and then have it translated, but by next Monday, once it goes out, that material is outdated. We made sure there was a quicker turnaround time to get that information as quickly as possible.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The reason I asked, Mr La Posta—you said that I asked you before—is that I looked at the Multicultural NSW website and it says that EmailLink is in hibernation. What does that mean?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** As I said to you before, what we did was we stopped all of the other communicative channels that we had, because yourself or one of your colleagues raised concerns that they were receiving information that they did not think was critical to the function and the role of the agency, so we took that feedback on board. I think it was the last budget estimates, or it might have been the one before. Then what we did was we focused exclusively on the critical health information, grant information, how to get information right now out through floods, how to get information out through COVID, how to promote vaccinations and all of those things. When we say EmailLink is in hibernation, it is in hibernation in a sense because it is not promoting the broader things; it is very much just focused on the critical health information. I did not want to stop the channel, as I am sure you can appreciate, because a lot of people do consume it. If we had stopped it altogether, then we would not be able to use that channel during the pandemic to get the information out.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** So why not remove the word "hibernation" and say it is critical information?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Great piece of feedback.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Because when I saw it I thought there was something wrong.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Look, it was not something wrong, but it is like any database; it needs to be washed and filtered and made sure it is still relevant and current. There is no point in me telling you there are 10,000 names on there if 5,000 no longer exist. As you know, Mr Moselmane, a lot of the members in our community and a lot of the leaders in our community can change and shift very quickly. We need to be making sure that our databases are up to date, and our sales force and our tracking, so that we are communicating with the people that we need to in the current moment, and so that we are not talking to someone who was the president five years ago. So in terms of an action, I am very happy to get the team to review that and remove any references to "hibernation". That is fine.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Because it just looks like it—

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Understood.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Sorry to interrupt. Updating this information is very important and very critical. Certainly over the years we have all seen databases that are five, six years old of the president twice removed of a particular group. I think these guys have done a great job in making sure that there is up-to-date information and that the databases are continually updated.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Thank you Minister. While on the website, in the next rounds of grants, have they been announced already? Are they on the website? Are you planning for the next round of grants? The reason I ask, so I do not go around this particular issue, is that when looking at Multicultural Media COVID-19 Response Grants, they are now closed—that is what the website says. When looking at Multicultural NSW COVID-19 Community Support Grants, they are now closed. Looking at the innovation grants, they are now closed. Stronger Together Festival and Event Grants are now closed and there is one more that is about to be closed. Should the website not have the announcement for the next round rather than just stating they are closed? Then people might know when the next round is.

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter. If it is okay I will pass you on to Joseph La Posta and I will then add a few comments at the end.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Moselmane, I understood—and I could be wrong—that the \$4 million that the Minister only recently announced around COVID support was still to be opened. But I will get the specifics on that. If it is closed, it has only just closed. If it has only just closed, the reason it is closed and was only open for a short period of time was that the feedback—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Which grant was that, sorry?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** It would have been the latest round of empowering communities grants, which are I think between \$5,000 and \$30,000. Mr Shoebridge touched on this before: What support are we providing to multicultural communities ongoing during COVID? There are still a lot of challenges around cost of living, access to food and access to all of those things. I have been advised that grant is still open. I give a plug for that grant: Please jump on the website, [multicultural.nsw.gov.au](http://multicultural.nsw.gov.au), and all of our community and religious organisations can apply for that grant.

With respect to the other grants that are closed, Mr Moselmane, in one sense that is a very positive story. It highlights the sheer volume of activity that this agency has undertaken to support the community during the pandemic, so to know all of those have closed is great. With regard to festivals and events, we have a current round of funding which is being distributed to communities between January and July. Then what we will do is open the next round of festival and event funding from July through to January—to the end of this year—and we will open the next round of project grants at some stage in and around that time as well for the subsequent 12 months. Yes, it is very cyclical. The reason that the grants have closed is that they are running the festivals and events right now for the first six months and then we will open another.

