

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 5 - JUSTICE AND COMMUNITIES**

**Friday 3 November 2023**

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

## **WOMEN, SENIORS, PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT**

**CORRECTED**

**The Committee met at 9:15.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Robert Borsak (Chair)  
Ms Abigail Boyd  
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence  
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine  
The Hon. Rachel Merton  
The Hon. Emily Suvaal  
The Hon. Bronnie Taylor (Deputy Chair)

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. Jodie Harrison**, *Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault*

## **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 first hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 5's inquiry into budget estimates 2023-2024. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Robert Borsak and I am the Chair of this Committee. I welcome Minister Harrison and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Women, Seniors, and Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent.

Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. I welcome our witnesses and thank them for making the time to give evidence today. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Harrison, 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.

Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m., should they wish to ask questions.

**Mr MICHAEL TIDBALL**, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, sworn and examined

**Ms ANNE CAMPBELL**, Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Policy and Commissioning, Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

**Dr HANNAH TONKIN**, Women's Safety Commissioner, Department of Communities and Justice, affirmed and examined

**Ms KATE MEAGHER**, Deputy Secretary, Community Engagement Group, Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

**Ms TANYA SMYTH**, Director, Women NSW, Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

**Mr ROBERT FITZGERALD**, NSW Ageing and Disability Commissioner, NSW Ageing and Disability Commission, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, welcome to your first estimates. I am sure you will do smashingly well. I'm starting today, and I'm pretty sure you'll know what the first question I'm going to ask is here today. What I really want to know is when were you made aware that the NSW Regional Woman of the Year Award had been removed from the NSW Women of the Year Awards.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I received a brief from Women NSW containing recommendations as to how best to strengthen and ensure that the Women of the Year Awards were of high calibre, and that was really part of the reasoning behind the decision to amalgamate the Regional Woman of the Year and the Community Hero Award. I don't off the top of my head recall the date that I saw that briefing paper, but I can certainly take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, Minister. You just said that you wanted to strengthen the Women of the Year Awards. Are you suggesting that by taking out the Regional Woman of the Year you are strengthening—is that what you just meant?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The recommendation—and it was a good recommendation, I thought—was to combine the Premier's Woman of the Year Award and the Woman of Excellence Award, and combine the Community Hero Award and the Regional Woman of the Year Award.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But you didn't combine the other—you only got rid of the Regional Woman of the Year Award.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** No, that's not true. The Premier's Woman of the Year Award and the Woman of Excellence Award have been combined, as well as the Regional Woman of the Year Award and the Community Hero Award.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I will have to say in the strongest of terms that I think a comment like that—that you wanted to strengthen the awards, so you got rid of Regional Woman of the Year awards—is something I really would not like to hear. I don't want to misread you, so would you like to—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: Obviously, the honourable member is entitled to ask a question, but it would be good if there was a question and not a sort of stream of consciousness on her reflections on the decisions made by the Government—if she could get to the question, please.

**The CHAIR:** There's no point of order. Carry on.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, we'll keep going and I'll redirect that. You received a brief that you signed to get rid of the Regional Woman of the Year Award. Did you question that with your department? Did you query it?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** We had discussions. We have discussions often about briefs that come to me. But after discussing it with Women NSW and after reading the brief, I actually thought that it was a good, strong recommendation.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** A good, strong recommendation to get rid of the Regional Woman of the Year Award?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** At the time of reading the brief. That's right.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You receive a brief. You think it's a good recommendation. You sign it. Then when it's raised in Parliament, in the upper House, it's reversed right away. How can you stand by what you're saying—to say that you think it's a good recommendation—but then you swapped it right away when it was found out?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** As you know, Ms Taylor, there were certainly questions raised in the Chamber. It also came to my attention at around about that time—I can't remember exactly what time, but certainly on that day—that organisations that could have been and probably should have been consulted hadn't been consulted. The Premier, in consultation with me, made the decision to reinstate the Regional Woman of the Year Award that day.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, can I ask you if you will support this category going forward in the NSW Women of the Year Awards?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think that we've heard very clearly from stakeholders that they really would like to see the Regional Woman of the Year Award—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I understand what stakeholders think. I have spoken to a lot of them. But what I want to know from you as the Minister for Women now is an assurance that the Regional Woman of the Year Award will stand.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think, Ms Taylor, that it is really important that what we do in raising the profile of women in New South Wales is to raise the profile of women right across New South Wales, and that includes regional women. In the past, regional women have been very well represented in the award categories. You will know that the 2023 Woman of the Year Award was actually won by a regional woman. I will certainly make sure that the Women of the Year Awards continue to hold a strong—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you won't say whether you will continue the Regional Woman of the Year Award—that category. I'm asking you a really direct question.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** It will continue, Ms Taylor.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you very much for that. Who is the sponsor of the NSW Regional Woman of the Year this year?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are no sponsors of the Women of the Year Awards this year.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** For any categories?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** For any category.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I know the nominations closed on 24 October. What did you do as Minister for Women to encourage nominations? Have you spoken to your colleagues?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I recall that there was information that went out to my colleagues, encouraging them to nominate. There were certainly social media posts, and when I have been doing visits to regional New South Wales I have certainly been encouraging women as well to nominate.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I have seen that you have done multiple visits to regional New South Wales, and that makes me very happy. Minister, I'm glad that we have cleared a bit of that up and I hope we never see that again. So I'm going to move on now to the seniors travel card. Do you agree that the cost of living is an issue for seniors in New South Wales, particularly those living in regional New South Wales?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I believe that the cost of living is an issue for all seniors. In fact, right across New South Wales. Cost of living is an issue for everybody in New South Wales, and it particularly hurts people who are of lower income.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Can you explain why your Government cancelled the regional seniors travel card on 7 July?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes, I can. As you know, Ms Taylor, the regional transport Minister has responsibility for that decision. But, of course, as Minister for Seniors, I have an interest in it. Also being a regional MP, I have an interest in it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Why did you let them cancel it?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Because it was a poorly designed scheme.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Let's turn then to your scheme, Minister, to your replacement, which offers seniors 4¢ off petrol at United petrol stations. Sometimes people in the regions have to travel 200 kilometres to use that seniors travel card at a United petrol station. Do you think that's reasonable?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I need to clarify that that United Petroleum discount did not replace the regional seniors travel card. The United Petroleum 4¢ discount is available to Seniors Card holders and it is available to any of the 1.9 million Seniors Card holders across New South Wales to use right across Australia. It is available to Seniors Card holders; it did not replace the regional seniors travel card.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, it couldn't possibly because it isn't nearly the scheme. But you did go out pretty hard in the media to say, "Here is our scheme that we're doing." My question, Minister, that you haven't answered is do you think it's reasonable then that people are driving sometimes 200 kilometres to get to a United petrol station to get the 4¢ off.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** To start off with, the Seniors Card and the discounts available to it are created by an open invitation to businesses who want to provide discounts to seniors in New South Wales.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did United approach the Government with this deal?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** The Government didn't approach United?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will clarify that because I actually wasn't part of that decision at all. I would need to refer to departmental staff about the detail of that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Respectfully, Minister, we've got the department here all afternoon, so I really want to direct my questions to you. I'm really happy for you to take that on notice if you need to.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That's fine.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Just so that we get this right, you're not sure whether the Government approached United or United approached the Government? Would you like to take that on notice?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I believe there is an open invitation to businesses right across New South Wales to join the Seniors Card and Senior Savers Card, and I have just had it confirmed that that is how that occurred. There was an approach made by United Petroleum to offer a discount. And BP, or Caltex, or any—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Has the Government approached any of those other petrol companies to match that, to make it easier for regional seniors?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** No, but I have certainly made an open invitation, whenever I have had the opportunity, that any business—and any business who might be watching this budget estimates session—is more than welcome to talk to the department.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So the Government has made no approaches. United came to you. They said, "We want to do this", and you thought, "We're cancelling the regional seniors travel card when we know how much that's missed", but then you didn't think, "Maybe we could get in more people to do this and maybe it could be more helpful to regional seniors"?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The two decisions were completely separate. Now, when the regional seniors travel card was first implemented, first brought in, in mid-February 2020, it was brought in as a two-year trial by the previous Government. So that takes the funding up to 2022. Then we had an election coming up, so it received an additional 12 months' funding—still in trial. When I say it was poorly designed, I will go back to why I know it has been poorly designed from the actual time of implementation.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'm going to redirect now because I don't—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: I just draw the honourable member's attention to the resolution on procedural fairness with regard to the treatment of witnesses and allowing the Minister to answer the question which was asked of her. She is doing that and she is being directly relevant to the question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: In my capacity, I'm allowed to redirect the question. I think I'm being very—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Yes, but not interrupt rudely.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** To the point of order—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I was hardly interrupting. Goodness me.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** If there is an attempt to redirect, it must be done in a courteous way under the procedural fairness resolution, number 19: Witnesses are to be treated with courtesy at all times.

**The CHAIR:** You are entitled to redirect, but maybe just do it a little bit slower, so the Minister has a chance to actually answer the question. But there is no problem with the flow of the questions.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I want to get back. What I'm asking you as the Minister for Seniors in New South Wales—we know there's a cost-of-living crisis, we know there are serious issues and we know how well received that seniors travel card was. You had a scheme where you went to the media and you were out there saying, "This is great; we're partnering with"—well, that's what it looks like on the telly. So now I'm saying to you what are you doing as the Minister for Seniors in terms of making sure that—because this was cut by your Government and you've got one thing with the 4¢ with United, what are you doing as the Minister for Seniors to help them in terms of their travel costs? What are your ideas?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are a range of cost-of-living measures that we are—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But for travel, Minister—what we're talking about here.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** For travel specifically?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are a range of discounts that are available to seniors to assist them with vehicle usage, for registration, for driver licences.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But those aren't specifically for seniors; those are just across-the-board things.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** No, that's not true. There is discounted registration and there are discounted licences for seniors.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You're not doing anything in terms of helping with that travel card for seniors.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That regional seniors travel card was abolished because it was poorly designed. In one part of my electorate, people were eligible for it. In the other, right across the road—if you lived at number 2 Ellerslie Road, Adamstown Heights, you could not get it; if you lived at number three, you could. That is a badly designed scheme. It was badly designed from the start. It was only when we got into government that we discovered how poorly designed it was.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think we all know how missed the regional seniors travel card is, but I admire your defence of that. Let's move on, Minister. I really want to talk about elders and your role in your Seniors portfolio. That is where I would like to focus the remainder of my time. I note that at 30 June there were an estimated 4.2 million older Australians aged 65 and over. It is expected, as you would know, as Minister for Seniors—a portfolio I never held—that this number will continue to grow. I am actually really, really concerned about the increased rate of elder abuse in our community, and I genuinely think that you would be too. I want to draw your attention to what the Government has planned. So you have come in, you are a new Minister and you have new portfolios. I'm pretty aware of some of them; I'm not as aware of others. But I want to know what is in your charter letter from the Premier about seniors? Did you get a charter letter from the Premier when you became a Minister?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I did.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** In that, what did it put as priorities for seniors in New South Wales?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** My understanding is my charter letter is an issue between the Premier and myself.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What are your priorities, Minister, for seniors in New South Wales?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** For seniors, or in relation to elder abuse?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** In relation to what's happening with seniors and the increasing rate of elder abuse.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** As you know, we have an Ageing and Disability Commissioner in New South Wales.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I do, and I'm looking forward to questioning him this afternoon.



**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Very respectfully.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** And the work that the Ageing and Disability Commission has been doing has been an excellent way of dealing with elder abuse in New South Wales, I think. There has been a considerable amount of work done by that commission in raising awareness in relation to elder abuse, in—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Just in the interests of time, elder abuse in the first three months of this year has increased by 20 per cent. That is, for all of us here, really alarming, and I imagine that's only going to increase with the cost of living and pressures like that that are on people. Given that increase, what new initiatives have you done and are you thinking about and are your direction in going forward for this? This is a big problem.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: The Minister was answering the question and then was interrupted and asked exactly the same question. Obviously there's a right to redirect the witness. There's not a right to interrupt and restate the question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: I don't think I can be any more respectful than what I'm trying to be here today. I can go hard, if that's what you want, but I'm trying to get those answers.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Come on. Let's not do that.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** That's not really a response to the point of order.

**The CHAIR:** I think things are going along reasonably well, so let's just let it flow, please.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I've never been to such a calm estimates.

**The CHAIR:** The Minister is answering the questions. Ms Taylor is asking the questions. She is entitled to ask the same question any number of times and the Minister is entitled to answer or not answer as many times as she likes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, can we please go back to that? Would you like me to repeat, because there was a bit of stuff going on?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** No, I think I've got it, Ms Taylor, thank you. First up, I just want to say that as the Minister for Seniors and as a member of this Government, I absolutely condemn elder abuse. Any form of abuse against older people, in the same way that any form of abuse against women, against family members, is totally unacceptable.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I agree.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I am absolutely committed to working to reduce elder abuse and to raise awareness of exactly what elder abuse is.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** How are you going to do that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There is currently work being done at a national level to develop the second national plan to address elder abuse.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Respectfully, Minister, I do need to redirect. I understand about the national plan. My question was what are you doing.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm happy to keep answering the question unless you want to redirect the question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I just want to know what you're doing, not about the national plan.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I was about to say that New South Wales is actually working with—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: The Minister is very carefully and deliberately explaining what she is doing. She is being interrupted and asked, again, "But what are you doing?", which is the exact same question. It is not courteous to interrupt simply for the purpose of interrupting.

