



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, November 6, 2019  
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-1-8

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 30th Legislature  
First Session**

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP), Chair  
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair  
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP), Acting Chair\*

Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)  
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UCP)\*\*  
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)  
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UCP)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UCP)  
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)\*\*\*  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)\*\*\*\*  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

\* substitution for Laila Goodridge

\*\*substitution for Brad Rutherford

\*\*\* substitution for Jonathon Carson

\*\*\*\*substitution for Lori Sigurdson

**Also in Attendance**

Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)

**Support Staff**

Shannon Dean	Clerk
Stephanie LeBlanc	Clerk Assistant and Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk of Committees and Research Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Michael Kulicki	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

## **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Hon. Rajan Sawhney, Minister

Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister



9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 6, 2019

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

**Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Acting Chair:** All right. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, if you could please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am Mike Ellis, Calgary-West, and I am substituting for Ms Goodridge as chair of this committee. We will continue, starting to my right.

**Mr. Shepherd:** David Shepherd, Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Nathan Neudorf, MLA, Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Glasgo:** Michaela Glasgo, MLA, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Jeremy Nixon, Calgary-Klein.

**Mr. Yao:** Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Walker:** Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Long:** Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

**Ms Lovely:** Jackie Lovely, Camrose, and I'm sitting in for MLA Rutherford.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Good morning. Rajan Sawhney, MLA for Calgary-North East, Minister of Community and Social Services. To my left I have Mr. Chi Loo, to my right I have Deputy Minister Shannon Marchand, and to his right we have Olin Lovely.

**Ms Renaud:** Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

**Ms Pancholi:** Good morning. Rakhi Pancholi, Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Mr. Sabir:** Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-McCall.

**The Acting Chair:** Wonderful. Thank you very much.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the official record: Mr. Shepherd for Ms Sigurdson, Ms Lovely for Mr. Rutherford, Mr. Sabir for Mr. Carson.

All right. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

The process review and the speaking order time. Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the comments, we begin a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

The rotation of speaking time will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times being set to five minutes, that, when combined with

the minister's time, makes it a 10-minute block. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to either the chair or the committee clerk.

A total of six hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The committee will continue its consideration of the ministry's estimates at 3:30 this afternoon. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break? Seeing none, we will have that break.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to six hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the three-hour clock will continue to run. However, the timer for the speaking block will be paused.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on November 19, 2019. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

All right. I now invite the Minister of Community and Social Services to begin with her opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you kindly. I'm pleased to provide an overview of the Community and Social Services, CSS, 2019 budget. Budget 2019 is a balanced plan to create jobs and grow the economy. It protects front-line services for the most vulnerable, it charts a path back to balance through targeted reductions and thoughtful reallocations, and it delivers on the government's key promises.

My ministry's 2019 budget of \$3.91 billion will make life better and protect services for Albertans affected by homelessness and unemployment, children and adults with disabilities, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Ninety per cent of our budget goes directly to vulnerable Albertans in the form of benefits or to civil society organizations who support them. Overall, CSS's budget has increased by \$276 million, or 7.6 per cent. This is the largest funding increase across government in an increasingly difficult fiscal situation, which required difficult decisions in all departments.

Funding for persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, and family support for children with disabilities, FSCD, are both increased, 5.5 per cent and 8.7 per cent respectively. This will support more Albertans to receive services in 2019. We've also maintained funding for Alberta's 12 fetal alcohol spectrum disorder networks and the Alberta brain injury initiative.

Funding for the residential access modification program, or RAMP, is increased by \$800,000, or 30 per cent, to \$3.5 million in 2019. I was pleased to announce this just yesterday. This meets our commitment of additional funding to help Albertans with mobility challenges make life-changing modifications to their homes. It will give additional people the ability to move more freely in their homes and the freedom to participate more readily in communities. It also helps people make their homes safe and inclusive regardless of whether they rent or own.

We are committed to listening and engaging with the disability community on issues that matter to them through the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the disability advocate's office, the Disability Advisory Forum, and the Service Provider Partnership Committee. The Disability Advisory Forum, specifically, is helping us gain insight and perspective on topics affecting people with disabilities. This input will directly inform how disability programs can more effectively support Albertans with disabilities to live full lives with dignity and equal opportunities.

The first forum meeting, on October 4, focused on the critical issue of PDD program eligibility, a priority theme from feedback gathered during the PDD review. At this forum we heard the voices and perspectives of the broad disability community, including self-advocates, families, service providers, academics, and disability workers. I look forward to continuing my open and transparent dialogue with the disability community.

Funding for the assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, program and income support is increased by a combined \$203 million to support more Albertans receiving benefits this year. Social assistance rates, which increased on January 1 of this year, are maintained in Budget 2019. Many clients receive supplemental AISH and income support benefits based on their specific needs in addition to their core amounts. These may include health, child, and transportation benefits.

Speaking of transportation, we are also providing \$9.5 million to Calgary and Edmonton for their low-income transit programs. These programs help thousands of families each month, including AISH and income support recipients, access community services and employment opportunities. Many civil society organizations and vulnerable Albertans themselves have told me personally about the difference these programs make in families' lives, including increased participation and inclusion in their communities.

Through Budget 2019 Community and Social Services continues to support civil society organizations which increase the stability, participation, and inclusion of vulnerable Albertans in their communities. We are maintaining funding of \$100 million for family and community support services, or FCSS, which, as you know, are locally designed and delivered preventative social programs. My colleagues and I understand the importance of the FCSS program to communities. Our support for these locally delivered programs shows the value we put on this long-standing partnership with municipalities and Métis settlements.

**9:10**

In 2019 we continue to provide \$60 million in grants to organizations preventing domestic and sexual violence, supporting survivors, and promoting healthy relationships. Our government is committed to preventing domestic and sexual violence and to supporting survivors. We are keeping our promise, maintaining \$51 million for women's shelters. With \$10.3 million for sexual assault services, we are helping maintain services for survivors of sexual abuse, including crisis intervention, counselling, police, and court support. This session our government was pleased to pass an Alberta version of Clare's law. Budget 2019 includes \$100,000 for

implementation planning. We believe and I believe that this legislation will save lives because people at risk of domestic violence will be able to make an informed choice about a potentially harmful relationship.

In Budget 2019 we committed to protecting supports for Alberta's most vulnerable people. I am pleased that we are maintaining funding for homeless shelters and outreach support services. A total of \$142 million will go towards homeless supports and services in 2019. We are keeping our promise to support the redevelopment of the Herb Jamieson Centre at Hope Mission; \$8 million in capital funding in Seniors and Housing's budget from 2019 to 2022 will ensure this. All of these investments together demonstrate our commitment to protecting services for Alberta's most vulnerable.

We are also committed to living within our means and ensuring that programs are sustainable over the long term. As you know, rising debt threatens vital social services that Albertans rely on. Alberta's debt requires more than \$5 million per day in debt-servicing costs. That's almost \$2 million on debt interest every year, or nearly half the ministry's total 2019 budget. The high rates of spending growth in many of our programs in recent years need and require a sustainability strategy. From 2015-16 to 2018-19 expenses for PDD and FSCD increased by 18.1 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. Expenses for AISH financial assistance grants increased by more than 20 per cent. The growth rate of the AISH caseload is more than three times higher than the growth rate of Alberta's general population over the same period.

For these reasons, we need to suspend indexing of AISH benefits as Alberta gets back to balance. The AISH benefit, I'd like to emphasize, remains the highest amongst the provinces. These rates have not changed under our budget. The only change is that they will not automatically increase annually. Pausing indexing of AISH and income support benefit rates will save more than \$300 million by 2023.

In the coming months the ministry will be conducting program reviews to look at options for making services more efficient and achieving better outcomes by asking important questions. How can we deliver programs and services more efficiently and more effectively based on Albertans' needs? How can we reduce red tape, eliminate unnecessary costs, and reallocate funds to areas that make the biggest differences in the lives of the most vulnerable and to those who are in the greatest of need? How can we improve programs so that they support . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Sorry to cut you off.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for 20-minute intervals so members are aware of the time. As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined.

We'll begin with the Official Opposition. Member Renaud? Okay. Thank you very much. Do you wish to go back and forth with the minister?

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, please.

**The Acting Chair:** Yes. Thank you very much. All right. The floor is yours.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. Okay. Before I get into the specifics, I just had a very general question, first of all. In the ministry business plan, under Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives, the first bullet point is about the Premier's charities council. Just a quick question

about where that \$100,000 for funding is coming from: can you tell me which line in the budget that will be coming from?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Sure. Well, first of all, when we're talking about the Premier's charities council, I just want to say that I'm very pleased that we could actually deliver on that commitment. It was a significant platform commitment, and related to that commitment are also other aspects of my ministry actually engaging with civil society organizations. As you know, I mentioned in my opening remarks that we do have significant partnerships with civil society organizations because they help deliver the very vital programs and services that vulnerable Albertans . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Sorry to cut you off. I don't have a lot of time. I have a lot of questions. Can you just tell me which line you think that will be coming from?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Sure. That comes from ministry support services, and that would be element 1.3.

**Ms Renaud:** Line 1.3. Okay. Excellent.

When you look at the makeup of this particular council, will you be appointing self-advocates or other folks that will be impacted by this work?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Good question. Right now we're still in the process of putting the council together.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Fair enough.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** We just had preliminary discussions. I know that we are looking for diversity. Of course, whenever you have a body like this, that's a decision-making body, you want to have diversity because that's how you make the best decisions.

**Ms Renaud:** Absolutely. I think what's really important, like you said – you know, you spent some time speaking with self-advocates. They're always the most important voices, I think, when we're making decisions about things that impact their lives, so it would be great to see a self-advocate on that group.

I guess I have one other question about that before we move on. Will this council fall under the same legislation as the other agencies, boards, and commissions, that being the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** At this point, yes, that is the expectation, that it will fall under the same legislation.

**Ms Renaud:** Awesome. Thank you.

Okay. I'm going to move to disability services, which in the ministry budget sort of takes up a lot of space. As you noted, there are a lot of things going on in that section. I will begin. I'd like to focus on the 2019-20 government estimates for Community and Social Services, specifically page 52, section 4, disability services. Program planning and delivery, line 4.1, saw a slight decrease comparing budget to budget, approximately \$1.7 million, or 2 and a half per cent, for 2019-20. First of all, can you tell me approximately how many FTEs are included in this line? Will there be some reductions in that number?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm actually looking at the numbers, and I do see an increase between the estimate and the actual.

**Ms Renaud:** For disability program planning and delivery?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. There is an increase between the estimate and the actual.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm looking at the budget. You want to look at the actuals. Okay. There's a slight increase. Will there be any FTE reductions in this period?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** At this point in time we are not looking at any reductions in this particular line. What I can tell you is that any changes in staffing will only take place due to attrition.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That's good.

Within this section can you tell me if there is any portion of this budget that is allocated to emergency planning, let's say? I think that in the last few years we've had a number of significant natural disasters in Alberta, and I certainly heard from community service providers and individuals in those communities that have been impacted. I'm just wondering. You know, given that we've learned a great deal from those experiences, what's going on in this particular planning area in terms of emergency preparedness?