I come back to the point you made before because I think it is important. It is all well and good for government to open grant programs. The critical things are: Who are the audiences that we are potentially not talking to that need our help the most; and how can we work with those communities and build capacity within those communities so that when they do apply for funding they are in with a shot, rather than it just going to the same organisations that are very competent in grant programs or just change the year or the detail on some of those grants? It is critical that my team identifies—and this is another thing I am very grateful for this Minister for. I ask any member of Parliament that has community organisations that they would like us to engage to please come through the Minister. Our office will happily engage them and try to get them to these workshops and these capacity-building sessions to help them with their grant writing or to support them on their evolution in terms of

their emergence. I will pass back to the Minister, but that is probably a fair snapshot in terms of where we are at with the website.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will briefly add to that. Grants are promoted widely through social media, the website, digital promotion and stakeholder networks as well. The MP toolkit also has some information about the grants. As you said, organisations can apply through the Multicultural NSW website. There are guidelines that are developed for all these programs. Of course, each application received is initially assessed by Multicultural NSW to determine that it meets all the requirements. Certainly you gave a plug, Mr La Posta, for the festival and events grants. In 2021-22 there was just over \$1 million distributed to 109 community organisations over and above the other festival grants that we have provided funding for. I give a bit of a plug: I think this Sunday is the Greek Festival at Darling Harbour.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Was it postponed? It may have been.

**Mr MARK COURE:** It may have been postponed again.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I think we were worried about the weather.

**Mr MARK COURE:** But it is coming up.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** It is on its way.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I am sure the Greeks will continue to run the festival. I think they are running it throughout the year; it is not just one festival, one program. Finally, before I pass over to my colleague, we celebrated International Women's Day just recently. Can you give me an assessment on what is the breakdown of women in the executive and management positions at Multicultural NSW?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter, as you know, and that might have been asked last budget estimates, I believe—not by you but by someone else. I will turn to Mr La Posta.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Through you, Minister: Mr Moselmane, that is an excellent question. There are three things I am really proud of. One is the gender diversity of our advisory board. I think at the moment, with the introduction of new members, it now sits at either 55 per cent or 60 per cent female, which is pleasing. The second thing is the composition of our executive team, which is 60 per cent female. The third thing is the composition of our workforce, which is about, again, somewhere between 60 per cent and 65 per cent female. In terms of the composition and gender equality across our advisory board, our senior leadership team, our executive and also our workforce, it is certainly front and centre in our thinking. That is one of our great assets as an agency.

One of the things that is really important for our agency to do is navigate and tackle complex social policy challenges. We do so with people like Ms Smyth, Mr Tidball and others, where we really need to unpack some of the challenges around access to accommodation, challenges around domestic violence, and challenges around patriarchal societies or groups that are coming to this country and need to embrace our laws and way of life. To have a workforce that has a very strong and, more importantly, equal representation at all levels is critical so that we do not continue to allow the decisions that were made yesterday to be the decisions that guide us tomorrow. One of the great things about this country is how we champion equality. That is at the forefront of a lot of our policy thinking, our settlement ideas, our language service provision and all of those different things.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I will keep the next eight minutes to my colleague before we finish.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Thank you. Minister, I come back to the aged crime prevention officers. I think in your earlier answer you said that 12 were now in place. I am advised that the promise was actually for 56. It is a long way shy of the number that was promised. Why is it so far off the election commitment?

**Mr MARK COURE:** As I said in my previous response, I look forward to continuing to work with the commissioner to ensure seniors live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives. I will also work very closely with the police Minister to continue this rollout. Ms Smyth, do you want to add to that response?

**TANYA SMYTH:** No.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You do not actually have an explanation as to why the number is so far off what you were—

**Mr MARK COURE:** The Minister for Police, I understand, has primary responsibility but working with DCJ. But I will work closely with the Minister for Police to continue the rollout. Regarding the particular numbers, I will take this on notice and I will report back.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Thank you, Minister. I might turn now just to Ms Smyth. Sorry, I have been calling you Ms Smith but I now stand corrected. I wanted to ask about the Design and Place State Environmental Planning Policy. Has your office had any involvement in providing a perspective in relation to the consultation on this proposed SEPP?