**The CHAIR:** I accept the point of order. If the member could allow the Minister an opportunity to answer the question before she addresses the next one, please.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Only ten seconds, so—

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** We're working with the national Government on developing a second national plan. I am certainly very keen to see the role of the Ageing and Disability Commissioner properly supported, which wasn't happening under the previous Government and that has been the subject of previous estimates, I believe—about the lack of funding for the Ageing and Disability Commissioner. I'm very pleased that—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Have you increased the funding?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order: Time.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Saved by the bell.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** —we've been able to provide additional funding to support the Ageing and Disability Commissioner. I will continue to work with the Ageing and Disability Commissioner.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I want to start by talking about coercive control. Obviously this is a thing that this particular Parliament has been deeply involved—it's an issue with which we've been deeply involved for some time. Two years ago the joint select inquiry on coercive control in domestic relationships reported to the Parliament, and since then we had legislation put in place under the last Government. You will be aware that there were significant criticisms of that legislation. The legislation was very much reliant on a taskforce being established that could implement and oversee that offence before it came into effect. You have now been in office for six months, I think.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Seven.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Yes, seven. What is the current status of the implementation of that offence?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I can certainly give you some indication of where it's at. I work very closely with the Attorney General on this. The Attorney General has predominant oversight of coercive control legislation and its implementation. We've had discussions about issues in relation to coercive control, and I know that you're really keenly interested in exactly where we're at. The implementation taskforce has been meeting on a regular basis.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** On eight occasions.<sup>1</sup>

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** On eight occasions since its implementation. The taskforce has established a three-stream work plan. Stream one is about training and education. Stream two is about operational systems and stream three is about community awareness. Sitting underneath the implementation and evaluation taskforce there were established 10 sector-specific working groups, which you would be aware of—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Yes.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** —identified in the legislation. Those working groups have also been meeting. The last one established was the lived experience working reference group, and that was established in June, I believe, and has met.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So can I ask perhaps a few questions about those groups?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will try to give you information. I'm not sure that I will have the detail.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** How were the reference groups determined? Who came up with what those reference groups would be?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'd need to refer that to departmental staff.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** That was undertaken under the previous Government by the then Attorney General.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Although I'm really pleased to see the inclusion of those with lived experience in the process, my understanding of the original intention is that those people would be embedded within the other reference groups as well rather than being a standalone reference group. Are there victim-survivors and those with lived experience sitting within the other reference groups as well?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I would think there probably would be, but I'd need to refer it.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** No, there are not.

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<sup>1</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee received 30 November 2023, Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, clarified the evidence given.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** There are not.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Not that we're aware of.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Not that I understand, Ms Boyd, but I'd be happy, if I need to clarify that, to take it on notice and confirm.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Were expressions of interest sought publicly for each of those reference groups?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Not to my knowledge, no.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I don't believe so, other than the lived experience group. I understand that was done through DVNSW through an expression of interest process, but I'm happy to take that question on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** What was the selection process for membership of the reference groups?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** It was determined, as I mentioned before, by the former Government.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can you tell me how they determined it?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I don't have that detail here.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Are you able to provide it on notice?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Yes. I can see what I can do.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Why is there no health-specific reference group?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** There is a Health representative on the taskforce, Ms Deborah Willcox, who is a deputy secretary in the department of health, who does play a very active role in the work of the taskforce. Where Ms Willcox has been unable to attend, there has always been a Health representative. Within the department of health, from the department of health, there's been very active engagement.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** On the taskforce—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** —but no separate reference group.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** No standalone group. Correct.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** There is a representative on the government and legal reference group from Health.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Okay, I'm aware of that person. Is there an overall strategic operating plan for the taskforce?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes, there is.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Are you able to provide it?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I would be happy to set that out and provide it to the Committee, yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Are you able to provide the minutes of the taskforce meetings that have been held so far?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** From where I sit, yes, I'd be happy to.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** We may need to check with the Attorney General.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I do actually report to the Attorney General on this—wiser counsel from my right. Subject to consulting the Attorney General, I will take that on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Minister, during the joint select inquiry and the deliberations that we had in relation to the report, given that there was cross-party support for that process and it was a very involved and long-running process, it was very clear to us that if we were to get implementation of this legislation right we needed quite a long lead-up time—for example, so that we could have police adequately trained before the new offence came in and so that we could have judges and other judicial officers trained. From what I'm hearing, it's just not been possible for that to have occurred as yet. Are there any moves to delay the implementation of the offence—the start date of the offence?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** From my discussions with the Attorney General to date, there are no moves to delay the implementation of coercive control as a criminal offence. My understanding of the advice that the

Attorney General is receiving through the implementation and evaluation taskforce is that training is underway. I can give you, if you like, Ms Boyd, a bit of an overview of what training has occurred to date.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Particularly police. My understanding is that there are—I forget the number—police who need to be trained who work in this area. It's been put to me that it's mathematically impossible for them to actually be trained in time in any significant way, even in a very superficial way, given the constraints on having to take some time off and having other people fill in. How many police have been trained in this offence so far and how many are left to go?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I know that all police have received some online training and there has been a second phase of training of police that has been provided to specialist police officers and identified select operational police, including ones that specialise in domestic violence. I'm sure Mr Tidball has further information.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** We know from experience overseas, though, that what is required for an offence like this to actually make a difference and not have unintended consequences is for police to have face-to-face multi-day training. Clearly, that's not occurred in this case, has it, Minister?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That hasn't occurred. Multi-day training for all police—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Face-to-face.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** —face-to-face has not occurred.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** No.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That's correct. But Mr Tidball would like to provide—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Ms Boyd, can I just add, at the symposium held on 17 August there was a complete criminal justice system consultation and briefing on where we're at. At the briefing were police, the Judicial Commission, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and Legal Aid and other stakeholders. In terms of the police, I agree that the rollout of training across such a large police force, particularly in regional areas, is challenging. I can take on notice what is happening. My understanding is that there is quite a detailed plan for police. I would struggle to brief on it today, but I'm certainly happy to provide you with the detail.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. That would be very useful.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I could actually add to that. The second phase for police commenced in June this year. That was face-to-face training to specialist police officers and also identified select operational police, including domestic violence officers, detectives and investigators, and police prosecutors. That training was developed in collaboration with DV specialists and will focus on responding and recording coercive control, collecting and recording evidence, prosecuting coercive control offences, and also the complexity and nuance within different communities, with a focus on First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The NSW Police Force have engaged with specialists in domestic and family violence in the second phase of the training, including filming a panel interview to inform the training of 12,000 specialist police officers. The third phase combines phase one and two—that was the online plus the face to face—to form a training package to be delivered in the constable development program. That will commence in June 2024 and run through until 2026.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** If I can just supplement Ms Campbell's answer on face to face, there are four components to that. One is recording and responding to coercive control. The second is the collecting and recording of evidence. The third is prosecuting coercive control offences and the complexity and nuance within different communities, with a focus on First Nations communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That sounds like the type of training we would want to see, at least at the initial phase. But, of the 12,000—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** That's not the initial phase. It's a three-phase, four-year program. That is the second phase, with the first phase, in order to get it out quickly, being online. The second phase, the face to face

to cover 12,000 police officers, kicks in in June 2023. Part of the thinking there, given the requirement that the statute commenced by 1 July, is to have that so it is fresh in the memory and to run hard at that juncture.<sup>2</sup>

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So the offence has to begin by 1 July. We have at least 12,000 specialist police to be trained. The training that Ms Campbell just outlined—how many police have so far been trained?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I think we would need to take that on notice to talk to police.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That's the concern because 12,000 police is a lot of people. How long is that training course to complete? How long is each police officer having to take out of their schedule to be trained?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I'm not aware. I'm happy to take that on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That's the bit where I have been told it's mathematically impossible for these 12,000 to be trained, given the way that their rosters work and needing to have cover during that time. Minister, if that training hasn't been completed—and that's just police. We're not even talking about all the other people who need to be trained before this offence comes into effect. If that can't be done by 1 July, do you think that this legislation should commence?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I would have to have discussions with the Attorney General about that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Are you aware of just how concerned a lot of people in the domestic and family violence sector are with the prospect of this legislation, which is flawed to begin with, having its flaws compounded by implementation without necessary training being undertaken?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm aware of concerns that parts of the domestic violence specialist workforce and organisations that support that workforce have had with the legislation since it was brought in. Certainly, in opposition, there were amendments that we moved in order to strengthen the accountability and the transparency with what was happening, as far as the implementation went. I am working with organisations and hear from organisations like Domestic Violence NSW and Women's Legal Service, as has the Attorney General, about their concerns. But we are being guided by advice that has been provided to us about what is currently happening in each of those particular workforces. We're happy to continue to have those discussions with stakeholders, though.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will come back to you in future months as well, as we get closer to that deadline. I am sure you can hear it in my voice; I'm very concerned about the unintended consequences that will arise if we don't do this properly, which was the very clear message coming out of our joint select inquiry into coercive control. This is something that we should do, but only if we do it properly. Otherwise it can make things worse. One of the major findings and recommendations from that report was that even if we don't go ahead to implement an offence—which, obviously, we are doing—a massive awareness campaign was required, and quite an urgent one in relation to coercive control. I understand that one of the streams of work from the taskforce is in relation to that, but the idea was that it would happen a lot earlier. What else has been done that I'm maybe not aware of in relation to general education around coercive control?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Initially, to start off with, there has been a micro-site developed to provide a really easy explanation of what coercive control looks like. That is currently in the field.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Has there been any education campaign advertising things of that nature?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That will be occurring from February next year. There will be an advertising campaign occurring from February next year and then towards May, June there will be some more detailed, some culturally appropriate, culturally aware training for communities of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and our First Nations communities. It specifically targets issues that relate to those communities.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Are you aware of the analysis that was done by the Domestic Violence NSW Death Review Team where they looked at 112 intimate partner homicides from 2000 to 2019—looked at 19 years of data and 112 intimate partner homicides? Are you aware of how many of them had coercive control as a core feature?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I believe, from recollection, it was all but one.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That's right—all but one. In the most recent media in relation to some very sad murders of women, there have been comments from yourself around how we need to address disrespect towards women and how it's important that people call out inappropriate behaviour. In the context of knowing that the vast

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<sup>2</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee received 30 November 2023, Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, clarified the evidence given.

majority, if not all, domestic intimate partner homicides have coercive control at their core, do you think that they were responsible comments that you should be giving in that context?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think the nature of coercive control goes to disrespecting women, and power. And one of the key ways that we need to overcome domestic and family violence—coercive control being domestic and family violence—is to deal with the issue of respect and attitudes towards women. And when I say that people should call out behaviour, that goes to it is all of our responsibilities to change our attitudes towards women.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** With respect, Minister, the domestic violence conversation has moved on from the "good men don't hit women" vibe. We have moved on to a far deeper understanding of what happens behind closed doors in these relationships. The talk of disrespect is not really getting at the very heart of what coercive control is about and is why we need this education and awareness campaign. We're talking about gender norms, we're talking about power, we're talking about so many other things. Can I ask if you will perhaps reflect on the message that this is sending out when we are talking only about disrespect in the context of these horrendous homicides?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Ms Boyd, I will certainly take—I'll consider your comments. Thank you. I had a discussion—we had a meeting with the domestic violence council. I had a meeting with the domestic violence council earlier this week. It was certainly one of the issues that were discussed—about the importance of language—so I will take that on board.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I think we would all agree that we need to remain committed to addressing the prevalence of domestic violence. Minister, do you know how many deaths due to domestic violence against women we have recorded in New South Wales this year?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** This calendar year?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** This year.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I can give you this: From 1 July last year until 30 June there were 27 deaths due to domestic and family violence recorded by police.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, the ABC just two days ago reported that 58 women have been killed this year across the country, including six women in the previous 10 days. Domestic Violence is reporting similar to yourself. Have you spoken to the Premier about these concerning and unacceptable statistics?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I regularly speak to the Premier about a range of things in my portfolio, and I can tell you that the Premier certainly takes domestic and family violence very seriously, as does every single person in government and I'm sure every single person in Parliament.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** As the Minister, given your portfolio responsibilities here and given the statistics that we've both agreed are alarming, have you specifically raised this with the Premier?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I have had discussions with the Premier about domestic and family violence. Yes, absolutely.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Have you spoken to the police Minister about this?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I have spoken to the police Minister about domestic and family violence, absolutely. I regularly have discussions with both the police Minister and with the Attorney General about these issues.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, there is talk about the need to establish either a State or national family violence register to log violent offenders, as exists currently in South Australia. Minister, do you have any views on this? Is this on the Government's radar? I can repeat that if you like.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes, please.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** There is talk about needing to establish either a State or national family violence register to log violent offenders, as currently exists in South Australia. Minister, do you have any views on this? Is this on the Government's radar?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I know that there have been discussions in relation to a domestic violence offender register. I think also, just by looking at police operations—and this is in the police Minister's portfolio—like Operation Amarok, domestic violence offenders, particularly high-profile ones, ones that are at high risk, are well and truly on the police radar.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** As Domestic Violence NSW reports, it's hard to quantify the devastating loss people are experiencing due to domestic violence. Minister, apart from the personal cost, what is the cost to the New South Wales economy?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I don't have that figure in front of me, I don't believe. I would need to take that on notice. But it is—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I could direct you to your budget papers. This is the Gender Equality Budget Statement in your budget papers. It states:

In addition to the personal cost, it is estimated that the escalation in domestic and family violence during 2020 will cost New South Wales \$3.3 billion between 2020 and 2025 ...

And it continues. Any reflections on that—what's presented in the budget papers? The cost to New South Wales on this?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You are the responsible Minister.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely. And we have been in Government for—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Seven months, you've established.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Seven months. That's right.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: I appreciate the Hon. Ms Merton's passion for the subject, which I think all of us here share, but I think we need to afford the Minister the opportunity to answer the questions before heading on to the next one.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** There is no point of order. Minister, continue.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The fact that it is in that statement is an absolute reflection that we take domestic and family violence very seriously.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Taking it very seriously—given the publication of the economic impact on New South Wales in your Government's budget papers, should the Government be doing more when it comes to the prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Ms Merton, all governments should be doing more. We have a national plan now, which aims to eliminate gendered violence within one generation. It's an important target to have. We are doing more.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** How are we doing more, Minister?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The New South Wales budget for 2023-24 in relation to spending on domestic and family violence is on track for \$417.2 million. That's a significant increase on previous years. We are doing a huge amount of work. Earlier this week I made the announcement that we were going to make the Women's Safety Commissioner a standalone position. It had previously been a position which was rolled in with another one, which was an executive director, operational position. We now have a standalone Women's Safety Commissioner whose role will be to provide oversight—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes, so a government commissioner, a standalone position—thank you. And anything more?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely, Ms Merton. I'll talk about the budget. The budget for this year is \$417.2 million. That's what we're on track to spend in relation to domestic and family violence. In the previous year, when the Liberal-Nationals were in government, there was \$226.5 million. In the year before that, it was \$204.9 million. So we're certainly well and truly increasing spending on domestic and family violence. We are seeing a rollout of a new style of emergency accommodation, which the previous Government brought in, which I was quite happy to see.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes, I'm familiar with that.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** We are managing those contracts to make sure that by the end of 2016 there will be accommodation for an additional 2,900 women and children leaving domestic and family violence—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** What year was that, Minister? I missed that. I thought you said 2016.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I did. I apologise—2026. Importantly—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Accommodation, lovely.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely. We're increasing accommodation. We're making sure that Staying Home Leaving Violence is available, both in metropolitan and regional areas. I'm sure Ms Taylor will be interested in the regional areas.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Always interested, Minister.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely. I know Ms Taylor.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you. She'll follow that, Minister, yes.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** But, importantly, what we need to do is we need to focus on primary prevention as well. We are in the process of doing that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Okay. Thank you.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are a number of things, on top of that, that this Government took to the election which we are very pleased to be implementing, and that is an additional \$8.1 million to the Redfern legal service to enhance and expand their current financial abuse service and an additional \$6.6 million in 2023-24 to provide specialist support for children who are in 20 refuges across New South Wales. That was funded initially under the national partnership agreement and funding ran out on 30 June this year. This Government made sure that there was funding to continue that really important program, because we know that domestic and family violence affects children, and that has been sorely not recognised up until recent years. It's important to provide support to children who have experienced domestic and family violence so that we can actually stop that cycle of violence.