9:20

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, a portion of that funding, in terms of emergency preparedness – and of course here you're absolutely right when you say that we've learned a lot. I mean, the situation with the wildfires that we experienced this summer certainly highlighted areas where we need to make sure that we're really proactive in taking care of the most vulnerable who are impacted in those areas. There is some funding in element 4.2 in terms of that. I have to say that we worked very, very closely with Municipal Affairs in terms of co-ordinating supports. The majority of the emergency funding does come out of Municipal Affairs.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. You said 4.2. That would be PDD. Are you saying that most of the emergency preparedness for disability services will come out of PDD?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** There is a small portion that would be allocated to supports around emergency support services.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So it wouldn't be shared in any other area? The funding primarily would come from PDD?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Just a very small portion of it. The majority of the funding does come from Municipal Affairs.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Fair enough. Can you tell me if in this particular line there are any plans to either purchase or renew any licensing fees or buy product or training around assessment, any new assessment tool that's being planned for this particular area, disability services?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** At this point there's nothing in the budget that is going to account for any new assessment tools, but, I mean, that raises a good point. That's something that actually was discussed extensively at the Disability Advisory Forum. As you're aware, the first topic of discussion was around eligibility. There were some very spirited conversations about, like: how should we determine what eligibility looks like? Should we be looking at new assessment tools? Again, circling back to your original question, there is no funding in this budget for that as of now.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Moving on, I'm going to go to line 4.2, which is PDD, or persons with developmental disabilities, supports to Albertans, which, as you mentioned, saw a significant increase, which is a huge relief. As we all know, intake and need is huge. At March 31, 2019, can you give us the approximate number of Albertans that were approved for and receiving PDD supports, not including those in direct operations?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Right now what I can tell you is that the PDD program is helping almost 13,000 adults with developmental disabilities.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Excellent. Is there a projected number for 2020?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I do have projections. We should be looking at in excess of 13,000 clients in 2019-20, and in the following year it's almost 13,300 clients.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That's about normal with the increases over the last few years.

Is it fair to say that approximately 50 per cent of those receiving FSCD supports actually go on to receive PDD supports? Would you say that that's a fair estimate, or is that too high?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Are you getting that 50 per cent number from the business plan or from any of the documents that you've read?

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. From previous plans, documents that I've read, I was trying to figure out how many people go through FSCD as children and then move on to PDD as adults. There's a disconnect because eligibility is quite different. I'm wondering: approximately what's that number, that target, that you're using, or that budgeting number that you're using?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** That number actually seems a little bit high to me. I don't have the numbers right now, but certainly we can look into that.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That's fair.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** It does seem a bit high compared to the actuals.

**Ms Renaud:** It does seem high? Okay. That's fair. I just wanted to know. I really don't know, so I wanted to get an idea. If we could get that in writing, that'd be great. That'd be super helpful.

Is it possible to get an approximate split in terms of percentages? I'm not saying the actual number but just an estimate of the split between people under PDD receiving supports via a community service provider and those in FMS, or family-managed support.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I believe that the numbers receiving supports in FMS have increased. Certainly, that is what we want to see, and it is a platform commitment as well, to expand family-managed services across the province. The split: I'm going to actually see if we have those numbers. I don't have that information readily available.

**Ms Renaud:** That's okay. If you could just submit that, that'd be great, too. The last I knew, I mean, it was certainly growing. You're absolutely right. I thought it was something like, I don't know, 70-30, 80-20, but if you could get that to us, that'd be great.

Just to your comment about it being a goal of your government to look at increasing FMS, I think absolutely any family that wants to use family-managed supports is outstanding. It is a lot of work because it's like running a small business, right? You have to do payroll and hiring and training and turnover and planning and all of those things. Not every family is equipped to deal with those things, particularly, say, families who've got adult children, adult sons and daughters, and they themselves are elderly. They're not able to do that. If it's a choice that people are making, I think it's an outstanding program to have available to people, so I'm glad to hear that.

Could you tell me out of your service provider and your FMS contracts what percentage approximately of those contracts are already multiple-year contracts?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, that was another platform commitment as well, to make sure that we move towards multiyear contracts. That work is currently under way. It's all part of our red tape reduction.

**Ms Renaud:** Right. Quite a few already have multiyear contracts, correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. We do have a number of them that are multiyear in place, but certainly our next steps are to increase those numbers. We want to expand that.

**Ms Renaud:** Sure. Could we get a number approximately so we have a target of where we start and where we're going so we could evaluate the progress?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I don't have that specific number available.

**Ms Renaud:** But could we get it in writing? Just a target, even just an estimate or a government target in order to meet your budget targets. Could we get a sense of where we are so we could measure that red tape reduction?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Excellent. Does the ministry have any goals or targets related to increasing – actually, I'm going to skip this question for now.

Are there any plans to introduce any form of income testing with PDD eligibility?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, as this point, as part of my philosophy within the ministry and as part of, you know, what the MacKinnon panel report recommendation was, I'm going to be taking a very comprehensive review of all the programs within the ministry because one of our big commitments is, first of all, that we want to ensure that we have these vital services protected and preserved. Secondly, one of our other goals is to make sure that we're delivering these services and programs absolutely efficiently and effectively as well.

**Ms Renaud:** Cool. That's great. Going back to this, are you not ruling out the possibility of introducing income testing to programs like PDD or FSCD?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** What I want to emphasize is that right now I'm going to be undertaking a comprehensive review of all programs. That means, you know, really starting at the beginning and understanding what our client needs are, what the needs are of vulnerable Albertans, and really having a very concerted focus on sustainability.

**Ms Renaud:** I understand that in Ontario – and I'm not saying that's where you're going; I'm just giving you an example – part of the problem with autism support services was that the government introduced income testing and service caps. Are you not ruling out the possibility of going there?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** My answer to your question is simply that at this point in time I'm going to be reviewing all the programs . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So it's possible that you could introduce income testing into FSCD?



**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, no. I'm not saying that at all, actually.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm not saying that at all. I'm just going to reiterate once again that it's early days. I'm in the beginning stages.

**Ms Renaud:** You can imagine that families are stressed by this, by seeing what happened in Ontario. I'm actually not trying to put you into a corner here. What I'm asking is – families are scared. They're really scared. They're afraid that income testing and service caps will be introduced in Alberta. I just want you to give them some reassurance that it won't.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** What I want to say is this. I've spent a lot of time since becoming minister speaking to stakeholders, to partners, and to families. I've had the opportunity to listen to the fears and the worries of many parents, particularly parents who have children with disabilities. I'm very cognizant of the sentiments and the feelings that are out there. That's why I'm taking a very responsible approach, which is to really start from the beginning, look at every single program, look at the legislation, look at the outcomes, try to get an understanding . . .

**Ms Renaud:** I'm sorry to interrupt. I understand that you're going to fully review the program, and I appreciate that. You know, I hope that all Albertans can have an opportunity to weigh in as well.

I'm going to move on a little bit to one of the other things you mentioned in your ministry business plan, I think it was. Again, I notice your government's commitment to increasing supports to families with FMS or that choose to use the FMS delivery system, which I think is great, actually. A lot of times, particularly in rural, remote areas, where it's more difficult to find a service provider, they really are on their own, so to have supports for them is great. I think it's great.

9:30

I understand Inclusion Alberta is funded to operate the one centre in Calgary – it's kind of sad that we only have one – and Gateway association is funded to support families in the Edmonton region. Now, I know, certainly there have been a number of other proposals like St. Paul, which had a fantastic proposal for a centre to support FMS families. So I'm wondering: what is the targeted amount in the budget line to put towards increasing these sorts of centre-focused supports for families?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I've had the opportunity to actually visit the FMS centre in Calgary that's run by Inclusion Alberta, and, you know, they do have a great model in place right now. Unfortunately, I haven't had a chance to visit Gateway, and I'd like to hear more about what's happening in St. Paul.

Circling back to your question in terms of funding. Again, I mentioned that it was in the platform, and we're just getting that number together right now. In the next several years' time the budget is going to be in the order of about \$500,000.

**Ms Renaud:** Five hundred thousand dollars for FMS supports. Okay. Perfect.

Will your government be looking at – so oversight for FMS contracts, as you can imagine, is tough. Right? It's a completely different animal of contracts. It's quite different than a service provider, and already these families are stretched pretty thin. Can you talk about any changes to oversight for FMS? It's my understanding that caseworkers are really just seeing these families at renewal, so at intake and then at renewal. But can you talk about any other training changes or accreditation standards that would be

introduced, or will they be required to get the complex behaviour designation? Because, as we know, more and more individuals coming into support under PDD are very complex. I think we can all agree that that is the new reality. So can you talk about increased oversight or training for FMS contracts?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You're right. We are seeing more complex cases coming into the PDD program. Certainly, there are always, you know, different perspectives as to how to meet the needs of these complex individuals and cases. There are some good points raised. This is part of the reason why I'm going to be undertaking that comprehensive review, because there is tremendous opportunity, first of all, to understand best practices in terms of what's working well and what isn't, and that is going to require some in-depth dialogue with the providers and with Inclusion Alberta, who would clearly have experience in this space.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Just if I could interrupt for a second, and I apologize. I just don't have a lot of time.

Because it's hard to measure progress when you don't have the benchmark – right? – would it be possible to get a list of requirements for current oversight for FMS contracts like audit requirements? Or, you know, what are our case managers or caseworkers looking at when they're providing financial oversight or oversight to these contracts? I think if we're looking at growing them – and that is the government's plan, to increase the number of people within that service delivery model – can we get a starting place of what's currently required, what oversight is provided to FMS contracts?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. I can certainly provide you with some more information as to where we are currently.

**Ms Renaud:** Just a quick question. I don't know if you can answer this, but are there currently any surplus retention agreements in any FMS or service delivery or community service provider contracts?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Not that I'm aware of.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I imagine that the generous PDD budget increase is due in part to cost pressures related to waiting lists in addition to the pressures related to population growth, aging population, better diagnostic processes, and a higher incidence of autism spectrum disorder – and there's certainly a lot of discussion about why that is. Is it possible to give us an approximate number of people waiting for PDD supports at any given time? Before they are sort of directed to a community service provider or FMS, how many people have been approved and are waiting for service? Like, what's the average number?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm just going to go back to caseload growth right now. As you know, we've experienced a 39 per cent caseload growth in the past 10 years, and . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So you don't have a current number that you're working on for your budget? Right now there's been an increase, obviously. You saw a need, which is great. Can you give us a number, sort of what are you working with right now for people on the waiting list in Alberta for PDD supports?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, as you know, that number is going to be changing. I know it's challenging for those individuals who are awaiting services.

**Ms Renaud:** Even a range is good.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. You know, it's roughly less than 2,200 folks right now who are waiting.

**Ms Renaud:** Twenty-two hundred?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you. The first 20 minutes has expired. Member Renaud, do you wish to continue?

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, please. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** You may go back and forth with the minister. Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** Would you say that of the 2,200 people on the waiting list, are they sorted by – if I've got the waiting list number wrong, I'm happy to be corrected.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm just going to make a small correction here. The wait-list is actually very small. There are only six individuals who are on the wait-list.