**TANYA SMYTH:** There was a presentation provided to the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing at their last meeting. The council, providing advice to the Government, has been involved in some of that consultation.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Sorry, does that mean that your office was involved? You have received a presentation.

**TANYA SMYTH:** The advisory council received a presentation and provided their thoughts back regarding the SEPP.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Right. Where does it go from there? Was there formal input from your office or the Minister's office in relation to the development of the SEPP?

**TANYA SMYTH:** It is not formal advice from the department; it was advice from the council. So my team have not provided formal advice into the SEPP.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You did not have any role in that. Minister, have you met with COTA?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I have met with peak bodies, like COTA, for example, via Zoom. It is something that I do on a regular basis.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Did they raise with you the silver level living housing design standards?

**Mr MARK COURE:** They perhaps did, yes. Perhaps they did.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What is your view on supporting that or otherwise?

**Mr MARK COURE:** In terms of the silver level means, obviously there are level pathway from road to the dwelling, as we know; at least one step-less entrance on the ground floor; a ground floor toilet; and reinforced walls around that toilet, shower and bath et cetera. A large majority of the new social housing in New South Wales meets that silver level of livable housing design guides, and the Government supports that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, given Ms Smyth's earlier answer about the input into the SEPP, I do not really understand the connection between how your support for that proposal translates into feedback into a process like the one that is being undertaken to consult on a SEPP that potentially is an opportunity to embody this silver level living housing design standard into law [disorder].

**Mr MARK COURE:** Sure. Whilst it probably is a question directed to our Minister for Planning, I will take that on notice and report back.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask about the Ageing Well strategy? Ms Smyth, does your unit have oversight for that strategy?

**TANYA SMYTH:** We do.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What is the status of the action plan for the first year of the strategy? Where is that up to?

**TANYA SMYTH:** The action plan runs through 2021 and 2022. We have not provided a formal progress report; we will do that at the end of 2022. But we regularly check in with agencies responsible for the actions under that plan and just recently—it could even be March; it might have been February—we met with the interdepartmental committee to discuss how that progress was occurring.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Have you developed the evaluation framework yet?

**TANYA SMYTH:** We have commenced developing some of that but we have not finalised it, no.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you satisfied with the progress? That evaluation framework seems like a pretty fundamental foundational step in terms of developing and implementing the strategy so that you know what you are actually—it is how you are going to measure progress. Why is the progress on that so slow?

**TANYA SMYTH:** That is an action in the action plan for the first two years to finalise that framework. So it will be completed at the completion of that action plan.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, how much money has been allocated to the strategy?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Into the seniors strategy 2021-2031? As Ms Smyth has already answered, this is a 90-dot initiative—I think it is 88, sorry—88 dot recommendations, which is of course delivered through agencies and government departments right across New South Wales. So working across government to deliver the strategy is what DCJ will be doing.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How much has been allocated for this current budget year?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter. Maybe the director might be able to answer that or the secretary of the department. But a lot of the recommendations are within their own remit—department remit.

**TANYA SMYTH:** There is a recurrent budget of approximately \$8.7 million, and that covers resources for the team and actions under the strategy. But, as I mentioned before, funding for activities that sit outside of the Seniors team did not pass through that budget.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** In terms of the role of your unit, Ms Smyth, do you not track the budget spend for the strategy across the various activities? Obviously the lead agencies are responsible for implementation. I would expect that your unit has some responsibility in relation to tracking the spend for each of those programs that are part of the strategy. Is that not the case?

**TANYA SMYTH:** No, that is not the case. Many of those actions—for example, within focus area three, "staying safe, active and healthy", the NSW Ministry of Health is responsible for the majority of those actions and that is part of the broader New South Wales health system. Older people are a priority for NSW Health and many of the programs they deliver, but some of those programs are not specific to older people, so I do not think it is possible to pull apart that budget.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Does that mean that you do not have access to the spend for the previous strategy?

**TANYA SMYTH:** We do in terms of that allocation for the seniors strategy team and the implementation of actions related to that team.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. But not the actual programs that are incorporated in the strategy or the previous strategy?