In addition to that, we're providing an additional \$6.1 million to extend and expand the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service, the hearing support pilot that is occurring in courts. There was a pilot brought in by the previous Government in some courts; we have now expanded that so it is available at every court across New South Wales to provide important hearing support for victims of domestic and family violence. We're also providing \$4.4 million over three years to establish a new specialist multicultural service for victim-survivors of domestic violence. That won't just provide direct support; it will provide support to general services out there so that everybody, all services, will be able to best support culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** That's a good list of announcements.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That's what we're doing.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In term of implementation, what are we going to see on the ground? What time frame are we looking for on these? Is it rollout now? Is it announcement now?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I can provide you details.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I'll follow up this afternoon. I'm conscious of your time. Minister, were you consulted about the Government's decision to spend \$16 million on Ultimate Fighting Championship, UFC?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** No, I was not.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, I presume you're aware of Hayley Foster from the women's counselling service Full Stop saying she would "prefer not to see taxpayer funds used on events such as this that glorify violence". She also said, "We have very problematic messaging that we're sending to men or boys in our communities around what it means to be a real man." Minister, do you support the Premier's decision to give \$16 million to UFC given the comments made by some of the fighters relating to women—and I can quote going on. Minister, what's your position?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** For a start, I will reiterate what I have said previously and say that there is absolutely no place for domestic violence in our society. I believe that there is an important part that all of us, including sporting organisations, should be sending to people who participate in their sports.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The concerns continue by Hayley Foster, and by others, when we're having quotes coming out of these government-funded UFC centres like "We need to take women out of the workforce. We need to elect somebody that's going to put women back in the kitchen." It continues. Is this not a problem, an issue or a concern to you, Minister?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Comments that indicate disrespect to women of any form, in any place, concern me. I think that it should concern everybody.



**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the New South Wales Government's funding for UFC, Domestic Violence NSW commented about the funding, saying, "It could have funded the \$6 million we need for the 27 women's domestic violence court advocacy services. It could have funded the \$12 million we needed for specialist legal services." What do we say to Domestic Violence NSW?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I am having regular conversations with Domestic Violence NSW. I meet with them absolutely regularly. We are constantly talking about where priorities should be in relation to spending in domestic and family violence. We've also talked about the need for a real focus on primary prevention. We've also spoken about a need for data. We've also spoken about a need for evidence-based decision-making in where we put our funds in relation to domestic and family violence.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you. I recognise your regular meetings with Domestic Violence NSW. Minister, further to the comment from Domestic Violence NSW relating to advocacy services, did you advocate to the Premier for the \$6 million to go to domestic violence court advocacy services in the 2023-24 budget?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll reiterate what I previously said in one of my previous answers.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** So it was \$6 million for domestic violence court advocacy services. Did you advocate to the Premier for that \$6 million to Domestic Violence NSW for court advocacy services? I know you mentioned earlier about some work you've done on that in that space.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes, absolutely, Ms Merton.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** But, in terms of, I guess—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: Again, I appreciate Ms Merton's commitment to—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I think it's a toing and froing and it's a standard genre.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Sorry, I'm trying to take a point of order. If you could let me finish. It would be appreciated, and in accordance with paragraph 19 of the resolution on procedural fairness, if Ms Merton let Ms Harrison answer the question, or at least refer to the previous answer she'd already given. Chair, I ask that Ms Merton allow her to continue.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, what was the last part of that?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** That Ms Merton be asked to allow the Minister to finish her answer.

**The CHAIR:** The member will allow the Minister to answer the question before she asks the next one. It's been going really nicely. Can we continue that, please?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you, Mr Chair.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** In relation to an additional \$6 million for women's domestic violence court advocacy services, which Domestic Violence NSW referred to, we are providing an additional \$6.1 million to extend women's domestic violence court advocacy services across every single court in New South Wales.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The question was directly to Domestic Violence NSW and \$6 million of their domestic court advocacy services. I appreciate that services go beyond Domestic Violence NSW. In response to Domestic Violence NSW, how do they stand on the court advocacy? Was funding provided to them? Were you successful? Did you put that pitch forward to the Premier?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Domestic Violence NSW refers to an additional \$6 million for women's domestic violence court advocacy services being rolled out to courts right across New South Wales. That is exactly what this Government did. This Government provided an additional \$6.1 million to roll out women's domestic violence court advocacy services to provide court hearing support in every single court across New South Wales.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could take you to Core and Cluster—I love the name—\$426 million, which was part of the 2021-22 Coalition budget. In November 2022 it was announced that up to 39 new women's refuges would be delivered. Minister, where are we regarding the delivery of these new refuges from tranche one? It's referred to as the Core and Cluster. It was a \$426 million commitment by the previous Government. Where are we in terms of the delivery of the 39 women's refuges?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will clarify. I don't believe the 39 Core and Cluster refuges were part of tranche one. I think they were part of tranche one and tranche two. Contracts, if they have not already been signed—in some cases, building has commenced and, in some cases, buildings are now operating as Core and Cluster refuges.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the announcement of 39 new women's refuges, where are we at? How many do we have today?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will refer to Mr Tidball about that.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** If I can indicate—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Any locations or details? Maybe you've visited them. Consultation?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Of that 39—

**The CHAIR:** A point of order has been taken.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Once again, I draw attention to procedural fairness and the treatment of witnesses. Witnesses, both the Minister and others, should be allowed to answer the question before another rolling set of questions or commentary.

**The CHAIR:** Please allow the answer.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you, Mr Chair.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** The figure is 39. The key point in terms of the implementation on the ground is those projects being approved by the various organisations, and 39 have been approved and are being rolled out.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is that tranche one and two or just tranche one?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** It's tranche one and two, yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So there are 39.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** And three have opened.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Minister, I will take you to something different: drink spiking. A petition was submitted by What Were You Wearing?, and I know there was a debate on this in the lower House in, I think, June this year. That petition was looking at the uptick in the reporting of drink spiking incidents. I understand that in the year between July 2022 and June 2023 there was an increase of 20 per cent on the previous year. It was calling for two things. The first one was a collaboration with venues to prevent drink spiking, involving training and other things, and the second one was to reduce the stigma placed on victims, given that less than a sixth of all incidents get reported to the police, and the research shows that that underreporting is put down to shame and stigma. Are you aware of what has been done by your Government in response to that campaign?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That petition was led by one of the local women in my area, Sarah Williams, who I think was the Newcastle Local Woman of the Year this year.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We love the Women of the Year Awards.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** We love the Local Women of the Year Awards as well.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Sorry, Abigail.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** It's okay.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm very passionate.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** And it's regional.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And it's regional.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The Minister who has general oversight of that is the Minister for Liquor and Gaming. My understanding is that there has been additional evidence of training required, but I would need to take that on notice. As I said, the Minister for Liquor and Gaming has responsibility for that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I understand. The Minister for Gaming and Racing put out a media release on 11 October in response, setting up a new campaign called Think Safe to Drink Safe. Were you consulted about that campaign at all?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Personally, I'm not aware of the details of that campaign.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Was the department consulted? Was Ms Tonkin consulted, given its impact on rates of sexual assault, particularly against women. Is anyone aware of whether the department was consulted?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'd need to take that on notice, I think.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** There are 12 Think Safe to Drink Safe tips included. At least five of the 12 tips appear to have nothing to do with drink spiking or the drink spiking campaign, and appear to actually be leaning into the stigma around drink spiking. For instance, one of them says:

Pace yourself. Count your drinks, try a low-alcohol alternative, or have a 'spacer' of water between alcoholic drinks.

Others say:

Avoid shouts, drinking games or shots. Drink at your own pace, you don't have to join in every round and consider buying a non-alcoholic drink ...

...

Eat before or while you are drinking. If you have a full stomach, alcohol will be absorbed more slowly.

...

Stay busy. If you have something to do, you tend to drink less, so have a game of pool or hit the dance floor.

...

Consent and boundaries. Alcohol can lower your inhibitions. Be aware of this and set boundaries for yourself before going out.

These look very much like victim-blaming statements and something that is leaning into the stigma that is preventing people from reporting this. Does this cause you concern?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I would need to have a look that, Ms Boyd, and I'll come back to you.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I understand you'll need to have a look, but on the face of it, do you wish you were consulted?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I have to say, there's absolutely no place for victim blaming in relation to sexual assault. Nobody ever asks to be sexually assaulted. Nobody ever gives cause to be assaulted. There is no way that blame should be placed on a victim of sexual assault, of any form of violence. I'm really, really clear on that. We need to be sure that we can be in safe places. That's a really key message and I'm more than happy to take that further on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you, I'd really appreciate that. Moving on to something happier, I was very pleased to see that you have made the Women's Safety Commissioner a standalone position. Can you give us more details about what that looks like? I understand that Ms Tonkin was having to do a completely different role in addition to her commissioner role previously. Can you explain to the Committee what the difference is now in that role?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Can I say, firstly, Ms Tonkin was appointed as the standalone commissioner on Wednesday and I was really pleased to be able to do that. The role of the Women's Safety Commissioner in New South Wales—and it is actually the first standalone women's safety commissioner in Australia of any of the States or Territories—will be to provide leadership in relation to oversight of government programs on domestic and family and sexual violence. It will be to monitor implementation of strategies and initiatives and to provide oversight of specialist and mainstream service systems responsible for responding to that domestic and family violence and sexual violence and harassment.

Ms Tonkin will also be responsible for raising awareness and promoting public education campaigns and promoting public education and engagement to improve the outcomes in relation to women's safety. Really importantly—and this is an area where we need to do better—her role will be to foster better collaboration across government agencies, government departments and, on top of that, to raise the voices of people with lived experience. It's certainly not dealing with the day-to-day minutiae of what's happening with really, really important work of getting things done; it's to provide that oversight and to raise awareness.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Now that Ms Tonkin doesn't have—and apologies for talking about you in front of you, Ms Tonkin. Now that she's been freed up of the other responsibilities that she had in the department, will there also be additional resources given to that position in terms of other staffing, for instance?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Mr Tidball is indicating yes.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes, so 15 full-time—FTE—positions will report to Ms Tonkin.<sup>3</sup>

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Excellent. That's very good news.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** If I may, Minister, just supplement on that, I think one of the key things it will allow her to do is be independent from funding and commissioning decisions and policy decisions and actually have that ability to independently critique.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Excellent. It's much needed and that sounds very promising, thank you. Can you tell me what the working women's centre—I think it's called—is that was announced in the budget? I couldn't see anything about this—\$8 million allocated in the budget. Can you tell us about that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** New South Wales currently doesn't have a working women's centre. The Respect@Work report that was done by Kate Jenkins recommended that every State have a visible working women's centre to provide women in the workforce with advice on a range of issues, both industrial—also harassment, navigating the workplace. The Federal Government has made a commitment to implement working women's centres across the country. The New South Wales Government has made a commitment to contribute to that in New South Wales and we are currently working through the detail of how that will occur in New South Wales.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So \$8 million has been allocated but we don't yet have details about when and where it will be established or what projects it will undertake—things like that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** It's \$8 million over four years and it is likely to be one visible location that will also be able to access regional and rural areas as well, so it will be outreach as well.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So it's watch this space, though, in terms of—

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes. We're just working through the procurement processes with the Federal Government. Ms Smyth might want to provide further detail.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes. So we've been in conversations with the Commonwealth about the distribution of the Federal funding and the allocation to New South Wales. The plan is to have a single service provider, so we'll need to work with the Commonwealth on that procurement because it's a joint funding contribution.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** It was reported that there were 52 reports of sexual assault against older women in aged-care centres every single week in Australia. Aged-care centres are one of those strange areas for policy where the Federal Government is in charge in relation to aged-care policy generally. However, in relation to the rates of sexual assault against older women in aged-care centres, that's still within, I would assume, the New South Wales remit of some sort. Perhaps it's a question for the Ageing and Disability Commissioner, but I'm curious as to what we are doing at a New South Wales level in relation to the sexual assault of older women.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** New South Wales provides grants in relation to sexual violence. There has been some funding provided to the Older Women's Network. I would need to provide further detail. It's in my notes here somewhere. But for the interests of time—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That's alright. Maybe I could ask Mr Fitzgerald if he's got any insight into this issue.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Just a couple of things—as you know and as you've indicated, the complaints in relation to aged care are the jurisdiction of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, a Commonwealth agency. Nevertheless, sexual assaults within aged-care facilities in New South Wales are criminal offences and therefore part of the work of the NSW Police Force. Up until recently there were Aged Crime Prevention Officers in New South Wales, which had a remit in relation to crimes against older people, people with disability and people experiencing homelessness. In relation to the commission itself in relation to older people, 0.5 per cent of the matters we deal with are in relation to sexual abuse. But the advocacy groups, including the Older Women's Network, indicate an increase. We would believe that's a significantly under-reporting of sexual abuse by particularly women in the community at this particular stage. Again, if we received matters that were in relation to the assault of a person in an aged-care facility, we would refer it to the police in the first instance and, subject to the nature of the abuse—that is, by whom the abuse occurs—we would refer it to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner as well.