**Ms Renaud:** Six?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** We do have 12 currently – actually, this number has been updated – who have complex needs.

**Ms Renaud:** They would be at Alberta Hospital Edmonton or something like that? Or are they just in the community waiting?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** They're individuals with complex needs. But going back to that original number that I quoted, the 2,200, those are actually individuals who are awaiting PDD services, and they're in planning.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh. Okay. So there's another step now. There's in planning, then approved, then you're on the waiting list, and then you get services? Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. These individuals are in varying stages . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So there are 2,200 people that have been screened, let's say. So they're not just sort of anyone that's saying: I need PDD support. These folks have been screened. They're likely going to be put on the waiting list; they're just not on the waiting list yet. Is that fair?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, right now they're in service planning.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So is it fair to say that these 2,200 people – it's not fair to say? Sorry. Someone is shaking their head. So there are 2,200 people that will more than likely be approved for supports, but they're not past whatever stage. So there are only six of those right now. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, there are six individuals who are on the waiting list, 12 with complex needs. In terms of the other individuals that I mentioned, they are in service planning right now.

**Ms Renaud:** I've heard from lots, so I'm pretty sure there are more than 12.

What I'm getting at is the 2,200. These people have likely been screened. They're in service planning mode or whatever that is. They will likely pass whatever hump is there and be eligible for PDD supports, either through community service providers or FMS. Six or 12 people on a waiting list for PDD across the province kind of seems impossible.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I hear what you said. You have your numbers. If there are individuals that have reached out to you with concerns, please have them connect with me.

**Ms Renaud:** You're saying there are only probably 12 people waiting for services?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm just going to go back to – I've given you the numbers.

**Ms Renaud:** So you're sticking with: there are 12 people on the waiting list for PDD supports in Alberta?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** There are 12 individuals that have complex needs who are currently on the waiting list.

**Ms Renaud:** So there are 2,200 people that are in a different planning section. What exactly does that mean?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, they're in service planning right now. I can tell you that my ministry and department staff are reviewing all of the applications in a very thorough and consistent manner, first of all, to make sure that we're prioritizing those individuals that have critical and urgent needs.

**Ms Renaud:** So people are triaged on the waiting list or on the 2,200 list, whatever that's called?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** They are. Because, again, those who have complex and urgent needs will be . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So you would identify complex people on that waiting list and move them into the next phase of engagement or whatever it's called?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, individuals who are applying for PDD whose needs are not critical will be placed on a wait-list unless their needs change.

**Ms Renaud:** I feel like I have a responsibility to say this, and I always will: the recommendations from the Betty Anne Gagnon fatality inquiry were very clear. This was a young woman who moved regions, correct? She had been supported through a model of supports. She moved to this region, and people didn't check up on her. I mean, she was on the waiting list, then she wasn't. I'm not saying it was anybody's fault at all, but at the end of the day this woman died from abuse and neglect. Some of the recommendations really focused on the need to focus attention on the waiting list. It is so important to know what the needs of the people are on the waiting list, so I'm worried when I hear there are only 12 people on the waiting list for Alberta. I would just like to reiterate that it's really important to look at how you figure out who gets service and who does not. I just felt the need to put that out there.

9:40

I'm going to move on a little bit to community service providers. I understand that there are approximately 158 service providers in seven regions in Alberta. Is that accurate still, approximately?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Approximately, yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm sure the number goes up and down, but there are still the seven regions of service delivered.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Those supports that they're still offering – and I might be wrong if you call these supports something else now –

home living, employment supports, community access supports, and specialized service supports. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Is it fair to say that approximately 85 per cent of the funding provided to these community service providers or organizations goes to the front-line staff?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Where would you be getting that number?

**Ms Renaud:** From their contracts.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. I would say that that's accurate, roughly.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Is it fair to say that administrative and service delivery amounts included in service provider contracts have essentially remained frozen for several years, probably going back to about 2014?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Sorry. Where are you getting that information from?

**Ms Renaud:** There is in the contracts with service providers – right? – a portion for administration and service delivery. That's why I asked. Is 85 per cent of this funding for the contract going to front-line supports? The rest is service delivery and administration. Is it fair to say that those contracts, those totals that are calculated, are still based on about 2014 numbers?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I am just going to – I would just . . .

**Ms Renaud:** You can get back to me on that.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** No. You're making an assumption. Are you drawing this question from any information that you've seen in the business plan or in the budget?

**Ms Renaud:** No. Actually, I even had a contract going back that far. What I'm asking is: have those numbers been calculated in a different way since that time?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I've had an opportunity to sort of do a very superficial look at this, but what I can tell you is that these numbers have been stable, and they are subject to change. You know, I can get back to you on that.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That'd be great. That's fair.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Because you're looking for very specific numbers here, are you?

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. I'm wondering. Have those numbers – maybe let me phrase that a different way. Have they increased in the last five years?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. No. I can get back to you with that, but I also would like you to know as well that the contracts themselves have actually gone up in value.

**Ms Renaud:** Absolutely. The front-line supports have absolutely gone up, and I appreciate that.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** And they will continue to as well.

**Ms Renaud:** That's great. Is the government planning any changes to the way services are contracted? Will there be any kind of new bidding process or like an RFP process to provide services to people with disabilities?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** That is something that I can answer more definitively after undertaking a review of all the programs. Again, I'm going to go back to that point. This is the whole reason why we're doing this comprehensive review, so we can look at areas of continuous improvement, and that's going to require some conversation and collaboration with our partners.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Do specialized community supports still include behaviour consultative services, professional counselling, would you say?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Sorry. What?

**Ms Renaud:** There used to be, for example, people that were approved and receiving supports through disability services that had access to counsellors, whether it was a psychologist. Now, of course, you can imagine the wait-list for that was long because a lot of people wanted those supports. Counselling services are not cheap. That used to be included as a service for people that they could access: behavioural supports or psychological supports. Is that still available to people?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I will confirm that in writing.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That'd be great. Are any other dual-diagnosis type mental health supports available to people receiving PDD supports? Again, this sort of goes back to the specialized supports. As you can imagine, very often it isn't – you're supporting somebody that has a developmental disability, for sure, but also may have a mental illness. So the complex needs are exactly what they sound like, complex. These folks, being on AISH, don't have a lot. I mean, they have medical services, but they don't have the extra dollars for counselling supports. Are there additional supports, mental health supports specifically, for people with disabilities?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** If we're talking about PDD support, I can tell you that the program does provide four types of services, which include home living, employment, community access, and short-term specialized community supports . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. Those are the funding areas.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** . . . which includes – I'm going to go back to the question that you asked before this one – counselling and behavioural intervention.

**Ms Renaud:** It does? Awesome. That is really good news.

How many FTEs would that be for the province? Would that be two still? Like, I know that in the Edmonton region – I don't know about Calgary or the other regions – you had two dedicated people. I think one was a psychologist if I'm not mistaken. Are there dedicated FTEs for these supports?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** On that I'll have to get back to you.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That would be great.

Would you say that it's fair to say that there are sufficient funds in this budget to meet all of the recommendations generated following the Wolski fatality inquiry? That was the woman – I believe she was from Camrose – who died, who was killed, actually, at work. Again, I mean, sadly, we were reminded about the dangers of community supports recently, unfortunately. There were a number of recommendations generated in that fatality inquiry or after that fatality inquiry that focused on working alone, in training,

different safety features that would be helpful to staff working with very complex people.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** As part of the recommendations out of that review there were a number of policy changes that were made and were implemented by the government. I can tell you that through our staff safety initiative we are continuing to be committed to working with our partners to make sure that we're doing whatever we can to reduce violence and harassment for staff who are working in Alberta social services sectors, and these tragic, tragic cases remind us of the need to be continuously focused on that.

**Ms Renaud:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm glad that you said that. It's really important. Workers in the disability community are often underpaid, most likely overworked, but they do vital, vital work. Would you say that you have sufficient funds in this budget and the projections for the years out to meet the recommendations from that fatality inquiry?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** We do. We do.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Excellent. Other than the adaptive skills inventory that's completed at intake by department staff to augment, obviously, the disability-specific documentation that people are giving you when they apply, are there any other formal assessment tools being used now?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** What are you referring to specifically?

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. When someone applies for PDD . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** If you could elaborate, please.

**Ms Renaud:** Would your deputy minister be able to answer this question?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Can you just elaborate on the question a little bit?

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. When someone applies for PDD, they have to send in their documentation about their disability, and then staff do an informal assessment on them with them. I'm asking: is there any other assessment tool, something like the supports intensity scale?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Oh. Okay. I understand what you're asking.

**Ms Renaud:** I know that we're not using that anymore.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** No.

**Ms Renaud:** So no other tools?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** No, there isn't.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Excellent. Are all service providers – and, again, I'm talking about PDD but only community service providers right now – required to maintain accreditation in the complex behaviour designation?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** When you say “all service providers,” are you . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. All contracts with the government and someone in the community that provides support to people with disabilities: are they all currently required to maintain accreditation?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** They are required to maintain accreditation if we're looking at complex needs.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So not all service providers are required to maintain accreditation?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Any provider who is serving individuals with complex needs needs accreditation.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. That's a separate designation. I understand that. I'm talking about the over 150 or whatever providers: are they required? It used to be. Accreditation looks at everything from prevention of abuse to auditing procedures for finances. It's everything. Of all the contracts with community service providers in Alberta, are they all required to maintain accreditation?

9:50

**Mrs. Sawhney:** All service providers who have a contract with the government are required to be accredited through ACDS.

**Ms Renaud:** Great. Excellent. Okay. As you know, FSCD provides services to children and families residing on-reserve in Alberta, and services are billed back to the government of Canada through an arrangement for the funding and administration of social services. The acronym is ARA; I still haven't figured that out. The CSS ministry business plan for 2019 notes on page 29 under outcome 3, on inclusion, that the ministry will work with indigenous communities. As a PDD program is an in-scope program and able to actually provide services on-reserve and bill the government of Canada, will PDD expand their current reach? I believe there are only about six people right now receiving PDD supports on-reserve.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** This was also another significant platform commitment, that we were going to ensure that vulnerable Albertans on-reserve would have access to PDD services. Currently the department is doing some work in this area to try to ensure that we can deliver on that platform commitment.

**Ms Renaud:** Would you say that you would take sort of an approach of endorsing, like, Jordan's principle?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I cannot answer that definitively because I think there's still some work to be done at this point. As I had mentioned, you know, the department has put in a lot of time and effort to determine what the next steps are going to be to ensure that we are able to deliver effective PDD services to those on-reserve.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Would it be possible to get – are there budget targets for this work? You know, if this is a significant platform promise or, I guess, a ministry outline, directive, or whatever the word is, do you have targets? If we're at six people in the entire province right now, do we have targets for increasing that capacity?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** We are, as I said, doing some work on this right now. The department has put a lot of time and effort into determining what the next steps are going to be.