**TANYA SMYTH:** I can take on notice to determine if the evaluation of the last strategy was able to quantify or estimate an amount of funding that was attributed to that strategy.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Minister, when will the 2022 internal evaluation of the NSW Older People's Mental Health services' service plan be delivered?

**Mr MARK COURE:** That is an operational matter, but I can maybe turn to the director of aging.

**TANYA SMYTH:** That is not a service that is managed by my team. I understand that would be a service NSW Health provide. If it is an action under the strategy and in the current action plan, it would be due for completion at the end of 2022, though some actions do cross multiple years. So not every single action will be totally finalised at the end of 2022; some will continue.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is your answer that this is a question best directed to someone else or to another portfolio?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. You may have answered this, but I will ask again just in case. How many new projects have been delivered through the Aboriginal Housing Office capital works program that have specifically targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 50?

**TANYA SMYTH:** We will take that on notice.

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will take that question on notice, if that is okay. We are more than happy to help.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** That is fine. What about staying active and active aging programs? Can I ask about those? How have they reintroduced face-to-face components following the lifting of COVID restrictions?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Programs in general did pivot to online service provision but more recently many of those programs, including some of the programs funded under the Reducing Social Isolation for Seniors Grant Program, are now able to go back to delivering face-to-face services.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** That is just a proportion of them that are delivering face-to-face services. Is that correct?

**TANYA SMYTH:** I would need to take it on notice for exactly how many, but the majority have indicated to us that they are now moving back to delivering those services in person.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** If you could take the details on notice and provide us perhaps a bit more of a detailed answer, that would be appreciated. Minister, has the independent review of the Ageing and Disability Commissioner Act been tabled to the Parliament?

**Mr MARK COURE:** To my understanding, not yet.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** That is my understanding as well.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** When are you expecting to table it?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Very soon.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you able to provide the details on which stakeholders have been consulted in relation to the review?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It is all part of the review and we will report back to this Committee—unless, of course, the director or the secretary of the department wanted to add.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I am relatively new. Minister, I would need to take that on notice.

**Mr MARK COURE:** And the director?

**TANYA SMYTH:** In terms of the Act review last year, there were some regulation changes that were specifically requested by the Commissioner. That was just around allowing the commission to exchange information with Commonwealth agencies, such as Centrelink, the Commonwealth Department of Housing, the Commonwealth Department of Health and as well as certain New South Wales government agencies. It also allows for registered nurses and speech pathologists to assist in the execution of search warrants under the Act. So some of those regulation changes that assisted the Commissioner in implementing his provisions under the Act have already been amended.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Because of your interest in this, we will take the question on notice and provide you with a very detailed response.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** That would be appreciated, thank you, Minister. Minister, can I ask about strategies for preventing elder abuse among culturally and linguistically diverse communities? Can you elaborate on the types of strategies that are being deployed in relation to those communities?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will take that on notice, if I can. I did have material here. If it is okay with you, we will take that on notice and report back.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Sure. That is fine. Can I ask you how the Government delivered to help seniors without access to online or telephone banking and who had no access to funds when banks shut their doors during the COVID-19 lockdown? What was the strategy deployed there?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I will throw to Ms Smyth in a second, but certainly this has been an issue raised to me and you would have heard me on 2GB one morning a couple of weeks ago where this debate, this discussion, occurred. I will throw to the director in a second, but before I do, obviously as you know, we are delivering a Tech Savvy Seniors program in partnership with Telstra, and of course that has been operating since June 2012—July 2012, I do apologise. Over 100,000 training places have been offered since this launch through community colleges, libraries and local councils and, of course, in recent years just under 10,000 of these seniors were placed.

Of course, through the training in over 12 languages, obviously it has been able to improve the digital literacy of seniors right across New South Wales. It is a really good program that of course we are continuing to support. As I mentioned before, libraries, multicultural community groups, all of them—many of them are taking part in terms of this really good program. As the restrictions ease or are easing, I should say, our Tech Savvy Seniors courses have resumed both through college and library locations across the State, with new social distancing standards in place. In terms of the nuts of your question, I might pass on to the director of ageing.