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<sup>3</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee received 30 November 2023, Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, clarified the evidence given.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** In terms of what the New South Wales Government can be doing in terms of prevention, from a systemic level, if we take a step back and look at this, it's a classic situation where we have women in a situation of losing their autonomy within this sort of aged-care facility and then also being less likely to be believed if they do come out and say something. Is there something we can do from a systemic prevention perspective? I'm worried that because of the uncertainty, or the gaps in jurisdiction, we are missing an opportunity to step in and provide more support.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There certainly is. There are a couple of pieces of work that are currently being undertaken. The New South Wales Government is working with Relationships Australia on a program that they have, called Let's Talk, mitigating the risk and responding early to elder abuse. In relation particularly to sexual violence against older women, particularly in aged-care facilities, I'm certain that there's a grant under the sexual violence grants that we have that particularly relates to the issue that you're raising. I'd need to take that on notice. I might be able to get you further information later today.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That would be really useful. As I say, whenever there are any sorts of these overlaps in jurisdiction we tend to end up with not enough action, so it would be good to find out what's happened there. I just wanted to ask about plans to extend the Staying Home Leaving Violence program, particularly in the context of increasing housing prices and there not being any rental stock et cetera. Clearly we need more women to be able to stay in their homes. What are the plans in relation to extending that program?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Staying Home Leaving Violence is an important program which, as you indicated, allows women and children to stay in their homes safely. It provides things like changed locks, additional security on the house, CCTV and duress alarms. It's a wonderful way of supporting women to not leave their own home. Staying Home Leaving Violence is actually currently available in 91 local government areas across New South Wales, and it's being provided by 32 service providers. It's not available, as you mentioned, right across New South Wales. Staying Home Leaving Violence will be recommissioned in 2025, and I would certainly be looking at trying to get as much possible coverage in New South Wales as we possibly could at that time, but at the moment I can't give any indication as to exactly what that might look like. It'll be subject to future budgets.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** The Labor Government has a plan for shared equity schemes for victims of domestic and family violence to be able to buy a home earlier. That scheme has been criticised, by myself included, as being something that sort of misses the point in terms of, really, it applying to a very small group of people who can prove both that they were a victim of domestic and family violence and also that they somehow have a deposit of some sort. I know that there was further work being done in relation to that policy after the election. Where is that up to? Has consultation with the domestic and family violence sector resulted in a better structured program?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There was a taskforce established that was co-chaired by myself and Domestic Violence NSW to look at how best to provide that shared equity program to victims of domestic and family violence. There were a few meetings, and we've actually landed on an agreed position for the shared equity scheme. That will be available from early next year for victim-survivors. I think you're right, Ms Boyd. Shared equity is not going to solve the problems of every woman in relation to housing who has experienced domestic and family violence. It will provide assistance to some. We need to look at a huge range of different housing options, and that's what this Government is absolutely committed to.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I have another theme I want to prosecute, but I just want to go back to what we were talking about at the beginning with the women's awards. You said that you want—and I'm not meaning to verbal, so I'll say this respectfully and I'll be corrected. But you used the word "strengthen". You wanted to strengthen the awards. Then you said that you actually supported women being able to get awards and that it was important. Could you just explain to the Committee how you cut categories of awards and how that could possibly strengthen them?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Those two categories, the Community Hero of the Year Award and the Regional Woman of the Year Award—by combining the two, the attempt was to make sure that there was a really strong cohort and increase the number in that particular category.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think, Minister, if you can see what I'm saying—I'm just finding that really hard to reconcile. I would have thought, surely, is it not your job as the Minister for Women, if you're not getting a large number of applications, say, that you really promote and you really push that rather than you cut something?

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Is that a question?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It is.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Can you please repeat that question?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** How can you strengthen awards when you cut the categories?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** By increasing the numbers of nominations that go in to each category.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will ask just a quick one. The initiative for a specialist multicultural family violence centre—can you give us a time line and update on the progress of that initiative?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are discussions currently occurring, I believe, in relation to that particular commitment. I'll just ask Ms Campbell to give an update on it.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** We're currently in negotiation with Settlement Services, so we're pretty close to signing a contract there.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So we've got a site?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I understand \$4.4 million was allocated in the budget over four years. Is that just for the site and the construction?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** And the operating costs as well.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Very good. I think that's all I want to do right now.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** All right. Let's give everyone a break, Minister, and we'll look forward to seeing you back at 11.15 a.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** We might recommence. It is now just after 11.15 a.m. The Opposition.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, just another question—I said that I was finished, and I will move on, but will you apologise to the women of regional New South Wales for cancelling the awards?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** What I will do is I will say to the rural and regional women of New South Wales that it is absolutely important that they are recognised and that the Women of the Year Awards will continue to recognise them. I am actually really pleased that the numbers of nominations this year have increased.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's amazing when you give it a little bit of a push.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Is there a question?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** They have actually increased. So the actual total nominations for the Women of the Year Awards this year, for the 2024 awards, are 441 nominations.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That is great. Thank you, Minister. I will ask for that detail later.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** For 2023 there were 393 nominations.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, my question was would you apologise. I think that's a no.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: Witnesses must be treated with courtesy at all times, Chair. I'd say that that last statement was pretty discourteous, given that the Minister said no words to such effect.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, the Minister must be treated with respect at all times. I'm sure you were trying to do that, but you had a slip of the tongue.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'll rephrase the question. Minister, yes or no, will you apologise to the women of regional New South Wales for cancelling the award?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Ms Taylor, the day that we reinstated the award I made a phone call to the CEO and to the chair of the Country Women's Association, explained the logic—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you apologise?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I said that we were reinstating them and apologised for not hearing from them earlier.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I really appreciate that, and that's why I asked the question.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Is there a further question?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, was it you or was it the Premier who decided to reinstate the award?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** It was the Premier in conjunction with me.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So the Premier made the decision. Did you say to him that that was the right thing to do?

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Order!

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It was a question, Chair.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Point of order: Again, you're misrepresenting what the Minister has said, which is utterly discourteous. Under the procedural fairness resolution, number 19—

**The CHAIR:** No, that's not actually a point of order.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Well, witnesses must be treated with courtesy.

**The CHAIR:** The Minister can speak for herself.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** She's misrepresenting.

**The CHAIR:** If she can misrepresent, she may, but it's up to her. Please proceed.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** It's discourteous.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'm going to move on now to my next thing that I really want to get stuck into, and that is what we talked about a little bit before about elder abuse and seniors. It's going to become my new passion, and I'm sure you'll share it. Can I ask you what new funding has been committed to the commission to prevent elder abuse?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** My understanding is that there is an additional \$2.5 million that has been provided to the Ageing and Disability Commission.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Is that over the forward estimates, Minister, or is that—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** That is for the current—

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Mr Tidball's got further information.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So it's for one year, did you say, or is it over the forwards? Sorry, I just didn't quite hear.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** The \$2.5 million is a one-off payment for this financial year, over and above the budget that was announced this year. There are no forward additional funds at this stage.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you very much, Commissioner. That's very interesting. Minister, did you have discussions with the Premier or Treasurer about the need to secure funding for the Ageing and Disability Commission?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Inclusion and I talked about funding for the Ageing and Disability Commission. I was certainly in meetings with the Treasurer where that was discussed.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Did you raise it in the budget process?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** It was certainly raised through the budget process.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** But just for 12 months. That's all that was gotten—"gotten" is not even a word, sorry. Is that all that was allocated for 12 months?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The \$2.5 million has been allocated from within existing budgets.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Would that be from the existing budget? You said you did that with Minister Washington. Would that be from the DCJ budget?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There were no additional funds provided through the budget process for the Ageing and Disability Commission. Funding was found from within the DCJ budget, and Mr Tidball can provide more information.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's fine. Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, Mr Tidball. I can ask you after. I've only got the Minister for a certain amount of time. Minister, according to the figures, more than half of

the reports of abuse actually come from regional New South Wales, which, I must say, Minister, to be honest, I didn't realise until I'd been looking into this. But the Hunter, Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Central Coast have the largest number of reports and, in particular, 369 of the total 3,102 reports were actually from the Hunter region. Minister, do you agree that those in our regions for this particular issue need specialised support with those numbers?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There is certainly a need for increased focus in areas where there are high rates of prevalence of elder abuse, absolutely. I believe that one of the ways that that is occurring is through elder abuse prevention collaboratives throughout New South Wales, and the Hunter is included in that particular—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes, I think the collaboratives are fantastic. I've read about them. I just wanted to know too, with elder abuse—and I remember this from sitting on the committee years ago when I was a backbencher—we have a phone line for elder abuse and then there is also the ability to do home visits, a bit like a community nurse, but I understand that there is not that capacity in the regions. I'm just wondering if that might be something that you'd be looking at as well—to increase that ability. I understand the budget has just been, but I'm looking forward now and I really want to prosecute this because I'm genuinely very concerned about it. Do you think that it would be a good idea to be able to uplift that, particularly in those regions that I just mentioned—Hunter, Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Central Coast—that have this abnormally high level at the moment, to be able to allow home visits to occur?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That's certainly an issue that the Ageing and Disability Commissioner has raised, the need for increased funding, so that that outreach can occur, particularly in regional areas.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So I'm correct, Minister, in saying that there is no outreach in rural and regional areas, or am I incorrect?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I would need to check with the commissioner, but I do believe that there is currently some available to be provided.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you're not sure. Commissioner, just really quickly, could you tell me if there are home visits in rural and regional areas or not?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Yes, there are home visits in regional areas. Our jurisdiction is a preference jurisdiction—in other words, I am required to listen to the voice of the older person or person with a disability who is affected. In relation to investigations, we are required to seek their consent. In relation to older people, that can generally only be obtained by home visits. The issue in relation to regional communities has been raised with the former Government and the current Government. We have sought, in the past, enhancements to allow us to— to use your expression—uplift our involvement in the regions. That will continue to be a pressing problem as we go forward.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'm not saying that previously it was done better. I'm completely not saying that. I'm just really concerned, going forward, about what is happening and what we are doing. So are you going to have a specific strategy for the regions because of this marked increase in elder abuse in the regions?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll certainly be working with the Ageing and Disability Commissioner on the best way to deal with elder abuse in metro Sydney and also in regional areas where there are higher rates of prevalence, absolutely.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I completely appreciate that, obviously, I do have a bias—being a member of the National Party—for the regions. But I guess what I'm just concerned about is that if we're not—we've just been talking about domestic violence and I think, to be fair, everyone wants to see everybody doing better in that space, and when someone does I think we'll all rejoice in that. I think as well when we talk about these things now, we're looking at elder abuse and I'm looking at this data and I'm thinking, "Are we where we were 15 years ago with domestic violence and do we need an immediate plan and strategy in New South Wales going forward to look at what could be seen as just a massive increase with very detrimental effects?" Would you agree or disagree?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Ms Taylor, I certainly believe, I think as I previously said, that there needs to be further consideration about the way that we deal with elder abuse, both in the Sydney metropolitan region and particularly areas where there are higher rates of elder abuse, including regional and rural New South Wales. It is something that we'll need to consider in further budgets. It was a really tough budget, as you know, that was handed to the Labor Government. I'm sure that you've heard the figure about the \$178 billion debt that we inherited. There has been a lot of work to bring—



**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Good line, Minister, but you're in government now. It's your turn. You need to make those choices.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** Please give the Minister a chance to answer before you interject.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We'll move on then. Honestly. Minister, you talked about a national strategy for elder abuse and you very clearly articulated your concern and how you felt about that. But what I want to know is are you going to have a specific strategy going forward for elder abuse from New South Wales when you look at this data?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will work with the Ageing and Disability Commissioner, and I think I've already said that, on the way forward in dealing with elder abuse in rural and regional areas.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Will you have a strategy that you are going to implement or are you just going to work? Because things need a strategy, don't they, to get policy results.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think it would be sensible to be guided by the advice of the statutorily created Ageing and Disability Commission.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes, but you are the Minister so you need to make the decision as to whether this is an important issue or not.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** And I will be guided by advice that's provided to me by the Ageing and Disability Commissioner.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I'm also told between 2019-20 and 2022-23 there was a 34 per cent increase to calls to the hotline for elder abuse. Are you aware of that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I am indeed.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And what are your plans to address that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Certainly the additional funding that was provided to the Ageing and Disability Commission will be able to provide additional resources to put into that hotline.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So there's money allocated within that 12-month funding for the hotline? This is really important work. Do you think the current funding model of just 12 months is adequate?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Ms Taylor, I don't believe an additional 12-month funding is adequate in the same way that I don't believe a 12-month additional funding for the regional seniors travel card was a sensible spending of money either. I think short-term funding contracts are not the way to go, and that is why this New South Wales Government has committed to, within community services, extended contracts towards five years so that organisations can get reliable support and not have to constantly ask for funds. That is one of the things that over this term of government we'll be working on. Unfortunately, as you know, the Ageing and Disability Commission said very clearly under the term of the past Government that they were insufficiently funded. And we've got a legacy from that previous Government—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And that's fine, Minister, but this is your Government now and you're the Minister for Seniors, so I'm saying to you that you're now the Minister.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Are you saying or are you asking a question?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** There has been a 12-month extension.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: I ask that the member be, again, directed to the guidelines of the resolution about how to treat witnesses. It seems she was telling the Minister rather than asking a question. If she could just come to the question.

**The CHAIR:** Please allow the Minister to answer the question before the next one is asked.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I can continue with that answer, if you'd like.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, that's fine.