**Ms Renaud:** So is that a no?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, I don't want to say no. It's hard to be definitive because we're still doing the work to . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Can we get targets? I think the work is pretty important, and I agree with you a hundred per cent. It's in your business plan that this is work that you want to complete. Given that we're putting resources into this, does it not make sense to have targets so that we can measure progress?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Targets, obviously, are very, very important, but you can't be too hasty in setting up targets before you have a complete understanding of . . .

**Ms Renaud:** I think you can be pretty hasty when you're putting money towards a project.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, when you're trying to characterize the situation . . .

**Ms Renaud:** If you'd just excuse me for a sec. For the years that I've sat on the Public Accounts Committee with the Auditor General, what I have learned – I mean, there's a lot to learn on that committee – is that you have to have a framework to measure. You have to have targets set out if you're going to invest money. This is very significant. The fact that you're willing to do this work is great – I think it's great – but I think it's important to have targets so that we can measure where we're going. If you don't have them, that's great. If you'd like to submit something, that's great, too.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** What I've learned from my years of experience in the work that I've done is that you can't put the cart in front of the horse. Like, absolutely, targets are important, but you have to characterize the nature of the problem and the issues that you're trying to solve. Currently our department is spending time . . .

**Ms Renaud:** How do you know if you're making progress if you don't have targets or goals?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, we're still working on it, and progress is . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm going to move on to the government estimates. I'm going to go on to page 52, line 4.3, which is just under the line we've just spent some time talking about. It's on page 52, again, item 4.3, persons with developmental disabilities, and this time I'm looking at direct operations. Direct operations, for people that don't know, are the supports that are provided to Albertans with developmental disabilities that are not in communities. These are very often older Albertans. They've spent their life in care. These are, essentially, institutions. I note a reduction of \$4.5 million. Is that correct? Am I on the right line here? Yeah. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** It depends on what you're looking at. It sounds like you're looking at the budget estimate.

**Ms Renaud:** Well, either way, actuals or budget, it doesn't matter to me.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** If you're looking at actuals, it's actually a reduction of \$4 million.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Can you tell me why that was reduced?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, first of all, let's talk about this line a little bit. This particular line refers to facilities that are owned by the government to provide adults with developmental disabilities services in a residential care setting.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Pardon the interruption. The second 20-minute block has expired.

Member Renaud, I'm assuming you wish to continue.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah.

**The Acting Chair:** I know the minister was talking. You can complete your thoughts, Minister.

**Ms Renaud:** We're talking about very few. We're talking about graduated supports, which are in Calgary, Michener Centre in Red Deer, and residential support services in Edmonton. Those are the only locations that direct operations are delivered from. Is that right?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah, partially. But let me just answer your question. Right now only 2 per cent of our PDD clients receive services through the operated residential facilities, and the budget is reduced because we are anticipating fewer clients that are going to be living in these residential facilities. We are anticipating that more will live in community with their families. It's a continuation of a trend that we've seen over the past number of years.

**Ms Renaud:** Sadly, actually, most of these – again, I'm actually not sad that the number is going down, because I think that if we're going to make that transition to community for these folks that have spent their life in an institution, I'm okay with that. I think it's a great idea. However, sadly, a lot of these folks don't have families, so their reality has been an institution their entire lives. If there is a plan to transition people from, say, the Michener Centre to the community, does the department or the ministry have currently under way some plans or targets for moving these people out of direct operations in these three locations?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, as I said, you know, the number of clients that we're seeing is decreasing, and there are clients at the Michener Centre who will be there for the remainder of their lives. People pass away, which means that we're seeing fewer folks who are going to be living in these facilities, and that is why we see a reduction.

Let's go back to the original question: why are we seeing a reduction in the budget? That is essentially why, because we'll be seeing decreasing . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That's good. So there aren't any sort of purposeful moves or transitions to long-term care for these folks?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** At this point in time there are no plans in place as of yet. I will go back to the point that I've said repeatedly, that I'm in the initial stages of doing a comprehensive review of everything. At that point, once that review is completely fleshed out, we'll decide what the next steps will be.

**Ms Renaud:** Again, you're absolutely correct that these are older Albertans, and there aren't a lot of them, and, you know, they are passing away. That is the reality. But can you tell me: is there still a zero intake policy for direct operations?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** At this point, particularly for Michener, as you're probably well aware, yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh. That's great. I'm assuming that some of the budget reduction relates specifically to FTEs for direct operations in these three locations. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, as we're seeing a decline in the number of clients that are being served, that will translate to fewer staffing requirements.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. So can you tell me: is there a target for FTE reductions in direct operations?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Any reductions will just occur through attrition, so the answer is no.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. There was a very specific number of FTEs in Community and Social Services that were going to be reduced; 233 I think it was. I'm assuming that there was a calculation of where they're coming from, so I'm wondering: can we get a number for this, or can we get a breakdown of those 233 FTEs? How did you get that number?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Again, those positions will through attrition – I mean, they won't be filled. What I can tell you is that we're going to make sure that we have sufficient staffing for front-line positions.

**Ms Renaud:** Just for anybody watching or maybe unfamiliar with governmentspeak sometimes, can you define attrition for me?

10:00

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Attrition is essentially a situation where positions will not be filled if people choose to retire or they decide to pursue a career in a different sector and they leave the job. That position is not going to be filled.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Fair enough.

Oh, there was one other question, about direct operations. I noticed that there was a capital expense under department capital acquisitions, I think, line 4.3. Like, direct operations was about \$683 million, up from the actual. What does that include exactly?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. I actually have that information right here. This funding was primarily provided – it was capital maintenance and renewal for GOA-owned facilities that serve clients with developmental disabilities.

**Ms Renaud:** Which facilities would those be?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** It's for all of the direct operations facilities. It's laid out on several . . .

**Ms Renaud:** All three? Like, all three regions? Would it be possible to get a list of the maintenance or renovations or building that you're – I mean, this is a pretty big number. Can we get a list of what projects or what work you anticipate?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm just trying to give you an example. Some of these capital expenditures could be to bathroom renovations, to shower facilities, those kinds of things.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. I know Michener had, like, pretty extensive renovation over the last, probably, five, 10 years. But is it possible to get a detailed list of – I mean, this is a big amount. Is it possible for us to get a list of the work that you plan under this capital project line?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I just want to point out that this is – are you thinking that this is \$600 million?

**Ms Renaud:** No, I'm not thinking . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. It's just shy of \$700,000.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. Is it possible to get a list?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I can provide you with some examples of . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So not a list?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** . . . renovation projects that are included in this amount, yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Other than an example, is it possible to get a list? Okay. If not, that's fine. We can move on.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** We can provide you with a list.

**Ms Renaud:** I'm going to move on to family support for children with disabilities. I'd like to direct your attention to pages 93 and 94 of the government fiscal plan, and I'm going to just read a quote for you so you don't have to.

Ongoing consultation and collaboration will help balance fiscal efficiency with care and service. Caseload growth is a key cost driver with caseloads growing by 17 per cent for AISH, 14 per cent for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD), and 30 per cent for Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) over the past four years. A full program review will determine what activities provide value while clearing tasks that distract from client service.

Before I ask my questions, I would just submit that, in my opinion and likely my caucus's opinion, these three programs – AISH, PDD, and FSCD – already provide value. Maybe the wording here was just awkward, but they do provide value, and they actually are game changers, life changers for the people that use them. I just wanted to offer up that fact.

Anyway, what is the total anticipated cost for this extensive review that you keep talking about? Which budget line?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** It's going to be – I'm just going to draw your attention to element 1.3, strategic services.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. What would you say is the total cost? Just to get on the record.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** The total cost of the comprehensive review? Can you just clarify your question?

**Ms Renaud:** What is the total cost for the review, a full program review?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, no. I'm not going to, you know, anchor to a particular number because, as I've mentioned before, it's early days. It's difficult to know what kind of resources and what kind of time is going to be . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Are you budgeting for a number?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, it's in line 1.3, so it is part of the budget. There's going to be a range within that budget, and it's going to depend on what kind of resources I'll require and how much time is going to be necessary to make sure that I'm able to undertake that review on a sufficient basis.

**Ms Renaud:** How do you envision Albertans being able to submit suggestions for the scope or the process or the appointment of people to this particular review panel or committee or whatever you're going to call it?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, this review is going to take place internally. I have staff . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Internally?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** . . . department staff who are going to help me with the program review, and that's going to essentially look at data. We'll look at historical data, and certainly the department is a great repository for all of that information.

**Ms Renaud:** It is.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I will take a look at . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So this review will potentially impact thousands and thousands of people. AISH, PDD, FSCD: all of these programs will impact Albertans everywhere. Are you telling me that this review will be completely done internally?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Let's just take a step back. Yes, absolutely, this review is going to affect thousands of vulnerable Albertans, and that's why it is fair and it's reasonable and it's compassionate that we undertake a review. I mean, why wouldn't . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, it is. But will any other Albertans, other than ministry staff . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Let me just finish what I'm saying.

**Ms Renaud:** You know, my question is actually really simple.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** One of the reasons why we're undertaking this review is that, first of all, we have to ensure . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Mr. Chair, I just would like a question answered.

**The Acting Chair:** Hang on. We were doing great. Let me just say that. We were doing great. The member can ask a question.

I'd please ask that you allow the minister to respond. I totally understand that you have numerous questions that you want to get through, but let's just start over again. Member, if you could ask your question, allow the minister to respond, and we'll continue on.

**Ms Renaud:** Thanks. My question is quite simple. The review of all of these disability-related supports: will this review be completed a hundred per cent internally?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Again, in order to answer this question in completion, I'm going to go back to saying why this review is important, because I think it's important for anybody who may be listening at this point or who will be reading about this exchange afterwards to understand why I'm so passionate and adamant about undertaking this review. Number one, we are trying to ensure that we are preserving these vital services and supports for Albertans, and secondly, we want to make sure that we're using everybody's hard-earned taxpayer dollars to make sure that the services are delivered effectively and with efficiency. Something I haven't been able to speak about is sustainability and viability of these programs for the long term. I mean, we are in a very difficult fiscal situation, and my commitment is to ensure that we are looking at all of our programs such that they are going to be sustainable for generations to come.

In terms of the kind of feedback that I'll be looking for, I mean, obviously I have staff within my ministry and within the department, very capable and competent individuals who have worked day and night in this space for years, very passionate individuals who have a lot of experience. I'll also be liaising with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. They bring a lot of experience to the space as well, and they will have a lot of insight and feedback. I've just created the Disability Advisory Forum . . .

**Ms Renaud:** My question, actually, Mr. Chair . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm trying to answer your question. You're asking how I'm going to undertake this comprehensive review and how I'm going to . . .

**Ms Renaud:** No. That was not my question.

**The Acting Chair:** Minister, just hang on a second. The member asked more of a specific question. Then let the minister respond.

**Ms Renaud:** I've really tried to give you a lot of opportunity to say that there will be people other than internal staff that will be providing assistance and input on this review. So it's just a yes or no.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I was getting to that. The Disability Advisory Forum: I've just put together this engagement panel. That group of individuals – and it will change – includes self-advocates, it includes agencies, and it includes other stakeholders and partners that we work with. These individuals will also inform me as to their perspectives as we're undertaking this review. I mean, of course, you have to have people who have lived experience, who understand these programs because they are recipients of these programs and they've navigated through the system. Of course, their voices will be incorporated.