**TANYA SMYTH:** In regards to banking regulation, that is a Commonwealth responsibility but we are aware that the Commonwealth Government has a Regional Banking Taskforce. It released an issues paper and held consultations at the end of 2021 regarding bank closures in regional areas of Australia. In addition to Tech Savvy Seniors, the Minister mentioned the 12 languages that that program is available in. It is also available in Australian sign language through the Deaf Society of New South Wales in Parramatta, Wollongong, Gosford and Tweed Heads and there are quite a few actions under the Ageing Well action plan regarding digital literacy. TAFE NSW is providing literacy help for older people in terms of broader literacy skills in reading and writing in addition to developing computer skills. There is also a specific digital literacy—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I have to interrupt you there, Ms Smyth, because I do not think any of that really deals with the specifics of my question. If the answer is that the Government did not have any specific programs to address the issue, that is fine. But the question was about assisting or giving assistance to older residents who could not get access to money because the banks had closed and they did not have the capacity to access banking online. I might perhaps direct you back to that specific question.

**Mr MARK COURE:** If I can just add to that, it is probably more a Federal Government responsibility, other than of course we have a very successful Tech Savvy program, which provides, as I said before, low-cost/free training for older people who are interested in learning how to use this technology. But in my conversation two weeks ago with Richard Colbeck, I raised this as a concern in the community. We are seeing—and have for a very long time—unfortunately banks are closing, being replaced by ATMs. This is something that I am very, very mindful of and it is something that, as I said in that interview on 2GB, writing to my Federal counterpart about.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Just on a related point, I want to ask you about the digital inclusion pilot program that I think was launched in 2021 and was running in Wagga Wagga, Taree and Cessnock. What is the status of this program?

**Mr MARK COURE:** A digital inclusion program aimed at keeping people connected, improving digital inclusion, the pilot involves Service NSW staff identifying customers with no or low digital literacy and offering them to connect with existing programs that local communities have. I think that is a very wonderful project. Of course, the introduction of those courses to assist Aboriginal and older people as well, delivered by TAFE NSW—and I will turn to our director of ageing—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How many people utilise the project, Minister, do you know?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes. As I was mentioning before, I will turn to our director of ageing, who will add to that response.

**TANYA SMYTH:** The program is being implemented at the moment and I do not have actual numbers of how many people have participated, but we can get that on notice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Okay. Has there been an evaluation of the efficacy of this program?

**TANYA SMYTH:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** If the evaluation has not been undertaken, can you provide also details of when the evaluation will be done?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes, we can.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Thank you. Is there any intention, Minister, in terms of rolling out this program beyond the pilot sites?

**Mr MARK COURE:** We will certainly look at that and provide you with a detailed response.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Okay. Minister, I think in an earlier answer you touched on the Communities Plus program. I am advised that in 2019 the Minister for social housing, Brad Hazzard, said that over the next 10 years development projects on the Land and Housing Corporation sites throughout New South Wales would be delivered through this program. Are you able to advise how many homes have been completed to date as part of the Communities Plus program in New South Wales?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes. That is a question that should be directed to the relevant Minister. If it is okay with you, Chair, we will take that on notice and report back to the Committee.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Has the program ceased?

**Mr MARK COURE:** As I said, we will take that on notice and I will speak directly to the Minister for Families and Communities and Minister for Disability Services and report back to the Committee.



**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Perhaps on notice you might also inquire as to why that Communities Plus website now sends visitors to an unrelated other website on its home page. Minister, perhaps you might take that one on notice as well why that is the case.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Yes, sure.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The link to Communities Plus on the Communities and Justice page takes you to something that is not related to that program.

**Mr MARK COURE:** As you would understand, that is an operational matter and the director of the department—sorry, the secretary of the department, my mistake—is next to me and he will no doubt follow that through with the relevant department.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you able to provide, Minister, the numbers in terms of how many organisations applied for Reducing Social Isolation for Seniors grants?