**The CHAIR:** I uphold the point of order.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I think you've answered enough on that one. Minister, can I ask you about the Council for Women's Economic Opportunity? Have you got one?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I know the Council for Women's Economic Opportunity has been disbanded. It had its last meeting in June this year and the Women's Advisory Council is in the process of being stood up.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So you are going to have one?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm going to have a Women's Advisory Council.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You've changed the name.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm going to have a Women's Advisory Council which will focus on all three pillars of the women's plan.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Great. That's really good to hear. When will you start that? Sorry, did you just tell me? When will you start the applications for that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The first meeting is scheduled for December.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So that's well over a year since you've—

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Nominations are currently being examined. I don't know whether you saw this, but there was a call for nominations for the Women's Advisory Council.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I didn't see it. That's great.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** And there are over 400 nominations.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Great.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There will be 12 members on the Women's Advisory Council. I'm firmly of the view that the women on that council will be from a really wonderful, diverse, regionally representative—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Fantastic, Minister. Thank you.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm sure you will be very pleased when you see the membership.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm sure I will. I'm sure your commitment to regional women is going to be outstanding now.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** And the first meeting will be 13 December 2023.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Fantastic. Just going back, with respect to the Seniors team within New South Wales, how many people in that team are focused on ageing, in your team, in your Seniors team?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'd have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You don't know? Who does the team report to? Would you like to take that on notice?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll take that on notice or I can ask Ms Campbell.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Given the apparent increase in need that is happening, are there plans to increase that team?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are not currently plans to increase the team; however, every budget cycle is a new budget cycle.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's right. We can only hope. Who assesses the applications to the New South Wales seniors grant program? I note in the guidelines there is an assessment team and an assessment panel. Who is that comprised of? I'm happy for you to take that on notice, Minister.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I can take it on notice but I do have the answer here, if you'd like it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I can follow that up in the afternoon if you like. Could you tell me how much the NSW Seniors Festival costs each year?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Again, I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You want to take that on notice? Okay, no problem. Do you know how the overall cost of the festival is split across regional New South Wales and metro?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll take that on notice as well.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No worries. Can I ask you what the eligibility of the NSW Seniors Card is?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes. For people to be eligible for the Seniors Card, they need to be over the age of 60 and they need to be working less than 20 hours a week. People can receive the Senior Savers Card as well if they work over 20 hours a week.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, since July New South Wales residents have seen an increase in energy prices of between 19 per cent and 25 per cent, depending on what network the area of the State is covered by. It's an average of about \$315 to \$594 per bill for each customer. In your budget the Seniors Energy Rebate has increased from \$200 to \$250. I note that this is also not set to hit the pockets of seniors until 1 July 2024. I commend the increase, but do you agree that this rebate is not enough given the projected price increases seniors are expected to face?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Every government could always do more to assist people with the cost of living, particularly people who are struggling, and what this Government has committed to doing is making sure that the supports that we provide people across New South Wales, including seniors, actually support those who need them most.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So, Minister, if that's the case—and I agree with everything you just said—why will the rebate not be available until 2024?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Because we inherited a debt of \$178 billion.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's another choice that you've made to do that. I would suggest that by 2024 the rebate might be completely redundant, Minister.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I would suggest that every decision this Government makes will be economically responsible but also socially responsible and assist the people who need it most.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I don't think people would agree with that, Minister.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** As I'm sure you know, each jurisdiction within the Hunter and Central Coast has a higher than average rate of domestic violence and sexual assault. Speaking with some of the domestic and family violence services, particularly around the Hunter, they are reporting just in the last recent few months a further uptick in what they are seeing, including needing to buy tents for women to sleep in parks, using car parks as temporary accommodation for women and a whole bunch of really quite shocking stories. What are you doing in terms of focusing on those sorts of hotspots to provide additional support?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** In relation to housing?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** In relation to service provision and housing. We have been calling this a crisis for a long time but we're now hearing that there is a further increase. What mechanisms are in place for this Government to quickly respond to that sort of thing?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are a number of aspects. Firstly, I will go to additional specialist workers in the domestic violence area. You would probably be aware that the Federal Government made an announcement in relation to additional specialist workers under the national partnership agreement. We have been working with the Federal Government on exactly what that looks like, as well as providing the commitments that the Federal Government made in relation to additional specialist workers in particular regions.

New South Wales DCJ has been doing analysis on areas where rates of domestic and family violence are particularly high and where there are service gaps and working with local DCJ officers to increase specialist services in particular areas. That's currently being worked through and that analysis is currently being done. We're hoping that we'll be able to provide advice to services later this year in relation to the actual procurement so that, where there is a need, there can be a tendering process for particular services.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I would be interested to know if the department has already done any research on one of the issues that's come to my attention recently. There are real concerns that there is already and is going to be an increasing rate of domestic violence in those communities impacted by the transition out of coal and into renewables. When we're looking at that transition process around the world, there's been a need for additional community services, not just an upskilling and reskilling of workers coming out of coal and into other industries but also a need to really focus on workforce for those social services within those communities. Is that something that the department has been looking at or is there anywhere within government looking at domestic violence in the context of the transition?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I would need to refer to the department on that.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I think we would need to take that on notice. I'm happy to provide some information later today, if I can get it.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That would be really useful.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** If I may respond, if it is of assistance, on the question of people living in cars and the like, just to note that in the housing and homelessness component of DCJ, temporary accommodation arrangements have moved and shifted from two to seven days and the annual 28-day cap removed.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I am sure you're aware of, Minister, and we've had a discussion previously about the funding request from Jenny's Place for a domestic violence resource centre. Is that something that the Government will be funding? Do we have a decision on that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That could be considered in the context of the additional specialist domestic violence workers.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Is there a time frame for when that will be agreed with the Federal Government?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will refer to the department on exactly where that is at at the moment, if that's all right.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** We are just currently doing the procurement. We are hoping to get that process sorted by the end of this year. Just to note, just to your question about Hunter, you may or may not be aware but the Commonwealth set particular quotas for how many workers and they also looked at particular cohorts. They looked at First Nations, CALD, LGBTQIA+, disability, and children and young people. A number of those positions—I think about 99 of those positions—were determined by the Commonwealth in terms of locations and the rest by the State. As the Minister indicated earlier, we looked at the BOCSAR data and a whole range of different data sources. For the Hunter, the Commonwealth have identified six workers and New South Wales has identified another seven, so that's 13.<sup>4</sup> There is then Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, so the Commonwealth quota is 10 and the recommended allocation from DCJ is 11. That just gives you an idea of the proportion of positions. But we're certainly happy to provide that on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That would be very useful. The rate of DV-related assaults per 100,000 population in Muswellbrook is more than double the rate across the State. I understand that Upper Hunter Homeless Support is requesting funding for a domestic and family violence community education engagement worker. Will that also be included within that Federal allocation process or is there additional funding available for that somewhere else?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I don't believe that a community engagement worker would actually be able to be funded under the national partnership agreement additional specialist workers agreement.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I'm trying to understand how the department keeps track of where—and I referred to them before as hotspots—there is a known growing need and where, if we were looking at a natural disaster, we would be sending firefighters and whatever in. How do we deal with it when we have an uptick in domestic violence and assaults in an area? Is there some mechanism where we can deliver more funding?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll refer to Ms Campbell on this one.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** We do that regularly, in terms of looking at the stats that particularly BOCSAR provides around hotspots across New South Wales. I think the service you're referring to would be funded under the specialist homelessness services. We have just extended the contracts for two years and we're doing an evaluation of the homelessness strategy and looking at where the investment is currently across New South Wales and where the demand and need is. If we don't have enough funding, we'll obviously put to government a proposal to look at further investment. But, again, that would depend on budget processes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Another area of great concern for the sector is that—given the chronic underfunding from the previous however many years of Coalition Government and the uncertainty around the funding, which I understand Labor has committed to address with, for example, five-year contracts instead of rolling one- or two-year contracts. There's a concern that, if we do get more funding now into the sector, there won't be the workers that we need. Have you been doing anything in relation to that workforce planning around the domestic and family violence sector?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There has been a lot of work done in relation to workforce planning. New South Wales is in the process of developing a workforce strategy for domestic violence, and that is not just a strategy for specialist workers; it's for anybody who has some kind of link with domestic violence. There is

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<sup>4</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee received 30 November 2023, Ms Anne Campbell, Deputy Secretary, Strategy Policy and Commissioning, clarified the evidence given.

currently a survey out asking people, asking workers, and, as I said, it's wide. Anybody who has anything to do in their work with domestic and family violence have really been encouraged to participate in that survey, because we really want to know what the challenges people are experiencing, what skills they need, where they see the gaps as being, so that we can inform that workforce strategy. Because you're right; at the moment we could put a billion dollars more into the domestic and family violence budget, but there is, sadly, not the workforce and that's a real challenge for us.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Have there been any discussions with the education Department or the skills Minister in relation to providing more fee-free places for people studying—I have now forgotten what the name of the certificate is—but, basically, training in order to become—I have absolutely had a blank—anyway, to work in a domestic and family violence centre—social worker, that sort of social work training within TAFE, for instance? Have there been any discussions with the skills Minister around that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I haven't personally had discussions with the skills Minister about that as yet. That would need to be informed by what comes out of the workforce strategy, where the gaps are, and whether that is a sensible way to go. I don't know whether the department can provide anything further.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I think that's right, Minister.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** They are certainly options that we would be looking at because a specialist workers isn't necessarily a social worker either. There's further work that needs to be done beyond that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Yes. And my apologies to all social workers for forgetting something so simple. I couldn't remember the term. But you are absolutely right; there's a range of different specialists that we need in these centres. But I think the focus so far of this Government on some of our more identifiable essential workers has been really great and I have been really pleased to see, in particular, the extra focus on the pay of teachers and nurses. But it seems that community sector workers are not as visible to the Government. I'm wondering when we're going to get to that point of really focusing on that workforce as well. What's the time line, then, for that workforce strategy to come out?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I might just ask Ms Campbell to answer that, about the detail of when it's likely to be out.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Yes. The survey is open until 12 November. It's likely that early next year, the analysis of the findings, and then engagement with the sector about, well, what are the solutions. It's one thing to do a survey, but the key thing is to identify pipeline strategies to actually address the issues flagged. It may take some time but I'm happy to take it on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. That would be very useful. Perhaps we can talk about services in regional New South Wales, but for First Nations people in particular. There has long been a call for more specialist services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing domestic and family violence. Is there anything new in the budget that addresses that particular cohort?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There will certainly be additional accommodation for First Nations women in the Core and Cluster Program. One of the concerns that I had with tranche one and tranche two was that, although there were 39 refugees being identified—and 64 per cent of them were actually in regional New South Wales, which is fabulous—only five of them were actually run by Aboriginal-controlled, community-controlled organisations. Tranche three is something that I'm very keen to see an increase in number of Aboriginal-controlled organisations running Core and Cluster refugees. And I've asked the department to look at ways of prioritising Aboriginal community controlled organisations and supporting them in that process.

Also, one of the things that we very clearly heard is that it takes time for Aboriginal community controlled organisations to be able to comply with the procurement processes that we have in government. I extended out the expression of interest time for tranche three and also the expression of interest time for the request for tenders. I think they're about three months each, which is certainly considerably more than tranche one and tranche two. That's in regard to accommodation. In relation to additional specialist workers, there will be some targeting in relation to making sure that there are additional specialist workers for First Nations people. We are doing really not very well in relation to—it's well recognised that historically we haven't been doing well in achieving Closing the Gap target 13. It's a challenging target and we need to do a lot of work if we're going to reach it.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** One of the integral initiatives to support that Closing the Gap target 13 was the establishment of the Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network in 2022, which was designed to improve the safety and wellbeing of First Nations women and children. I understand the New South Wales Government has only provided short-term funding for that initiative, however, and it's to expire in June '24. Can you tell me if there's any commitment to fund that network beyond '24?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I can't give any commitment in relation to future budgets. I have certainly met with Dixie Link-Gordon and Christine Robinson, spoken about the work that the Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network does. I know that they are doing really great work talking to and listening with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and women across New South Wales and I would be really, really keen to continue to hear from them in that form.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Will you advocate for their funding to be extended?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can you tell me what the status of the First Nations Women's Economic Participation Review is?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I will take that on notice.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. It might be useful, actually, if you could tell me a little bit about the NSW Respect@Work Advisory Group I understand you have established with the Minister for IR and work health and safety. Can you tell me what that is designed to do and, in substance, what resources sit behind it?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The Respect@Work taskforce sits within SafeWork. The taskforce was established as a result of the Kate Jenkins report, obviously. As you mentioned, there has recently been an advisory group established. It will predominantly report to Minister Cotsis. They had their first meeting and there was a range of organisations there. They had their first meeting, I believe, the week before last. I might just go back, if I can, because I now know the answer to the First Nations economic opportunities taskforce. That's actually a taskforce that's led by Treasury.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Okay. So there's no involvement from the Minister for Women?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There is some discussion with Women NSW. It's Treasury led.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** On the Respect@Work Advisory Group, the press release that was issued on 24 October by your office and the office for the Minister for Work Health and Safety said that that advisory group would be led by SafeWork NSW and then supported by Minister Cotsis and you. What does your support for that look like? What is the tangible support being given?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll be, certainly, with Minister Cotsis—we'll be attending as many of those advisory groups as we possibly can, listening to what the issues are that members of the group bring and really wanting to make sure that any changes that need to occur to regulation and legislation can actually occur if there is evidence, and there is no doubt—sorry, I'd change my words there. It's not "if there is". We know there is sexual harassment happening in the workplace. We know there is disrespect happening in the workplace. As the New South Wales Government, we want to make sure that we work to eradicate that. Minister Cotsis and I will be continuing to listen to that and working with that group.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, can you confirm that you are the Minister responsible for volunteers?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I am the Minister with responsibility for volunteering, yes.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** How many volunteers would we have in New South Wales? You can take that on notice; you've got a big folder.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** No, no, I can provide you with—we have over five million volunteers in New South Wales.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, what is the value of volunteers to the New South Wales economy?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There are 1½ billion hours of work that volunteers provide to New South Wales. If you extrapolate out, that means there's \$127 billion worth of value that volunteers provide. So we absolutely rely on volunteers to keep New South Wales going.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes, it's significant.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** And they also get a lot of joy out of it themselves as well.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Sure, and I think we've each, probably, ourselves firsthand been recipients of the great volunteer spirit in New South Wales. In terms of your diary disclosure, I can't see evidence of meetings with volunteers or stakeholders relevant to your portfolio responsibility for volunteers.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Is that a question?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Have you had meetings with the National School of Volunteer Management? The Centre for Volunteering?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** A question in relation to The Centre for Volunteering?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Have you had meetings, correct.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I haven't had any formal meetings. I have been to functions and I have been at events with The Centre for Volunteering. In fact, there was an event that I went to where we announced some funding for, and it was in conjunction with The Centre for Volunteering—calling for increased nominations or increased involvement and encouraging people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to volunteer.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could just go back to my question. In terms of your diary disclosure, they show that there have been no meetings held with volunteers.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: I just wondered if there's a question. There seems to be quite a lot of statements just being posed at the Minister.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Why does the diary disclosure show no meetings with volunteers?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** You can ask the Minister, not me.