**10:10**

**Ms Renaud:** Just out of curiosity, did you consult the Premier's council about deindexing AISH?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You know, this decision in terms of deindexing . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Well, it's just a yes or no. It's just a yes or no.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** . . . was a government-wide decision.

**Ms Renaud:** Did you consult the Premier's council on the status of people with disabilities before you deindexed AISH? Yes or no?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** This was a decision that was taken government-wide because we understand that we are in a very difficult financial situation, and we're trying to ensure . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Did you consult the disability advocate before . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Member, let me just say this. We allow a lot of broad latitude in this committee. I will say this, as I've said in all the previous committee meetings: the question is allowed to be asked; the question can be answered. You may not like the answer to the question, but from my observation, I do see that the minister is answering the question. So we can continue.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** It was a government-wide decision to suspend indexing not just within Community and Social Services but also within Treasury Board and Finance, as you're well aware, and Seniors and Housing. Specific consultation with stakeholders: I mean, I spent the time talking to all stakeholders, including the council, to learn more about their perspectives on the various programs.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm going to take that as a no. You did not consult the Premier's council on the status of people with disabilities or the disability advocate before deindexing AISH.

I'm going to keep going on, then, with FSCD. Just out of curiosity, since this review is going to be completely done internally, can the ministry tell us how exactly, let's say, for example, you will determine what the drivers are related to caseload growth? Like, how are you going to examine that?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** First of all, I'm just going to backtrack a little bit and respond to the first part of your question, where you've said, you know, that this review is going to be taken internally. A good portion of it will be, absolutely. I'm going to rely on the expertise of front-line workers and my department staff, to get their feedback. But I had also mentioned that the Disability Advisory Forum, which

is not internal staff, which is comprised of diverse stakeholders, will also help inform me as I undertake this comprehensive review.

Now, in regard to caseload drivers and what impacts them, I mean, we are seeing an increased prevalence in disabilities across the board. We are seeing general population growth within our province as well. All of these factors contribute to caseload growth. We're seeing greater medical diagnoses, and there's more awareness in the early days as to conditions such as autism. Parents are more aware. Related to that, there's also more awareness of the programs that are offered.

**Ms Renaud:** Absolutely. I agree with you there.

Can you tell me: are there any plans to introduce income testing to any aspect of FSCD?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You had asked this question already . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah, I did.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** . . . and I'm just going to go back to what I said before. There are no plans. I am going to take the time that I need, as much time as I need, to do a thorough and detailed review of every single program within the ministry.

**Ms Renaud:** Internally. Gotcha. Okay.

**The Acting Chair:** You may answer the question.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh. You're not done. Go ahead.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** No, actually, I'm not done.

**The Acting Chair:** Continue on, Minister.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Because I know you keep focusing on this word "internally," again I will say: well, yes, of course, you have to rely on people who administer these programs and have done it for a long, long time and have the expertise and front-line workers. Again, I have a forum. I have a Service Provider Partnership Committee as well, that I will liaise with. These are not internal panels. They are actually external panels. We will actually include their feedback as well.

**Ms Renaud:** The reason I keep going back to it – and maybe I'll just put this out there – is that there is a very long and rich history of people with disabilities being completely excluded from decisions that impact their lives. That's why I keep asking the question.

I'm going to go back to the focus of FSCD funding. As you know, the discontinuation of Children's Services stay-at-home subsidies will increase the need for services funded by FSCD such as work-related child care. Your colleague obviously spoke to estimates in Children's Services the other day and said – you know, she talked a little bit about what was changing there. She did mention your ministry a number of times. Now, I'm assuming that there's some work. Based on these budget projections, because I'm assuming that you've had these conversations – she referred to them – can you tell me: are there any budget projections that will sort of capture these new cost pressures?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, this is what I'm going to say. Right now our government is very committed to ensuring that we're undertaking very extensive crossministerial engagement, and as you mentioned, I am working very closely with my colleague in Children's Services to understand where the areas are that we intersect and also to understand, as we're both undertaking program reviews, to determine how we can best serve . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Minister, thank you. I hesitate to interrupt.

We will now go to the government caucus side, where they will have 20 minutes. At the conclusion of that 20 minutes we will be taking a five-minute break, as agreed upon by the committee. Who on the government side wishes – Mr. Rutherford. All right. Mr. Rutherford, would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

**Mr. Rutherford:** I would.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much. The floor is yours, sir.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, thank you for being here today and to your staff as well. You have an incredibly important ministry. It's complex, but of course supporting Alberta's most vulnerable is an important job. I think you've done really well, and I want to thank you for the work to date. Some of the things that I've seen in your fiscal plan and that you've laid out, supporting objectives like Clare's law, for example, and also the sexual assault crisis line, I think are extremely important. Some of these initiatives are things that I reflect back on in my past 10 years in policing as being really crucial to be focusing on.

In terms of domestic violence, it is something that is quite prevalent in our society, and giving women and men at times an added tool to be able to look into the past of a potential partner and to be able to acquire information that may help them make what's going to turn out to be a more informed decision as to the relationship that they're getting into can prevent future violence from happening as well. I appreciate those initiatives, including some support around the Herb Jamieson, another one that frequently, especially as we get into the wintertime, had brought people down to the homeless shelters, who are out in the elements and needed a place to stay. The expansion of that program is going to be quite beneficial to people in Edmonton, the homeless population and a vulnerable population as well.

If I could turn your attention to page 93 of your fiscal plan, I just want to get into some more detail on the \$276 million increase from 2019-20 compared to the '18-19 actuals. If you could just get into some detail about the reason for this increase if you could, please.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Okay. Yes. I'd be very pleased to, and thank you for all your comments. Much appreciated. I'm also very pleased. I agree with you. I'm happy that we were able to deliver on some significant elements of our platform, Alberta's version of Clare's law and the funding for Herb Jamieson and Hope Mission. That was a very important commitment as well.

In regard to your question, we know that Budget 2019 is a balanced plan, and it acknowledges the challenges that people are facing as government is working to create jobs, to grow the economy, and to protect vital services. Our budget delivers on our mandate of creating jobs and growing the economy, as I mentioned, but also protecting front-line services and supports for the most vulnerable. It also charts a path back to balance, as I mentioned, through targeted reductions and reallocations while delivering on our key promises.

As you had mentioned, our budget has increased by \$276 million. Again, this is to protect services for children, adults with disabilities, Albertans affected by homelessness, people looking for work, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The ministry is also continuing to support civil society organizations through programs like FCSS, which is a very important program. It increases the stability, participation, and inclusion of Albertans in their communities. This increase in our budget is going to help us maintain services and benefits. We're also committed to meeting



our budget targets because, as you're aware, we do have to live within our means in order to ensure that we get our province's finances back on track. This is why it's very critical that we take a comprehensive review of all of our programs this year to ensure that we're achieving efficiencies while protecting those who are most in need.

10:20

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you.

What you touched on there at the end, Minister, about how a comprehensive review with the objective of improving services is important and looking at, "Are we delivering services the best way possible so that the people receiving them are getting maximum value and so taxpayers are as well?": I think we're really balancing that.

I just want to get into some more of the specific programs, individual increases such as around child care and intervention. If you could elaborate on some of the details of the specific programs and why individual increases have happened within those, that would be appreciated.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. I'd be happy to elaborate. As I've said, you know, to maintain benefits and support increasing caseloads – I've mentioned the numbers before – we have increased funding to our core programs. The funding for AISH has increased by \$142 million, and that supports an 8 per cent growth in caseloads. As has been mentioned, the AISH benefit is the highest in Canada as compared to our interjurisdictional comparators. Persons with developmental disabilities, the PDD program, has increased by \$50 million to support caseload growth of almost 4 per cent. We have also increased family support for children with disabilities by \$16 million because, again, caseloads are expected to grow by almost 9.2 per cent. The increase in the budget for employment and income support is \$61 million. Although caseloads are projected to increase compared to '18-19 actuals, we are anticipating a reduced number of income support expected to work recipients in future years because we are expecting to see an improvement in the economy, and unemployment rates will decline.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Okay. Thank you.

You mentioned caseload growth. Are you able to comment on why you believe that the caseload is growing at the rate that it is?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** In terms of income and employment support caseloads, particularly expected to work, I mean, these caseloads are very closely linked to the economy and unemployment, so as our unemployment rates increase, we are going to see more clients that are accessing these supports. But as you're aware, as all of us are aware, our government is taking steps, taking significant measures to make sure we're doing what we can to revitalize our economy and to create jobs and get Albertans back to work. As the economy improves and our job-creation strategies continue to pay off, unemployment and the income support caseload will be reduced. In terms of the increase in caseloads for disability services for FSCD and AISH, I mean, those increases are linked to increased and improved medical diagnoses in addition to an increased awareness of these programs and just a general increase in population growth.

Having said that, we will be taking a closer look at the drivers of both caseload and cost per case as we undertake the review that I've mentioned several times today. Again, the objective is to ensure that all of our programs are delivered efficiently and effectively and that they're actually achieving the outcomes that Albertans expect. If we want to ensure viability of these programs for vulnerable Albertans over the long term, we have to manage the growth and expenses for core programs because it's just not sustainable. Again,

this is going to require ongoing consultation and collaboration with community partners to ensure that we're balancing fiscal restraint and efficiency with care and service for those who are receiving supports.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you.

I think what you touched on there is important to highlight, that there are two ways to look at this: one, improving the economy to help people get back on their own feet and then, two, having supports there when they need it. I think you're showing that the approach is on both sides and a very strong approach as well.

If I could turn your attention to page 94 of the fiscal plan, it shows that the ministry's budget is essentially flat from 2020 to 2023. I was wondering if you could comment, Minister, on how you're going to meet future-year spending targets with those projections.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** As I had mentioned before, the current spending is not sustainable, and we're all committed to meeting our budget targets, living within our means, and getting our province's finances back on track. To achieve future-year budget targets and to support our government's path to balance by 2023, the intention is that we will grow the economy and focus on helping Albertans get back to work through job creation and partnering with service providers, civil society organizations, and communities as well to determine how we can come together to find innovative solutions and system changes while eliminating red tape, reducing costs, and reallocating funds to core front-line services that make a difference in the lives of vulnerable Albertans.

As we revitalize the economy, we will see employment increase, and income support caseloads will decrease as a result of that, which is going to reduce the cost for the income support program. By 2023 we're projecting an unemployment rate closer to the historical average of 5 per cent, and the income support expected to work caseload has a very close correlation with the unemployment rate, as I'd mentioned, with about a six-month lag. Again, our review of all the programs this year, with the objective of achieving efficiencies to get better results for Albertans, will also be very instrumental in meeting our future-year spending targets.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Okay. Thank you.