**Mr MARK COURE:** I believe we have got that information here and I turn to our director of ageing, who will be able to help you in more detail.

**TANYA SMYTH:** In 2021-22, for round two of the Reducing Social Isolation for Seniors Grant Program, 185 applications were received.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you able to provide on notice the details of the organisations that applied for the grant—just the list of who the applicants were?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes, we can do that. No problem.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you able to also provide details about whether—was this a budgeted program, Minister, or did the funds for this grant program come from some other source?

**Mr MARK COURE:** It was obviously before my time, but we can provide you with an answer.

**TANYA SMYTH:** It is an annual grant program for seniors, though, when the pandemic hit, the guidelines were changed to ensure that the programs that were being funded related to reducing and combating social isolation in older people.

**Mr MARK COURE:** Any remaining questions I have I think we will be able to put on notice later on.

**The CHAIR:** Do government members have any questions?

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Minister, do you have anything you wish to raise or talk about in relation to today's hearing?

**Mr MARK COURE:** Can I just begin by thanking everyone for their time today, including our secretary of the department, the director of ageing, Mr La Posta and his staff, my own staff who are behind me, those working in Parliament, the secretariat, the members of this Committee and, of course, yourself, Mr Chair. You have done an outstanding job as Chair of this budget estimates hearing.

**The CHAIR:** I am sure you are right.

**Mr MARK COURE:** I would not lie. Can I just add that many of these questions certainly deserve detailed responses, and we will provide budget estimates with those detailed responses. In addition to that, many members have got my number. Certainly, if there is anything that I can do either in the multicultural space or in the seniors space, please knock on my door or call me. You know where to locate me. Anthony had some very detailed questions there and I am more than happy to help in any way I can. I did not want to take too much time from the Committee, but my very capable staff have just looked at my new website, markcoure.com.au. The media release that Mr Walt Secord was talking about is there. Unfortunately, I think he might have been clicking on an older link. As I said to the Committee before, I have a new website. It has only been up and running for a week or two, maybe three. A lot of the content on the old website is migrating to the new website.

**The Hon. LOU AMATO:** Thank you for the clarity, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** We will draw the hearing to a full and complete close now. The Opposition and the crossbench have no more questions.

**The Hon. PETER POULOS:** Just a quick point, Mr Chair, with your indulgence, did any of the other witnesses have any responses that perhaps they do not require to take on notice, to save some time?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I can help on a couple of things, in the spirit of time.

**The CHAIR:** Please do.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mr Shoebridge asked the question around grant funding for Turbans 4 Australia. I can provide clarity to say that Turbans 4 Australia have received four financial grants from Multicultural NSW in this year. They have received \$15,000 as part of the Stronger Together grants program for Turban Fest; \$10,000 as part of the Stronger Together grant program, distributed in February; \$29,700 as part of the Empowering and Supporting Local Communities grant program, which was paid in November 2021; and then another \$5,000 as part of the Stronger Together grant program, which was approved and paid in September 2021. That is four grant programs that that organisation has received, and they do incredibly important work. I am also very pleased to say that this Government has spent over \$60,000 with that organisation. To Mr Moselmane's question about our staffing—our ERE—he was quite right. In the financial year of 2021, our agency had a staffing spend of \$16.7 million as an actual, and this year in 2021-22 we have a Treasury allocation of \$19.18 million. That is an increase of \$3 million from the Government into our agency for staffing. But I cannot answer Mr Moselmane's future questions about what we will do in terms of our staffing—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Increase in staffing.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** —but I hope he is right from my point of view and my agency's point of view.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** If I may, through the Minister, just qualify, not correct, and add to an earlier response in relation to the Ageing and Disability Commission and the staffing for that commission—the commissioner being Robert Fitzgerald, AM. What I would like to add is that the staff, whilst an establishment of the commission before Mr Fitzgerald was appointed, were appointed by DCJ. All subsequent appointments and currently all staff are appointed by the commissioner, managed by the commissioner and are performance-managed by the commissioner.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending. All witnesses are released. This is the end of the hearing. Thank you very much.

**(The Minister and the witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**