**The CHAIR:** Order! That's not a point of order.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Yes. The question has been asked. We're waiting for the Minister to answer it.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I've had requests for meetings from 600 different organisations and people. We're in the process of going through those. I have had discussions with Gemma Rygate from The Centre for Volunteering. They haven't been formal meetings; they've been at events. I'm quite happy to—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** As the responsible Minister, why wouldn't you be convening what you refer to as formal meetings?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I've put an invitation to The Centre for Volunteering for a meeting—and they're quite happy to get through their volunteering awards that are well and truly on their radar at the moment—and happy to meet with them in future.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You've heard the awards, but you don't have a meeting.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, in this year's budget, how much was allocated to volunteers?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** In this year's budget there was an amount of \$200,000 allocated to volunteering, and then on top of that there is the funding that's provided to The Centre for Volunteering as the peak agency for volunteering.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, what is the funding source for this?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The funding source for the \$200,000—

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** DCJ. It's part of the DCJ budget.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** —is part of the DCJ budget.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, I just missed it. If you could reiterate the dollar value breakdown for those earlier points you mentioned.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The dollar value breakdown for which part, sorry?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You mentioned what the funding is. What is the dollar value again for the available funding?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** In relation to volunteers?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Correct.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There is an amount of \$200,000 for volunteering within the New South Wales DCJ budget. Then on top of that there is an allocation for The Centre for Volunteering as the peak agency, which I'd have to take on notice for you.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could take you to the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission report which reviewed NSW Police Force responses to domestic and family violence incidents. I note

the report was provided to Parliament on 14 June 2023. There were 13 recommendations. Minister, have you read the report?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I have.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Are you aware of any of the recommendations?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I've had discussions with the police Minister, who has oversight of that, in relation to implementation of the recommendations from the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Are there any recommendations specific to your portfolio that you would be strongly advocating for?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think all of the recommendations that the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission have made are valid recommendations. They all relate to the experience of domestic violence victims and the way that systems respond to those. Government should take them very seriously. All of the recommendations relate to domestic and family violence.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, how many times have you met with the police Minister relevant to your portfolio responsibilities?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'd have to take that on notice. I certainly provide—obviously, within my diary disclosure, I'm required to disclose meetings with external bodies. I haven't got a record of the number of meetings that I've had with the police Minister, nor the number of conversations that I've had with the police Minister, on me at the moment. I'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, at your last meeting with the police Minister, what did you discuss?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think the last meeting with the police Minister was in relation to—it was actually a meeting with the police Minister and the Attorney General in relation to how this Government is going to ensure that we move away from the way that government has been operating in the past, and that is not really taking cross-agency activities and not making cross-agency actions. Instead, we want to move towards having a real whole-of-government approach to dealing with domestic and family violence. Certainly, at the last meeting I had with the police Minister, the Attorney General was there and it was about progressing a true whole-of-government approach and how we can make sure that all of our systems fit into one another.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of follow-up on that to reach some of these outcomes, what would be the strategy around this?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** We're currently in the process—

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Point of order: I'm mindful that this discussion and line of questioning may be straying closely to what could be regarded as Cabinet in confidence and conversations that cannot be—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: Quite seriously, if it's an issue that is Cabinet in confidence, I'm sure the Minister is quite capable of saying that herself and doesn't need that defence, wasting the Opposition's time.

**The CHAIR:** It's not actually a point of order. The Minister can decide how she answers the question.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Don't make her look bad.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Excuse me. I would ask you to withdraw that.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I will withdraw.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, how many times have you met with the police commissioner?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I have not had any direct meetings with the police commissioner.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, given the level of concern relating to some of the domestic violence in your portfolio, would this not be a priority for you?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I've met with a number of senior officers in the police, including deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners. I've not met directly with the commissioner. We've had some really good conversations about how we can ensure that police respond to domestic and family violence appropriately. I believe that the police are doing some pretty amazing work in relation to improving their responses and providing the best response possible.



**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, could you update the Committee on the progress of Labor's election commitment to build a victims notification app?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes. There is currently some scoping being done in relation to that commitment. That's being worked through with DCJ in conjunction with the Department of Customer Service in its digital space. There's a lot of scoping needing to be done. There are some really, really complex systems. There are a number of exit points that offenders can go through where there is a point of risk for a victim. It may well be that an offender—a perpetrator—has been bailed, it may well be that they've been released from remand or it may well be that they've been released from Corrections.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could return to the question.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm trying to reply.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It was the victims notification app—a New South Wales election commitment.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Yes, and that's exactly what I'm talking about. There is systems work being done on it—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Systems work.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** —and there will be scoping systems—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: What kind of interjection is that? It does not accord with any of the principles of the resolution that go to treating the witnesses with respect.

**The CHAIR:** What is the point of order?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** The point of order is that you ask the Hon. Rachel Merton to treat the Minister with respect and not interject with inane comments.

**The CHAIR:** Interjections are disorderly at all times, so please refrain from interjecting and allow the Minister to answer.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There's currently a lot of scoping being done. As I said, it is a project between DCJ and the Department of Customer Service. It is a complex piece of work. As you mentioned, DV notify is about when perpetrators—offenders—are released, from whatever point they are being released. There are a number of different departments and agencies that could be involved and there are a number of different systems. That is what is currently being worked through, and I will be making further announcements in relation to exactly what that looks like. As I said, it's a huge piece of work—it's very complex—and it will take some months before I'm able to provide any actual detail in relation to that system.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** What is the expected time line of delivery for that app?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** If we keep going according to the plan at the moment, we should have something in place—potentially part one—by the end of this financial year.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, can you confirm that you are the Minister responsible for carers?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I am the Minister responsible for carers.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Your most recent diary disclosure shows that you have held one meeting with Carers NSW relating to your portfolio responsibilities. Could you share with the Committee some of the forward thinking, the plans or how important this is? Where does this sit in your priorities?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Firstly, I would say that a lot of carers don't actually identify themselves as being carers, and part of the challenge of government is being able to support them properly. Without people knowing that they are carers, it's really difficult for them to ask for any support. One of the major aspects of our Carers Strategy, and of the actions that we have in relation to carers, is in relation to assisting people to identify themselves as carers and also to provide the supports that they need. Often carers are isolated. They don't know where to find the information to best support their loved one or their neighbour—whoever the person is they're caring for—and that's certainly one of the things that I, as the Minister, want to overcome.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of your plan in meeting some of this, what could we expect? What might be next? Is there a strategy?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** There is a strategy—there's the Carers Strategy—and the Government is working towards implementing that. There's an action plan that underpins that as well, that sits underneath the strategy, and we're just into that second action plan.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Was there a budget commitment on this?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The total carers budget for New South Wales is \$5.1 million.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Does the action plan sit within that money or was this additional funds?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The strategy sits within that \$5.1 million. There are also carers grants that are available, which obviously also sit within implementing aspects of the strategy and the action plan.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, could I ask you about the Staying Home Leaving Violence program, if that's the right word? How much was spent last year compared to this year?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The total budget for Staying Home Leaving Violence for this year is \$19.3 million. I'll need to come back to you on the previous year.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I asked the Premier in his estimates if he supported a safe workplace for women, and he said yes. Sorry, it's such a Dixer, but may I ask you if you support this Parliament being a safe workplace for women?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Absolutely I do. I don't think you'd expect me to say anything else.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** No, I wouldn't, Minister, but obviously I have a reason for asking you. Minister, do you see your role as Minister for Women as supporting all women regardless of who they are, regardless of their political party, regardless of where they are within this work environment?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I believe that, as a member of the Government that oversees workplaces—I believe that it is part of every parliamentarian's job, and certainly me as Minister for Women, to ensure that it's a safe workplace, as it would be the role of the Minister for Industrial Relations as well, absolutely.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Minister, I've seen you talk before about the gender pay gap and how that can really hold women back. What are you doing to ensure that women who do the same roles as men or may sit and reside in different places are able to be seeking that same payment that they are entitled to for doing the same job?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Well, legislation actually provides that people who do exactly the same job as somebody else, no matter what their gender, be paid the same job.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It does, doesn't it? Yes, very powerful. Minister, have you had an update on the status of the Broderick report within the Parliament?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I haven't. I've spoken to the Speaker about it, though, and there's certainly a real desire to ensure that the Parliamentary Executive Group and the parliamentary advisory group are up and running and get—

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Will you be seeking a formalised briefing on that, seeing you are the Minister for Women in New South Wales and that was a pretty fundamental report to the culture of this Parliament?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll certainly be having further discussions with the Speaker on where we're at with that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Just on that point, I think there was a report at some point that Labor was planning a unit similar to, I understand, what we now have in the Federal Government on the back of the Jenkins report. That was supposed to be a group of people put in place to deal with parliamentary workplace safety and complaints. Are you aware of that?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Sorry, could you ask the question again?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Yes. There was a report and I was just put in mind of it—there was a media report that there was I think \$8 million or something. I'll have to find the exact figure, but it was reported that there would be the establishment of a particular unit within Parliament to deal with parliamentary complaints and culture. Is that something you're aware of?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'd have to take that on notice. I know that there is. It's not firmly on my radar right at the moment.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** It just sounded a little similar to the situation with the Women's Safety Commissioner having 15 people sitting underneath her. I just wanted to check whether that was a combined thing or if that's still designed to be separate.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** The Women's Safety Commissioner role will be—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Not parliamentary focused?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Not parliamentary focused.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will ask perhaps in Legislature about the establishment of that group then and ask the Presiding Officers in relation to that initiative. Can I ask about child specialist workers? I understand that the sector requested a minimum of one child specialist worker in each refuge in New South Wales, with \$10 million to fund the program. But instead we've just got sort of the maintenance of the existing 20 staff. Can you explain why that funding request was rejected and what the status of those workers is?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'll just clarify. The children's specialist workers are in 20 refuges. It's not necessarily 20 specialist workers because there may be multiple specialist workers—

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I see.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** —in refuges depending on the size of the refuge and the nature of the people who come into that refuge. So that funding has been provided from the New South Wales Government up until 30 June this year and obviously national partnership agreements are things that we negotiate on a—we've just had a further extension. The original group of specialist children's workers were funded under the national partnership agreement and I hear very clearly from the sector about the need for increased focus on children. Why weren't there additional—why wasn't their ask included? Simply because we couldn't fund them. But I will certainly—prevention and recovery are an important part of our domestic and family violence plan and children are at the heart of both of those.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Budgets are about choices, and I understand there is a limited pool of funds available for the New South Wales Government to divvy out, particularly because it's not raising revenue from all the sources that I want it to. We have a limited pool and I do understand that budgets are—that there is that limited amount to go around. But you'd agree, wouldn't you, Minister, that the amount given to domestic and family violence in this budget was a little underwhelming?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think we can always spend money and we should always aim to have more support. It's not just about spending money; it's really about making sure that we provide funds for the best focused areas. At the moment we're in the process of doing work to build the workforce, to build the data, to build the evidence to find out exactly what interventions are going to make the most difference so that we can actually spend money effectively.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I think we worked out that a quarter of the requested funding from Domestic Violence NSW was delivered in this budget. Budgets are about choices but, by virtue of them being about choices, they also indicate what a government's priorities look like. I think many in the sector were hoping that, with a Labor Government, we would have the type of funding that reflected just how important and critical the domestic and family violence crisis is and how urgently we need to address it to stop people dying. Do you think that the amount of funding given to this sector is appropriate?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think in future budgets we will see increases. I'm certainly hoping. Certainly we have seen an increase in this year's budget in any case. We've seen an increase from \$226 million to \$417 million—and that's just in formal domestic violence budget. That's not including things like areas where Health has budgets in relation to sexual assault nurses, ensuring that there is an examiner in every hospital. So there are also additional funds that are in other departments. That doesn't make the answer any clearer though, I acknowledge that.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** And we're talking really quite small fry. Even generously, we're talking maybe half a billion across all different departments within the Government in this budget. That is a tiny amount of funding for something that is so significant. Again, the sector was really hoping that this Government would take it a bit more seriously and show that in its priorities. Do we need the Premier to perhaps have Domestic and Family Violence within the Premier's cluster? Is there something else we can do structurally within government to ensure that this issue gets the attention it deserves?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think part of what needs to be done is the standalone Women's Safety Commissioner. That'll work right across the whole of government. I don't think that position is going to be the be-all and end-all, although I'm sure that the person who holds the position is eminently capable. But there are

many organisations doing amazing work in this space that are really working very hard to reduce domestic and family violence in this State. What we're lacking, though, is that coordination and collaboration. We're lacking the data and we're lacking the evidence base. What I am absolutely committed to do is making sure that we build that evidence base, we build that collaboration and we build that data, so we can make sure that funding is put into the areas where we're actually going to make the biggest difference. Because we can continue to put money in the crisis end, and it's not going to solve the problem.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** The domestic violence death review team report—I think it was the most recent one. Recommendation 5.1 recommends the provision of unlimited lifetime counselling to children who have a parent or sibling killed in a domestic violence homicide, and also extending the statutory restrictions on the ability of those children to lodge a claim under the victim support scheme. Is that a recommendation that this Government will take on?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** That would be a recommendation that would need to be considered by the Attorney General. Certainly there is a need for improvement in the area of supporting victims, but in relation to the operation of the victims commission and the victim support scheme, those questions are particularly related to the Attorney General's portfolio.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I will ask the Attorney General instead. Just in the time I have left, I would be very interested, in your capacity as Minister for Seniors, to hear—and perhaps it's a question to Mr Fitzgerald, so feel free to pass it that way. Looking at the latest ADC annual report and the stats there, I'm just interested to hear what sort of trends we are seeing in terms of elder abuse, and, on the back of that, what the Government is aiming to do to reduce the incidence.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think the annual report was pretty clear that the trends of reported elder abuse are certainly increasing and that there's a pretty disturbing number of incidents of elder abuse that are perpetrated by family members. It's certainly an area that we need to do more work in.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Mr Fitzgerald, would you like to—

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Briefly, because you'll have a chance to ask later, but the trends in relation to abuse have been increasing each and every year. The area where we will see very significant growth in elder abuse will be financial abuse. Every indication is that it's not only more awareness, but there are two factors that are giving rise to that. The first is there's simply more older people who are reaching the age of 75 to 85 years, which is the area of greatest risk, and all of the risk factors will remain the same, that is, increased vulnerability, increase of frailty, increased dependency and loss of cognition. They are a precondition for abuse, and they will continue to exist, but just in much greater numbers.