I just have possibly one more question here. Page 93 of the fiscal plan says that the ministry will undertake a full program review. You may have commented on this before, but just to highlight it and to go over some of the points, the program review is to "determine what activities provide value while clearing tasks that distract from client service." Can you please elaborate on this review and why you believe it is necessary?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. I'd be very pleased to do that. I've said this a few times today, but I think it's worth repeating time and time again because it is such an important message. My ministry and I have three primary goals moving forward. Those are, number one, to protect the vital services that we're currently providing that help make life better for Alberta's most vulnerable and for those who are most in need. Secondly, we want to ensure that we're delivering services as efficiently and as effectively as possible because these are hard-earned taxpayer dollars. They're valuable resources, and we want to make sure that we're doing the very best with these resources to ensure that those in need are being served to the best of our ability.

We also want to ensure that these programs are sustainable over the long term, and that doesn't just mean towards the end of this mandate or the next 10 years. It means for generations to come. There are children who have disabilities who are going to be relying on these programs and services for the entirety of their lives, and

that's why this review is so critically important. We want to ensure that these supports are available, as I said, for generations.

Our budget demonstrates our commitment to protecting and prioritizing these services. The \$276 million increase to our budget will maintain benefits for Albertans, and it'll help our ministry and community partners support more people this year. We also know that spending growth can't continue, we also know that our debt threatens vital public services, and we also know that Alberta spends almost \$2 billion per year on interest servicing this debt. I've mentioned it before today, and I'll mention it again, that this is nearly half of my ministry's entire budget. We have a responsibility – I have a responsibility – to current and future generations who rely on these programs to get our fiscal house in order to make sure that our investments are achieving the best outcomes that are possible while serving those who are in need.

We're committed to living within our means and meeting our targets. This is going to take focus. It's going to take innovative solutions through collaborations from partnership with other ministries. I've said before that there is a concerted effort and commitment to ensure that we're undertaking significant crossministerial engagement.

**10:30**

I think that's really a departure from the way previous governments have looked at some of the social services files, to really liaise with other ministers and ministries and departments to determine where those areas of intersection are and to see how we can synergize and leverage on joint resources. That is something that this ministry and other ministries are undertaking, and we're certainly very focused on that. We're also ensuring that we are laser focused on what is most important in terms of outcomes for Albertans and ensuring that our programs are certainly delivering and funding those.

The other thing I want to emphasize is that we're looking at red tape reduction opportunities. We're asking ourselves: how can we reduce red tape, how can we eliminate unnecessary costs, and how can we reallocate funds to areas which make the biggest difference in the lives of the most vulnerable? We're also asking: how can we improve programs so that they support individuals and civil society organizations to be more resilient and to be more self-sustaining?

As we undertake these reviews and as we ask these questions – sometimes these are difficult questions and they don't have obvious answers, but nonetheless it's incumbent upon us to ask anyhow and to dig deeper and to find more information – we are going to ensure that we maintain ongoing consultation and collaboration with stakeholders and community partners to ensure that we are balancing fiscal restraint, again, and efficiency with care and service for the most vulnerable.

**The Acting Chair:** Minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but it's been over five minutes. We have to go back to the government caucus side to at least say a few more words, and then we can continue back with you.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Sure. I'll just jump in, and then you can continue your answer there. Just to highlight some of the things you had said, it matched what I was hearing in the campaign and going door to door. People wanted vital services protected, which is important, but they also wanted to make sure that their tax dollars were going as far as they possibly could go. They see historically a lot of government waste, and they don't understand how billions of dollars can be invested into something where they're not seeing improving results. Especially as our trajectory of spending has outpaced population growth and inflation, what we should be

seeing is better results. That's not always the case, so sustainability comes into play and becomes an important factor of a program running not just today but also five years from now and 10 years from now.

You know, I often think about the amount we spend on interest now, around \$2.3 billion, \$2.5 billion a year. By the time my daughter enters the workforce – she's quite young – we will have paid \$40 billion to \$50 billion in interest. It adds up quickly, and it takes a significant amount of money out of what we could have done in terms of building schools or supporting social services. We end up spending it in a very short period of time, and we come out of that spending period almost no better off than when we went into it except now we have 60 some-odd billion dollars in debt to carry and \$2.3 billion a year in interest that future generations are going to have to continue to pay for. I think that it's quite irresponsible to download onto future generations that cost that they will have to carry their entire working lives. It takes away from our ability to borrow in the future if there is another emergency or some issue in the economy that we have to deal with, so to borrow to the extent that the previous government did, I think, was irresponsible.

I think if you want to just finish your thought on the sustainability of these programs and ensuring that the delivery of services is done in a responsible fashion.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. I've spoken extensively about that, about the sustainability of these programs, and you've certainly alluded to our debt situation. It is dire. In fact, this is one of the reasons why I became involved in politics, because I was so worried about our future generations in terms of what sort of prospects they would have in terms of employment. I mean, I'm a mother of four. I have children as well.

Certainly, when I became the Minister of Community and Social Services, within, you know, probably two weeks I was reviewing all the different programs, and I saw the growth in caseload. I mean, I could envision how the caseload growth was going to look and how it was going to impact costs for the ministry. I knew right away that this wasn't sustainable, that it was very important for me to take a step back and to review everything from scratch to get a better understanding of what we could do to ensure the sustainability and viability of these programs, again, for generations.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'll cede the rest of my two seconds.

**The Acting Chair:** Fantastic. Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're at the midway point. As agreed upon, we'll take a five-minute break, and then we will return with the Official Opposition. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:36 a.m. to 10:43 a.m.]

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, I see the minister is here, members of the Official Opposition are here, and members of the government caucus are here. We will continue.

Member Renaud. Is that correct?

**Ms Renaud:** Yes.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. You may continue. The floor is yours. Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you very much. Okay. I'm going to continue my questions about FSCD, obviously, family support for children with disabilities. I'm essentially referring to supports provided under line 4.4, page 52. Now, again, I understand that this is not this particular ministry, but there are some overlaps. The loss of any

classroom EA, or educational assistant, can be really tough on a child, particularly a child with a disability. Given the current school budget reductions in regions all over the province – they seem to be rolling in every day – do you project and have you budgeted for any cost pressures to FSCD as a result?

Some of the other cost pressures that I was a little bit surprised to read about that I think will also impact the need for FSCD services relate to the potential reductions to parent link or family resource centres. Typically – I'm sure you know this – it's that for a lot of families with children there sort of seem to be steps sometimes until they're pushed to the point of applying for supports under FSCD. They will often use supports in other places. Of course, children in school, when they are staffed appropriately with EAs, will be less reliant on FSCD.

Have you budgeted for any of these additional cost pressures related to changes in other ministries? And I understand that you don't have control over those ministries.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** In answer to your question – and you've mentioned the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children's Services specifically in your question – we work very closely together to determine areas of intersection, as I've mentioned before. We have conversations, and we know those areas that require additional time and care, particularly as we're dealing with children with disabilities who are in the school system. Through those conversations there is a deep commitment to ensure that nobody falls through the gaps and that we are indeed taking care of those vulnerable Albertans. In this case we're talking about students and children.

In terms of our budget I can tell you that we have an increase for the FSCD program of almost \$16 million, actually, and that's mainly to fund caseload growth. You know, it's generally been growing by about 9 per cent over the years. I mean, there's a commitment here to make sure that we have more funding available for this program.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you, Minister. Just to paraphrase, you feel that with these increases in FSCD you have sufficient room to manage any changes as a result of changes to other ministries.

I'm going to move on a little bit. What are the average wait times from the time a family applies for FSCD to the time they actually have a signed contract to work with? I know that the Auditor General has taken sort of a deep dive on AISH in particular in terms of wait times and intake processes, but I'm wondering: as it relates to FSCD, what is the timeline from when families apply properly – all the documentation is in – to the time that they get a contract?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. Thank you for your comments about the Auditor General's findings in regard to AISH. Certainly, some of those observations were arrived at during the tenure of the previous government. I am aware of that.

In regard to your question around wait times what I can tell you is that we know that this program is very, very important to parents and to those individuals who are really needing these services. Our staff is working really hard to continue to complete service agreements and renewals with consistent and thorough decision-making. This is normal practice to ensure that those individuals, families, children who have the most critical and urgent needs will be prioritized for services first. I would encourage families, if they have any questions around their applications and around the wait times, to please get in touch with the ministry and the department.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that families can contact the department, but this is about the budget.

Let's look at: in terms of caseload growth and monies assigned to this particular area, what are the targets for approval times? What is the average wait time from the time a family applies until a family gets a contract? If you don't know, that's okay. You could submit that in writing.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You know, what I . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Maybe before you answer, if I could just add another piece to this question. Also, if you could comment on the turnaround time for contract renewal, let's say. This is nonpartisan but a shout-out to your chief of staff, who's actually been quite helpful. Over the summer we had issues with contract renewals.

Okay. All that niceness aside, let me focus on the contract renewals. If there's a lapse in the time between when you apply and have your contract renewed, programs are in jeopardy. In the summer, for example, kids leaving school need to know they're going to be supported to attend summer camp, let's say. So these need to be timely renewals and timely contracts. Can you tell me: what is the average wait time, and are there targets for improvement?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Okay. Well, first, thank you for your shout-out to my chief of staff. Yeah, he's a good guy.

**Ms Renaud:** He's pretty awesome.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** That was unexpected, so I appreciate that. Thank you.

In answer to your question, I can tell you that once a service plan is determined, the agreements are usually in place in a matter of weeks.

**Ms Renaud:** So is that the target?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, that's the actuality. That's how things work.

**Ms Renaud:** Well, it's actually not, but if that's the target, that's great. If you're saying that the time that people apply and get their contract is a few weeks . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Generally speaking, as you know, when we have families coming in and they're applying, I mean, there are diverse needs, and there are complex medical needs. Sometimes the needs are not quite as complex. Once that service plan is determined – and that timing can be variable – after that point the agreement should be in place in a matter of weeks.

10:50

**Ms Renaud:** If that's your target, I'll take that. That's great. If families can get their contract within two weeks, that is outstanding.

Is it possible to get in writing – I don't really want to get into that right here because it's really just a feature of the budget – a targeted breakdown of spending under FSCD, so to split out, say, funds directed to respite or support services, transportation, specialized services? It's one budget line that you have, but is it possible to get a breakdown?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Is there a particular concern that you have?

**Ms Renaud:** No. I'd just like to know what the breakdown is.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Is there a particular category of breakdown that you're interested in?

**Ms Renaud:** All of the supports under FSCD. That would be great.

I'm going to move on. The next line after family support for children with disabilities is the provincial disability supports initiatives. I'm going to ask sort of a similar question, because this is a really broad area, as you know, that has so many different initiatives. I could probably spend a week asking questions about it. Would it be possible to get a breakdown from the ministry about what exact specialized services are covered in this line and not use the time here? I only have, like, probably three minutes. So if we could get that in writing, that would be great.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, just to confirm, what line item are we talking about here?

**Ms Renaud:** Provincial disability supports initiatives, 4.5. There are a number of different initiatives in there, everything from, probably, service dogs to brain injury supports, I'm assuming.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm happy to tell you what's included in that particular . . .

**Ms Renaud:** No, no. I'm asking if I could get that in writing.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You know what? I can also answer that question right now because it's right here.

**Ms Renaud:** But I have other questions, so if I could get that in writing, that would be great.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, there are only a few items here.