The second is in relation to financial abuse, which is quite significant, is that our children—my children—will have to wait much longer for the wealth transfer to occur, and that wealth transfer is being pushed out by five to 10 years. What we know about adult children is that they are not patient, so inheritance impatience will in fact grow. We know with certainty that in New South Wales and every other State and Territory abuse will grow, particularly in relation to financial abuse. The third thing that needs to be taken into account is we'll also see an increase in neglect. That's a consequence of an increase in poverty amongst older women in New South Wales and Australia, which was unexpected. It's a significant risk linked to the issue of housing stress and the possibility of homelessness as well.

The long and short of it is we are really where child protection was 30 years ago and domestic violence was 20 years ago. The big difference is we won't have that period of time in order to respond. The very good thing is that New South Wales is putting in place the frameworks which may be able to address those issues going forward. That's really the work of the commission, together with DCJ and others, to make sure that we are ready for this increase as it occurs, rather than to, in many senses, repeat the mistakes of child protection and our poor response to domestic violence back several years ago.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Thank you. I must admit I'm running out of questions for you, Minister. I have been given way more time than I thought I would get.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm very efficient in my answering.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** There was a request for a crisis accommodation support service for older women in particular, so having a particular—and I know that some of these exist, but sort of rolling this out to have a crisis accommodation support service for older women out of the Core and Cluster. Is that still being considered, so one of those Core and Cluster facilities would be just for older women?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Core and Cluster itself, no, but I do believe that there is work happening within Minister Jackson's area to deal with additional housing for older women in particular. I know that there's

been recently some housing for over 55s, I think, recently opened, but certainly some additional work in the women's accommodation area in Minister Jackson's space.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I think this is probably the last question I have for now. During the election, I think it was the Coalition announced—again, a program that I think is flawed, and I'm interested to hear what the status of it is—basically, the ability to be able to check on a partner's history of domestic violence. I forget what it was called.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think Right to Ask.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** That's right. Has that been dropped or is it still in process? Do you know where the status of that is?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Certainly the feedback—so that was an election commitment of the previous Government. There were no funds that were provided for that at all. There is no current Right to Ask proposal that the Government is considering. However, there is some research currently being done by Monash University in relation to notification schemes, how they might work and whether they actually do provide increased safety, because, to be honest, when you're being love-bombed, I don't think you're going to go and check whether someone's on the register. But that's just a gut feel. There could be evidence that shows something different, and we'll be looking at that Monash University research to find out.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Yes, but also the false assurance that you might get from a negative if it comes back saying, "Actually, this person is fine." Obviously, if you've already got those feelings of misgivings, it would be better that you had contacted a domestic violence resource or something else than just relying on that. Instinctively I agree with you; instinctively it doesn't seem to make sense. But as long as it's evidence-based, and it sounds like evidence is being sought now, that's good. In my last three minutes I will cede the time.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could just return to volunteers very quickly in the remaining minutes—just wondering, have you met with any of the volunteer groups?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** All of the meetings that I have had with external groups are actually in my ministerial disclosure.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The diary disclosure shows that you have not had any meetings with volunteer groups, hence my question today.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** In which case, I have had not had any formal meetings with any volunteer groups.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The Minister with responsibility for volunteers—no meetings with volunteer groups. Minister, how many have requested a meeting with you?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'd have to take that on notice. As I said, there's 600-odd meeting requests that I have had and my office is in the process of going through them. While not having had formal meetings, I have been at events where volunteers well and truly have been there. In fact, some have been in this very Parliament when Parliament has been sitting.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you. We've probably been at the same events. Minister, are you aware that in the Treasurer's Budget Speech he only referenced women on one single occasion? The former Treasurer under the Coalition government—there were 27 references to women in the Coalition Government's Budget Speech. Are women a priority?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Women are absolutely a priority in this Government. In fact, I think you just need to look at the Cabinet table to look at how seriously Labor takes the role of women in democracy and in society more generally.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It's not about us; it's about people out in the community.

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** Having 50 per cent of women in Cabinet means that we are well and truly at the decision-making table and well and truly part of the decision-making that goes into New South Wales policy. That is important not just because there are women at the table but also because it sends a message to women across New South Wales that women are at the table and that women can be at the table and that women should be in every room, in every boardroom and in every workplace.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And paid appropriately.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, would you have liked to see a greater focus on your ministerial responsibilities in the budget?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I'm sure that every Minister would have liked to have seen a greater focus on their ministerial responsibilities in the budget. As I've mentioned before, it was a tough budget. I will continue to press for the areas that I'm responsible for at any opportunity that I possibly have, including in upcoming budgets.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, just one final question. In terms of the priority you give in terms of engaging with the community and with stakeholders relevant to your portfolio, where do they sit? I note that you haven't met with volunteers and there has been one meeting with seniors.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINÉ:** Are there any more questions or just the same one?

**Ms JODIE HARRISON:** I think if you look at my diary disclosures in the past six months, in comparison to previous Ministers' diary disclosures and how many meetings were held then, that actually goes to show exactly how many meetings I'm having with relevant stakeholders in comparison to previous Ministers.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Good luck with that one.

**The CHAIR:** We will break now and come back after lunch at two o'clock.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** We will start the examination again.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** My question is to Ms Smyth. Hello, it is so great to see you again. I'd like you to update the Committee on the amazing work that you're doing and that the Minister has also expressed her support for in menopause. Can you update because I'm so excited to hear. I'm sure the Government is too.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINÉ:** I am.

**TANYA SMYTH:** I would love to talk about that.

**The CHAIR:** I'm excited too. Tell me about it.

**TANYA SMYTH:** As you'd be aware, Ms Taylor, there are three parts to the campaign: the employer campaign, and the community campaign, and the GP campaign. We held, on 18 May, a working with menopause webinar for managers. That was about employees across the public service and supporting them better. We had 1,188 people attend that webinar. We had panellists. We had a representative from Jean Hailes, which is a leading women's health organisation. We had two representatives from Communities and Justice and one from Service NSW. In addition to that, we released a series of fact sheets for employees and for managers that relate to the content of the working with menopause webinar. They are both on the menopause toolkit. Since it was launched, the employee fact sheet has been downloaded almost 500 times and the managers almost 300. On this World Menopause Day, which has just passed, a video resource was launched and that is about the role of managers in supporting women in the workplace. So far we've had just over 2,000 views, which is exciting.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's big for Women NSW website hits.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes. It's exciting. The next step in that is on, 8 November, Grace Papers is helping us with an in-person workshop, and that is for people managers across the public service, non-executive people and culture teams. They are coming together to talk about the policies that are in place in the public service and how they can be used to support women who experience symptoms of perimenopause and menopause. With regards to general practitioners, last World Menopause Day in 2022 we released the menopause checklist. Actually that was at the Meno Mix event, which was in Women's Week. That checklist can be used by women. They'll fill out the checklist and take to it their GP and then have a conversation around the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause.

This World Menopause Day—so 18 October just gone—the Australasian Menopause Society helped us deliver a case studies-based webinar for GPs. They looked at two complex perimenopause and menopause case studies and worked through those in the webinar. There were 300 participants registered for the webinar, but it's still available on their e-learning system and it's an accredited course for GPs to do. Following this, we will follow up with some additional resources that will be on the toolkit and we'll feature some of the information that came through that webinar.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** The toolkit's gone interstate, I understand?

**TANYA SMYTH:** The toolkit did go interstate. Prior to World Menopause Day there was an Office for Women meeting, where all of the offices for women across Australia meet. We did, following that meeting, share all of our resources and some have been on-sharing it, which is exciting

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That must have made you all very proud that you did that and everyone else took it up.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes, everybody is.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Tell me about the centres like the one at Prince of Wales that is going to start and where we are up to there. When are we looking at having that up and running?

**TANYA SMYTH:** The menopause hubs are a NSW Health initiative, so I don't have a lot of information about that. I have been attending their project control group, so they are sort of kicking on with the planning of those.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Ms Smyth, because I ran out of time in Health because it was a bit full on, would you mind taking that on notice and providing the Committee with the update just for the rollout of the menopause hubs, how it's happening, where we're going to open them and things like that? That would be really great. I would be very keen to see that.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Excellent. No problems.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Well done. It's amazing. You should be really proud of leading that work and the first State to do so. Well done to you and your team.

**KATE MEAGHER:** Ms Taylor, Ms Smyth is being modest. I just want to fill one more stat.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Come on, yes! You don't often get compliments.

**KATE MEAGHER:** The menopause toolkit, since it launched on 18 October 2022, has had 23,500 hits.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's amazing.

**KATE MEAGHER:** It's pretty cool.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That is amazing. We will look forward to hearing more announcements and more funding, and you're on the map, so well done. Thank you very much, Ms Meagher, for adding that. I think it's really important to recognise the incredible hard work by the department that has gone into that.

**KATE MEAGHER:** They do a great job.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** It was a department of, what, three and you're the leader, so well done.

**KATE MEAGHER:** Yes, she is.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's menopause wrapping up. I want to go to Mr Fitzgerald. Mr Fitzgerald, as I said before when I was questioning the Minister, I'm really genuinely concerned about the rise in elder abuse. I understand what you do in as much terms as I've only held the shadow for a couple of months. What can we do? And I mean that as in a very bipartisan approach. As a society and as a community, where should we be going? What should we do? As members of Parliament, what should we be advocating for and assisting the Minister to advocate for? Because I just feel this is a really big problem that's about to explode.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** I'll try to keep it quarantined if I can. We're at the emerging stages of a new public policy area, which is broadly defined as safeguarding of vulnerable adults. The two biggest groups in those are people with disability and older people. To put that into context, on the same day that we were established on 1 July 2019, South Australia established an adult safeguarding unit attached to their ministry of health and the ACT established an adult safeguarding unit attached to their Human Rights Commission. The public advocate in both Queensland and Victoria have recommended the establishment of a body similar to ourselves, and the disability royal commission in its findings and recommendations recommended that our model here in New South Wales be extended across Australia. In many senses, it's already recognised that the model that was established during the previous Government's term, the Ageing and Disability Commission, is the single most important thing one can do in terms of a systemic or structural response. That is good news.

The second thing is we have to actually make sure that the Ageing and Disability Commission sits within an architecture that actually will support the increasing level of abuse that I've referred to, and there's very little you can do about preventing that in the immediate terms. There are some things, and I will come to that. What's

the architecture? The architecture has to be about dispute resolution, for example family mediation where there has been abuse. Currently the Government provides some funding to Relationships Australia on a one-off basis. That has to become a permanent feature of the architecture. We have to ensure that the advocacy services in the elder space are adequate to be able to provide supports that will be necessary to advocate, not only the cause but also individuals. We will need to make serious adjustments to our guardianship and trustee arrangements which are not fit for purpose, and there has been a number of recommendations in relation to the disability royal commission.

And then, of course, there is ensuring that our police forces are adequate and, in the same way that you were discussing in relation to domestic violence, are actually able to investigate and then prosecute appropriate matters where there is genuine criminal conduct. And there's a number of other elements. The Minister's reference to the national framework for the prevention of elder abuse and your questions in relation to the State's response will be critical because it's going to be a 10-year plan. Like we've learnt from child protection and like we're learning from domestic violence, it's the component parts in that framework that will mean we'll make a difference or we won't. If we have just ad hoc services, randomly funded for the short term, it will fail—we know that.

The reverse of that is to actually say, "These are the component parts. This is the sort of funding that will be necessary over time", and then to make sure that works as an integrated set of services. I think the learnings from child protection and the learnings from domestic violence should be taken into this space, whilst recognising it's a very different space to those sorts of areas. In very simple terms, it's a matter of ensuring that we have the adequate resources to build on what we have already started. It won't come as a surprise to you—as I have said to the previous Government—that the commission needs to be resourced to be able to meet the ongoing demand, and to do so in a planned way, not on a year-by-year basis, which, frankly, for a permanent agency, is an impossible way to operate.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** You talked about what was happening in South Australia and, I think, the ACT and you said it was a department of safe—

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** No.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** What did you say?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** They are called adult safeguarding units. In Adelaide it's attached to the ministry of health and in the ACT it's attached to their Human Rights Commission.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** We don't have anything like that in New South Wales.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** We're it.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I know. You're it. I suppose what I'm trying to say is this: Is the function of what you do as the independent body that you are—that would, I think, be a very different model to what you're describing in South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** No. They are similar models but have different functions and different foci. I'll just give you an example of that. In South Australia, when it was established, it came out of health and it has very much a social wellbeing or social welfare focus. It's very much about trying to get resolution. It is not about trying to hold people to account. In New South Wales, the Parliament here, often responding to the views of advocates for people with disabilities, wanted an agency that not only would in fact ensure people were safe but that in fact people would be held to account. As you would be aware, we have an investigations unit. We have very substantial powers to issue search warrants, to force people to attend meetings, to refer matters to the police and so on.

In New South Wales we do all the bits of safety that you would expect but we also go further than that, with a view to holding people to account where that's appropriate. Each of the jurisdictions, I would imagine, whilst they have the core functions the same, will have slightly different foci depending on the circumstances. In New South Wales there's been a statutory review of our legislation. There's been no recommendations to increase the scope of our work, and I think that's appropriate. So we are sticking to ageing and disability. In years to come, that might be expanded to other vulnerable groups. But I think for the moment, let's walk before we run.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** If you're a registered nurse or a teacher and you have a suspicion of alleged—I'll be careful what I say; we've got the lawyer—child abuse, you have an obligation to report that. Is that the same with elder abuse? I can't remember that.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** No. Just bear in mind that New South Wales is one of the only States that has a particular provision in the Crimes Act, which nobody knows about, that in certain circumstances every citizen in New South Wales has an obligation to report matters to the police. Almost nobody knows that. I just



want to preface that. Putting that aside, elder abuse and the abuse of people with disabilities are not mandatory reporting regimes per se.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Does that need to change?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** My advice to the Government is "not yet". If I can just clarify, if you're in an aged-care facility or you're in a disability support service funded by the NDIA and the abuse occurs by a member of staff or volunteer, that matter will go to the regulators—the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission or the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. What's left in New South Wales is abuse, largely, that occurs by family members. The vast majority of abuse for older people—nearly three-quarters—is by sons and daughters and siblings.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's terrible.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** And 10 to 12 per cent are by intimate partners. In disability, for people with disabilities under the age of 30, most abuse is by parents and siblings—brothers and sisters. In this space, it's a non-mandatory jurisdiction. As a consequence of that, we spend an enormous amount of effort trying to educate frontline workers who see the abuse occurring. They will be home care workers, community nurses, disability support workers, local council officers and so on, particularly health workers on discharge from hospital. Discharge from hospital is a critically important point at which you identify abuse. In New South Wales we're spending a lot of effort to try to educate that frontline workforce who see the abuse and previously had nowhere to go with it. What do we do with it? In New South Wales now we have the commission, and the commission is then able to either deal with the matter itself or to refer it to the appropriate body.

The long answer is that my view at the moment is—and I know this is not a view shared by all members of Parliament—that for mandatory reporting we should wait and see and develop more evidence. Most importantly, if you do introduce mandatory reporting, you have to understand the unintended consequences. The lessons out of child protection in relation to the way in which you have mandatory reporting are very dear to my heart. In this space, we should pause, develop further evidence and really get an understanding of the perverse or unintended consequences that could arise. That is our advice. However, in the ACT—sorry, I think that's true in all jurisdictions. In the ACT they've introduced, however, laws specifically in relation to elder abuse. We don't have such laws in New South Wales.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** The ACT does like to be very different a lot of the time. I live very close to the ACT, so I'm allowed to say that. I'm very interested in this home visit program. How many people work within the commission—is that how we refer to it?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** How many are employed to go and do those home visits to assess?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** All of our community support and investigations team, which is about 12 individuals, would in fact conduct some home visits. The purpose of the visit is really to ascertain the will and preference or the consent of the individual, where that's necessary. We use the police to do safety visits—home safety checks—and we use other agencies. This is in relation to trying to ascertain exactly what I just indicated.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So 12 FTE?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I don't know for this particular thing but I know, say, for mental health we have trial programs and we have PACER and we have mental health clinicians based in police services. Are police really the most appropriate people to check that? If I have a policeman knock on my door, I just go to pieces, not that I possibly do anything wrong, in case anyone is listening and wants to check. We all get a bit obsessed with each other.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Sounding guilty there, Bronnie.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I wouldn't like that. I'd actually think that something bad has happened if there's a policeman at my door or I've done something wrong. I don't even like being pulled over. Is that appropriate if you're old and you're vulnerable?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** The truth of the matter is that it's about the only tool we have.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I get that, but is it the right one?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** I'll just take it in two parts. The police have had an enhanced experience of dealing with domestic violence and child protection over a very long period of time, and the record is patchy, as

you well know. Nevertheless, they have become more skilled at being able to visit people and to assess the wellbeing. So I don't think they are an inappropriate mechanism. However, if you said to me, "Is it ideal?" perhaps not. There would be other people, but we don't have those in place. There are NGOs that we'd rely on, service providers that are already providing services to an older person. We use those but, at the end of the day, there's no other formal mechanism for doing safety and wellbeing checks of older people or people with disability that we have.

It won't come as a surprise to you that I thought the initiative of the former Government in relation to the aged-care crime prevention officers, which I indicated earlier, was an extraordinarily good initiative, announced by Premier Berejiklian. That was a commitment of 56 dedicated police officers, with money attached. Only 12 were ever appointed, and they are being removed as we talk. That was a very good initiative, lauded by every other State and Territory, which was funded but has ceased to exist, effectively. The funds that were dedicated to that simply have been repurposed to other areas. They have certainly not been repurposed to elder abuse within the Police Force.

Our position on that is clear and stated over and over again. I think that, in the police area, we do rely on them. I don't think they are inappropriate. But it's critically important, such as we talk about domestic violence, that they are skilled. Some of the evidence is that we've got a long way to go to upskill the police in relation to dealing with vulnerable people, especially if they have a psychosocial disability, they have dementia, or they have other profound disabilities. And there's been recent publicity around some of those matters where the response has been inappropriate.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I guess what concerns me is that we know we have a shortage of police officers in New South Wales. That's what's there, and I think then if you put people under pressure—and time. Things take time, don't they? Like on a home visit, and they take time with people that are elderly. You need the gift of time. I don't mean to put you on the spot or anything, so please don't answer if you feel uncomfortable. Would it be a better solution if we looked at—because we have got this data. We know where we're heading. We've seen really difficult things in DV over successive different governments. No-one's gotten on top of it yet. Would it be better to look at doing something differently and not have that police intervention?

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Point of order—

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** In the financial year '22 and financial—

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** I would suggest that that seeks an opinion on a matter of Government policy, in that it's inviting the public servant to speculate upon a more desirable way of doing things, as opposed to the existing policy.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** To the point of order: I'm actually just simply asking an expert about what their advice is in terms of what could be a good model of care. I'm not asking them to say one or the other. I'm actually just really interested.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** It is certainly true that the honourable member is doing that, but that is exactly the problem, I would suggest.

**The CHAIR:** To the point of order: The member is entitled to ask that question. The bureaucrat, Mr Fitzgerald, for example, could be entitled not to answer it on the basis that it may relate to Government policy, but it's in his judgement to do that.

**The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** So it's not a point of order.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Perhaps to avoid that problem, I will tell you what we asked for, which is on the public record.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe that's better.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I'm not tweeting it. I have got other stuff to tweet.

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** And that is in financial year '22 and financial year '23 we sought an increment in the budget to cover a regional strategy, which would have comprised a panel of appropriate individuals who could conduct those visits and they would be paid on a sessional basis. We were unsuccessful in relation to both those budget bids. We were discussing with the two Ministers that we report to about re-articulating or re-prosecuting that case. Our view was that if we had a panel of regional personnel—not employees, but who were paid on a sessional basis—they would be the most appropriate to conduct the home

visits. They're home visits to ascertain the will and preference or consent of the individual. The issue we were talking about in relation to the police, they are welfare checks and they are of a different character.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** They're different, yes. Would it be fair to say that type of model would be similar to that of the Official Visitors Program in a way, that is run in the mental health space?

**ROBERT FITZGERALD:** Just to be clear, the ADC administers the two official community visitor schemes in relation to two areas. The first scheme is we oversight and administer the Official Community Visitors that visit the 18 assisted boarding houses and the 2,800 disability support accommodation services in New South Wales. On behalf of the Children's Guardian we administer the out-of-home care community visitor program, which visits over 300 out-of-home care services, children's residential services. We actually oversight those two programs. The answer to your question is no, it would not be the same. The home visit in this case is not a home visit for any other purpose other than to assist in the investigations that we are carrying out. In relation to the community visitor programs, all those areas—the assisted boarding house, disability, and out-of-home care—are to ascertain issues of concern to the residents and to try to seek local resolution with the service provider, and then to escalate those matters to the appropriate regulatory agencies, if that's necessary. So they are quite different in character.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Thank you, Mr Fitzgerald. I am sure I am going to be asking you lots more questions in the future. I'm really very interested in this. I have a few more questions for Ms Smyth, if that's okay. Ms Smyth, I'm just wanting to know in terms of the structure of Women NSW that it still remains under the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

**TANYA SMYTH:** Yes. The Department of Premier and Cabinet split. We are now in the Premier's Department.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Then where does Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault sit?

**TANYA SMYTH:** Communities and Justice, with Anne and Dr Hannah.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** So that is still separated in terms of two different departments. Mr Tidball, I don't know if this is appropriate, so watch me again. The Minister has the department of DCJ, the department of Premier, and where is Seniors? Is it DCJ too?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** That's with us.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Volunteers is DCJ?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** And carers is DCJ?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Yes.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** Right. Just the two.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In a similar line here, in the absence of a budget outcome statement, it's difficult to get detail on expenditure for each of the Minister's responsibilities that my colleague has just listed there as to where their home department is. I understand if this has to be taken on notice, but would it be possible to get the 2023-24 budgeted expenditure for Minister Harrison's responsibilities broken up for her positions, in terms of the Minister for Women, the Minister for Seniors, and the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Yes.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** We can answer that now.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** I think we can pull it together. I think the Minister this morning actually outlined—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** She outlined, correct.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** —the domestic and family violence. I think she outlined the 200k.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Let me just think what I'm missing—and the \$5.1 million, from memory, for carers—and 2.99 million for the Seniors Card program. If I've left anything off we can certainly provide that on notice.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you very much—and if we could include the volunteers, the carers and domestic violence. Just touching back on the Core and Cluster, if I could—as established earlier, an initiative of the previous Coalition Government—I understand we're in the delivery of tranche one and two. Would it be possible to get a number of how many additional women and children escaping domestic and family violence will be supported by the additional places, or what the first two tranches may represent?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** In aggregate, the figure as I recall it is 2,900.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Correct.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Sorry, Michael, I didn't hear that.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Sorry.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** No, that's me.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** It is 2,900. And the package is on—we're on track for that to be delivered.

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** And tranche three has opened and the request for tender opened on 23 October this year and closes on 31 January 2024. We've extended the time frame for tranche three, based on feedback from tranche one and two, which really didn't give Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations enough time to actually do the kind of codesign. We're all hopeful that we will get some fabulous proposals through tranche three specific to ACCOs and Aboriginal women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Do we anticipate that proposals that were unsuccessful in tranche one and two may consider tranche three?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** They may. We certainly, through each of the tranches, provided feedback to unsuccessful proponents.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the placement of the new refuges and who we're trying to reach on this, are we confident that we are meeting the greatest need?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Absolutely. We have certainly looked at the BOCSAR statistics. We've looked at demand data. We've looked at where services are currently. We have obviously got the 87 women's refuges already across the State. We've looked at where there are services and where there aren't services. Certainly for tranche one and two, I'm pretty confident that's on the website, the locations for those sites.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I understand that priority is given to applications from Aboriginal community controlled organisations and applications located in areas that address high need, as you stated. Would it be possible to indicate how much interest the Government has received, or is likely to receive, from Aboriginal community controlled organisations?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** We're currently under procurement at the moment, but I could generally say we're happy with the number of applications we've got from ACCOs.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In a similar space, I can see that there is a Safe Places Inclusion Round, with funding available from the Commonwealth. Is that program going to be administered by the Commonwealth?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Correct.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Would it be right to say that Safe Places, in effect, complements Core and Cluster here in New South Wales?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** Correct. Safe Places is really about the capital component. Core and Cluster is both about the capital but also the support services that you need in these places. We've been working closely with the Commonwealth Government to align so we get the best outcome across both funding buckets.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could move to housing, is there assistance available from this budget to help victim-survivors buy a home, noting the importance of ownership for security?

**ANNE CAMPBELL:** That probably fits a bit more in Minister Jackson's portfolio. I know the Aboriginal Housing Office has a particular program, in terms of purchase of homes. I'm happy to take that on notice. The Commissioner can talk to the shared equity scheme.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** That would be helpful.

**HANNAH TONKIN:** Minister Harrison talked about this a bit this morning. Basically, there's a new shared equity scheme that will be extended to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. The Government's investing \$13 million to expand that in a trial to include domestic and family violence victim-survivors.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Which department is that in?

**HANNAH TONKIN:** DCJ.<sup>5</sup>

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could move to the Carla Zampatti fund. In the last budget, a venture capital fund to be named after the late Carla Zampatti was announced, \$10 million to be available for early-stage women-led startups. When announced, it was stated the fund will target opening applications by the end of 2023. Just checking if we might have an update on this.

**TANYA SMYTH:** That doesn't sit with Women NSW, but we can take that on notice and get a response for that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** All right. I think this might be one for Ms Smyth. The Gender Equality Budget Statement—and this might have been better to the Minister. It's just been drawn to my attention that the Women's Opportunity Statement is now referred to as the Gender Equality Budget Statement. I'm wondering, does this represent any change to the statement or the outcomes or the work or commitment behind it?

**TANYA SMYTH:** No, not to my understanding. That's a Treasury-led piece of work, but not to my understanding.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Smyth, this might be another one in your area. Just questioning about departments working together, in terms of advancing outcomes for women. This is relevant to sport. I'm wondering how active is the engagement between Women NSW and the Office of Sport relating to development strategies to boost women's participation in sport under the program Her Sport Her Way?

**TANYA SMYTH:** The Women's Strategy is underpinned by an interdepartmental committee, and the Office of Sport are members of that committee. But, less formally, we regularly work with the Office of Sport around the Her Sport Her Way strategy.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the rollout of that, in terms of community sport and wanting to make opportunity available for women, that would be administered by?

**TANYA SMYTH:** The Office of Sport.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of government workings relating to Women, Women in Business, in terms of TAFE, targeted to get women to become entrepreneurs—just checking where this might sit and the level of engagement with Women NSW?

**TANYA SMYTH:** We have an informal group. All agency leads for funded a program that relates to Women in Business, we bring them together informally. It's around every two to three months. Basically that's a forum to share the work that we're doing, how we're progressing those initiatives, and make sure that we're making connections, not duplicating work, that we're sharing contacts and networks. So, yes, that's the mechanism that we've been using for that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It was spoken about earlier, I think, by my colleague Ms Boyd, just on the coercive control. I preface this by saying I'm aware that the legislation's due to take effect in July 2024. I'm wondering about the rollout of the coercive control laws. In term of community education, who would be leading that?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I can assist the Committee with that. I am the chair of the implementation taskforce. I am guided by a membership of that group, but that taskforce, pursuant to section 54I (5) of the Crimes Act, requires taskforces to establish reference groups. Those reference groups are, in turn, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, domestic family violence service delivery and lived experience. In turn, there is quite a detailed program of work that has been, and is being, undertaken by those

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<sup>5</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee received 30 November 2023, Ms Hannah Tonkin, Women's Safety Commissioner, Strategy Policy and Commissioning, clarified the evidence given.

reference groups. The statute requires that the taskforce consults with those reference groups, which it is doing, particularly in relation to the public education campaign and a number of other things—which I can detail.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the budget for funding the public education campaign?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** There is an allocation. Off the top of my head, I can't recall what is. We're certainly happy to provide those figures.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** That's okay. You can take it on notice.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** I have another one for Ms Smyth. Has there been any cuts to the department of women since the big increase in positions?

**TANYA SMYTH:** No, there hasn't.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR:** That's really great. Thank you for letting us have such a roll. I feel, Ms Tonkin, that you've missed out and we should try and think of some questions for you because I know the hours of prep you would have done. Everyone else has had a bit of a turn. I think Ms Meagher's gotten off quite well too. Thank you so much for all your time and for all the preparation that you do. We think your work is just fantastic. Keep up the great work. I'll be watching very closely.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** So are we, but in a good way.

**The CHAIR:** There being no more questions, we'll call it a day.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**