**The Acting Chair:** Hang on, Member. We've talked about this in previous committee meetings. We have the minister and we have staff here. If they would like to answer the question, they can answer the question, so I suggest we proceed.

**Ms Renaud:** Can I just rephrase my question, then?

**The Acting Chair:** Yeah. Sure you can. Absolutely.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. If we can't get the breakdown in writing, that's okay. I'm going to go to specific initiatives, then.

Let's first go to service dogs. Service dogs are included under provincial disability supports initiatives, correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. That's correct.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Can you tell me how many FTEs are assigned to this initiative?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** In terms of the FTEs, I can't tell you that information right now, but I can tell you that we have 11 approved organizations right now that are training and testing dogs. We certainly are always accepting applications from new service dog organizations that want . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Minister. The 10-minute time allotment for this segment has expired.

We are now going to go to the government caucus side. We last concluded with Mr. Rutherford. Mr. Amery is going to continue on. Back and forth with the minister?

**Mr. Amery:** Yes, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much.

**The Acting Chair:** Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you to the minister for all of your hard work in this department. Since April 2019 we've had the opportunity to work very closely on a number of initiatives, and I know that the

job for you, your officials, and your ministry has been very challenging because you are dealing with a number of vulnerable Albertans, and you've had to make very difficult, I'm certain, decisions to meet our government's commitments to those Albertans to get our fiscal house in order while ensuring that our most vulnerable are not left behind.

You also know that my background, like the background of all the members of this Assembly, brings forward an interesting point of view on many of the initiatives you've been working towards, and in turn I'm sure that you've heard good suggestions and recommendations from all. As a result of that background, Minister, you and I have had some great interactions in relation to your portfolio, be it about various provisions of Clare's law, some of the AISH changes that you've been contemplating and that you've made.

I think it comes as no secret to you and to all of my colleagues – nor do I deny it – that I've been a strong advocate for those who need your government services most, be it through my advocacy for increased funding for programs under your ministry or the continued, uninterrupted delivery of essential services to my constituents of Calgary-Cross, who, I think you already know, rely on services in significant numbers, and, of course, for all Albertans throughout the province as well.

Recently, Minister, we heard the delivery of Budget 2019 and the sweeping changes that Albertans can expect going forward, and I want to be clear that I think this budget strikes an appropriate balance in what I spoke about earlier, balancing our fiscal responsibility with that of our social responsibilities as well. I'm sure that your ministry has had to work very hard within the confines of that budget to achieve many of the objectives that Albertans have been promised.

That said, I know that you began to allude to some of the commitments in your opening statement. Unfortunately, I did not get to hear all of those commitments, partly because of the time constraints, and I think there's a little bit more that you have to say about that. One of Budget 2019's overarching themes is honouring commitments, and I want to give you an opportunity to provide – and, again, I'll ask you to be a little bit more specific than you were in your opening statements – specific details about what platform commitments are supported in your budget estimates for 2019-2020 going forward and where your ministry is at with respect to meeting those targets and when we can expect those to be met.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** First, thank you for your comments. I'm very pleased to provide some more specific information in terms of how we are supporting the theme of honouring commitments and what the platform commitments are that we've supported within our ministry in terms of our budget. Our government is honouring many commitments in Budget 2019, which includes providing \$10.3 million for sexual assault services, which help survivors of sexual assault. We are maintaining \$51 million in funding for women's shelters to support women and children who are fleeing abuse. We are increasing funding for the residential access modification program, which I just announced yesterday, by 30 per cent to help Albertans with mobility issues and challenges to modify their homes. I'm also very pleased to say that this session we kept our promise to introduce the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act, which I believe and we believe as a government will help save lives by empowering people at risk of domestic violence to make informed choices about potentially harmful relationships.

From 2019 to 2022 we also have \$8 million in capital funding in the Seniors and Housing budget, and this will support the redevelopment of the Herb Jamieson Centre. The centre plays a

vital role in Edmonton's homeless-serving system. In this year's budget we also committed to protecting vital services for vulnerable Albertans, and we have delivered on that promise by increasing Community and Social Services' overall budget by 7.6 per cent, which is indeed the largest increase across government. Certainly, we'll continue to work hard to deliver on all of our platform commitments during our mandate.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate giving you that opportunity to clarify some of those comments.

You spoke a little bit about some of these initiatives, but in your business plan on page 26 I note that you speak of government commitments to working closely with and supporting civil society organizations. I think you mentioned a couple of them right now. I just wanted you to give me a little bit more clarification on what civil society organizations you are referring to in your business plan, what goals you hope to achieve in working with these civil society organizations, and what specific funding commitments you've allocated in your 2019-2020 budget which will help you meet this goal.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** That's a good question. What I can tell you is that the government and the ministry have a very long history of working in partnership with civil society and the nonprofit, voluntary sector in Alberta. There are a number of different organizations, so I won't list any off for you. Certainly, I'd be happy to talk to you more about some of the organizations that we work more closely with. We can have that conversation.

**11:00**

In terms of our engagement with civil society we know that community groups know best about the issues in their communities and often are in the best position to address them. We do provide contracts and grants to many community-based organizations providing social programs to meet local needs, which include disability services, homeless supports, and services for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse. I'm really, really pleased to say – and I think everybody in this room was very pleased when they saw this as a budget item – that the ministry continues to support civil society organizations.

We're very pleased to maintain funding for FCSS at \$100 million because, again, we know that locally designed and delivered supports increase the stability, the participation, and inclusion of Albertans in their communities. My colleagues and I understand the importance of the FCSS program to communities, and we value this long-standing partnership with municipalities and Métis settlements.

In addition, in 2019 we'll continue providing \$16 million in grants to organizations preventing domestic and sexual violence and supporting survivors and promoting healthy relationships. Civil society and government: we do have intersecting mandates to promote the public good and the collective well-being of Albertans.

I'll just share some numbers with you. Interestingly enough, Alberta has more than 26,000 nonprofit organizations, that employ more than 760,000 Albertans. The sector itself accounts for 5 and a half billion dollars of Alberta's GDP – that's a Stats Canada number from 2019 – and every year 1.6 million Albertans provide 262 million volunteer hours. That's phenomenal. As somebody who has an extensive background in volunteerism, these numbers are very, very phenomenal and very encouraging to hear.

We've committed to helping expand and support civil society efforts by reducing bureaucratic burden such as renewal obligations. As I'd mentioned earlier this morning, we are going to

be shifting to five-year funding agreements with some civil society groups where possible.

I've also mentioned that we are in the process of creating a Premier's charities council, which is mandated to advise government on how best to assist the efforts of civil society groups. Wherever possible, we'll continue to partner with civil society organizations to deliver government programming and services where we can collectively achieve results that are more efficient and effective and meet the outcomes that we're looking for.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Minister. I will take you up on that offer to get some clarification on what civil society organizations you are working with. If you could provide that to me at a later date, that would be much appreciated.

You mentioned . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Member. I hesitate to interrupt.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition, where we concluded with Member Renaud, and we will continue with Member Renaud. Go ahead, ma'am.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. I'm going to come back to service dogs, vision loss, services for the blind, and all the specific disability initiatives a bit later. I'm going to switch topics completely and focus on AISH since that's where we seem to be going. AISH is assured income for the severely handicapped, as you know. In the government budget estimates on page 52, line 3, assured income for the severely handicapped saw an overall increase of \$153 million, which is great. However, on page 30 of the ministry business plan I note that the annual projected increases for AISH are significantly lower. For example, for 2019-20 we're at \$153 million, a 14 per cent increase, I believe; for 2020-21, \$23 million – I think that's under 2 per cent – for 2021-22, \$45 million, 3 and a half-ish per cent; for '22-23, \$44.5 million.

Obviously, we know, we've read that AISH intake caseload growth is at 17 per cent – I think I read that – and we know that the AISH program grows annually. Can you explain how you're going to keep up with the cost pressures given the out-years that you've described in your budget?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Can you please tell me what page of the business plan you're referring to?

**Ms Renaud:** I'm talking about the financials on page 30.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** In regard to the \$142 million increase for this year that's broken down into two different components. A portion of that component – and I believe it's in the order of almost \$52 million – is to fund the increase in the core rates that took place earlier this year.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. Sorry. Maybe I wasn't clear with my question. It was a bit confusing, so let me just rephrase this. There's a great big increase this year, and then the increases go down significantly in the next three years, but we know that the cost pressures and the caseload growth are really intense for AISH. So can you tell me: what plans are in place to bring this down so low?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I'm just taking a look at the caseload projections right now, and certainly historically the caseload projections have varied from 5 to 4 and a half per cent. It was a little bit higher for 2019 and '20 for a variety of different reasons, but go forward and that caseload projection should fall in line with what we've seen historically, which is around the 4.1 per cent rate.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So even the historical growth of 5 per cent: you and I agree on that number. There's 5 per cent growth, on average, probably going back – I don't know – 10 years, but if you look at your budget projections for the next three years, four years, the increase in AISH doesn't match the historical growth of the AISH program.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, looking at historicals here, for the go-forward in 2020-21 we're expecting to see anywhere from 2,600 to slightly lower than that in terms of additional cases that are being added, so I would say that our budget does reflect these projections.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. In the budget projections on page 30 the first year does, for sure; the next years don't. If we're going with the number of a 5 per cent growth of program demand every year, let's say – we can agree that's the number – these increases don't match. They're lower. What will you be doing? Are you looking at changing AISH eligibility? Are you looking at any kind of changes to income testing? Are you looking at any sort of changes at all that will bring that number down to match your budget projections?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** To answer the latter question, there are no definitive plans right now to make any kinds of changes. Again, I'll go back to my other message, that we are undertaking a comprehensive review. These programs are facing increasing cost pressures, and there is a very real issue of sustainability and viability of these programs. I can't stress that enough. We keep coming back to the same . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Minister. My question is . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, I just want to finish my statement.

**Ms Renaud:** But you're telling me about the sustainability of programs, and my question is about the budget. We know that the program increases by about 5 per cent a year. Your out-years, your budget increases for the next few years – this year is good; the next ones aren't. They dip way below the growth. Let me tell you: I think that support for someone with a severe disability is by definition not sustainable; it's something that we pay. So I'm asking: are you changing the eligibility? What are you doing to bring this number down? Your budget doesn't reflect the actual need in Alberta.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, what I can tell you is that we are going to ensure that anybody who needs supports will get those supports. We are going to be funding increasing caseload. Part of our approach as well for all of the programs is to ensure that through our review we're taking a very focused and innovative approach and collaborating with our partnering ministries and civil society organizations to ensure that AISH recipients will get the supports that they need.

**11:10**

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Civil society organizations aren't going to cut them a cheque every month so they can pay their rent and buy their food.

My question is: the budget amounts – this year is good. We're all good this year. But for the next three years the increase that you have projected for AISH does not match the need, the growth of AISH. The reality is that I can tell you, that, yes, there are more people that are requesting AISH because there are more children that have disabilities. For whatever reason, whether it's better diagnostics, we have more kids that are on the autism spectrum. I don't know. I don't know what's causing this. I really don't know. It's actually probably worth looking at, but there are more numbers. You know this by FSCD. You know that there are more children turning 18 that require AISH. So my question is: what are you doing

to the AISH program to have these projections that are lower than the growth?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You have clearly raised a number of different points in terms of, you know, disabilities and the prevalence of disabilities and the characterization of disabilities. Again, I am going to have to go back to my oft-repeated point, which is that we are going to be reviewing every program in depth. You know, those projections are there. I mean, we're here to talk about the current budget, and I've mentioned before that we are going to be funding increasing caseload growth.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Minister. We are also here to talk about your fiscal plan, which is the years out.

So is it fair to say . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** My comment to that . . .

**Ms Renaud:** . . . that this year you are funding AISH, that there is an increase, but in the next three years in your fiscal plan the increases do not match the actual increased demand for AISH every single year? We know that for years the AISH program, on average, has grown about 5 per cent a year. Is that correct? That's what you said earlier, so I'm going to go with: yeah; I'm guessing that's the number that we agree on. So my question is . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. Looking at historicals, I can see that. On average, it would be around 5 per cent.

**Ms Renaud:** My question is: they don't match, right?

**The Acting Chair:** We're getting to that point where we're talking over each other. Let's go: question by the member; then we'll allow the minister to answer, please. Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** Does your budget after this year match the AISH growth? Yes or no?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I will say to you, once again, that we are going to be funding caseload growth within the AISH program. That is something that I've mentioned several times already, and, yes, we know that that caseload is growing by 5 per cent.

**Ms Renaud:** Your budget doesn't match it, so there's a deficit in funding that you've projected in your fiscal plan. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** No. I wouldn't say that that's correct. Again, I'm just going to reiterate that we are seeing increasing caseload growth, and we are going to fund.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. If the growth is 5 per cent and the budget is a 3 and a half per cent increase, they don't match. There's a deficit. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Again, I'm just going to refer back to the importance of doing a review of the program because, I mean, there are a lot of questions that are raised as we talk about . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Minister. I understand that you're doing a review, and I don't have much time.

My question is about AISH. People are reeling already because they were sort of counting on an increase in January. Now, \$30 an hour . . .

**Ms Glasgo:** Point of order.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. A point of order has been called. Pause the clock, please.

Go ahead.

**Ms Glasgo:** Point of order. We're on 23(b)(iii). I believe that the minister has answered this question. Whether the member accepts the answer and likes the answer is not what we're here to talk about. But the minister has answered the question numerous times, and the member keeps badgering the minister on the same question.

In fact, it's not even related. This could also even be 23(b)(i) because we're talking about this year's budget. In the spring they could talk about next year's budget, and the spring following that, they can talk about the next year's budget. At this point we're here to talk about this year's budget. The minister has answered the question exhaustively.

**The Acting Chair:** Just to be clear here, you're looking at 23(b)(i) – right? – “speaks to matters other than . . . the question under . . .”

**Ms Glasgo:** And (iii); (b)(i) and (b)(iii), I guess. And (c) as well: “persists in needless repetition.”

**Mr. Neudorf:** Standing Order 23(c) is the right one.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. All right. Thank you.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Member. The member is asking a question which is about the numbers that are included in the government fiscal plan, that are included in the government budget document. They are out-year projections, and the question is fairly simple: are these projections realistic based on the numbers of the caseload of the program? She's citing historical data, she's referring to present numbers, and then she's talking about the out-year numbers the government presented, so I think it's well within the scope that the minister answer this question.

**The Acting Chair:** Is there anybody else who would like to make a comment?

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** The minister has clearly answered the question that she is funding caseload growth. So the repetition . . .

**The Acting Chair:** You know, as I've previously indicated – I think I'm prepared to answer – there's been a lot of broad latitude here. I will state that we were certainly getting very, very close to the edge in the sense that I appreciate that the member was asking a question. I believe it was being answered. I know the member had made various attempts to rephrase her question, and I certainly appreciate that. The minister, I believe, was answering the questions. As I've stated in this committee before, the members on either side have certainly a right to ask a question. You may not like the answer to the question that you're getting, but this is certainly, in my opinion, a question that has been answered.

I'm really hesitant to say that this is indeed a point of order. However, prior to the point of order being called, I certainly was about to encourage the member to move on with her line of questioning as I certainly believe that, to the best of the minister's ability, the question has been answered. I certainly appreciate the comments given by both sides in regard to this point of order, but at this time I'm going to suggest that this is not a point of order.

However, I will encourage that the member continue to move on. There are only 12 seconds left, so whatever you can do in the remaining 12 seconds. Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** You managed to use it, so go ahead.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you for your ruling.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Are you concluding?

**Ms Renaud:** No. Go ahead. I'm done. I'm not going to use 12 seconds.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. All right. Thank you.

Well, the time has now expired, so we will now go back to the government caucus side. I believe it was Member Amery that we concluded with. Yes.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will continue my line of questioning. Minister, I want to take you back to what we were talking about earlier. In specific, I want to talk a little bit about something that you had briefly mentioned before. You had mentioned in your previous answers a little bit about the Premier's charities council. On page 29 of your business plan one of your ministry's initiatives allocated \$100,000 to establishing this Premier's charity council. Can you please provide us with more about that initiative, what the \$100,000 is going to be utilized for, and what specific benefits this council will provide to Albertans?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Absolutely. I have mentioned this already, that this was a platform commitment to put together the Premier's charities council. How that came about was that there was extensive consultation with a number of different charities prior to the election. I think that almost 40 charities were consulted on the concept of having an organization in place that would serve as an advisory body to the government and to the Premier to advise as to how we can better liaise with the nonprofit sector and civil society. If you may recall some of the platform language, it was around “harnessing the power of civil society” to support important work that community organizations do. That was a reason why we wanted to establish the Premier's charities council.

The specific duties of this council are still being worked out, but generally speaking, some of the items will be to engage civil society leaders to explore how civil society organizations can be empowered in solving some of Alberta's most pressing issues and also to lead consultation about how government can help build capacity and self-sustainability of civil society and some of the organizations that we're working with and also, as I'd mentioned before, to provide advice regarding the various ways that government influences and also impacts some of these civil society organizations, which, as I've mentioned, are engaged in social issues and delivering social services in Alberta.

We believe that establishing the Premier's charities council will strengthen partnerships, and it will help our government meet its commitment to support civil society organizations in the pursuit of making life better for all Albertans.

11:20

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Minister.

You had mentioned civil society organizations. You also mentioned nonprofits. Are you using those words interchangeably? In your budget it does not mention nonprofits.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** It could be interchangeable. Civil society does certainly encompass the not-for-profit sector, but it also could encompass other organizations as well.

**Mr. Amery:** Okay. And then just going back to that question about what the \$100,000 is earmarked for.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Those funds are earmarked for putting this council together, for the secretariat support, and for other administrative functions that are associated with putting a Premier's council in place.

**Mr. Amery:** Do you have any idea of what that Premier's council is going to look like?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Right now we're in the process of just putting the council together. We are, again, liaising with stakeholders. We consulted, as I mentioned earlier, prior to the election with a number of folks in the charitable sector as to what they would like to see in terms of ensuring that we have open lines of communication so that we know how government can leverage these relationships to make sure that we are meeting the outcomes of serving vulnerable Albertans. That work, as I said, is currently under way, and we'll have some more clarity in the coming months as to what the membership is going to look like, and there will be more defined clarity around the mandate.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Minister. I ask only because \$100,000 will have to be stretched to form a council if I view it as being a group of people, a secretariat, as you mentioned, administration, and whatnot. Having said that, I wish you all the best in that endeavour. I'm very supportive of that initiative.

I'd like to pass my time to another government member now, please.

**The Acting Chair:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Amery.

Mr. Yao, you wish to go back and forth with the minister? Is that correct, sir?

**Mr. Yao:** Yes, please.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much. Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Yao:** Minister Sawhney, I want to thank you and your team for all your hard work and endeavours as you continue to review this file. It's very complex, with a lot of nuances in there. Certainly, when I see some of your decision-making, like supporting the Salvation Army in my region, my community, to ensure that they have the ability to address issues around the homeless as well as those who have issues with alcoholism and other addiction issues, I want to thank you so much for a very responsible and very strategic support of Fort McMurray in that regard. I commend you on that.

You've inherited a situation where, as much as we'd like to invest in some certain things, you're faced with a fiscal deficit. I mean, certainly, the financial literacy of the previous government with their investment in trains and super laboratories that were architecturally beautiful combined with their endeavour to chase out our oil industry, which was very successful – most of the international companies have left, leaving just traces behind, like Shell and BP and ConocoPhillips. Thousands of jobs were lost and have moved over to the United States and other nations. A good friend of mine transferred to Iraq, as a matter of fact, and that's really unfortunate, to see that kind of a brain drain on our community and our region in Alberta, because not only did they chase away all these international companies, but they took the best and brightest Albertans and Canadians away to these other international destinations. Again, that reflects on not only a brain drain but the financial depreciation of all these people that could have been paying taxes here in Alberta that are gone. That's really unfortunate, and that's the situation that you've inherited. So I commend you on all your hard work in trying to work with the limited funds available.

The public transit. Page 28 of your ministry's business plan says that 9 and a half million has been provided to Edmonton and Calgary for low-income transit. I'm very curious about this. Transit, as we all know, is a very effective form of transportation for those

who might not necessarily have access to their own personal vehicles and whatnot. I personally have used the public transit in large metropolitan centres, and it's interesting. When you travel the world, you certainly see how other nations adapt to that need for transport. Certainly, I've rode in chicken buses in Guatemala. I've ridden jeeps in the Philippines and tuk-tuks in Cambodia. It's amazing to see how these different nations, these different societies and communities adapt to the desire and the need to have transportation available for all.

Specifically to Edmonton and Calgary for this low-income transit initiative, can you tell me more about these programs and how they're targeted and whatnot?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. I'd be very pleased to. Just to step back, thank you for your observations in regard to the devastating impact that our oil and gas sector has experienced for a variety of different reasons, including fiscal policies of both provincial and federal governments. Certainly, we are all feeling the pain of that right now. That's very clear. It is devastating for families, for Albertans, and, indeed, for our entire country. We know that that's the case.

But coming back to a good-news story, we are very pleased to be able to provide 9 and a half million dollars to the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton to support their low-income transit programs. We know that these programs give low-income Albertans access to city transportation which provides mobility and allows individuals to access community services and employment opportunities. It allows seniors to be more engaged in activities that they're interested in. It opens up doors and avenues for people to participate in ways that are important to health, actually. Affordable transportation is a social determinant of health.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition and Member Renaud. Okay. Thank you very much.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. Continuing on AISH, again, I understand that you are reducing FTEs by attrition. Can you tell me what the approximate number of FTEs – what will the reduction be particularly in AISH? I guess: what do you project the number to be?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yes. There is going to be some reduction based on attrition. The overall budget for AISH has increased by \$142 million. What I would say is that we are very, very careful to ensure that we have support for front-line workers, for individuals who will be assessing applications. You know, right now we've got 3,000 dedicated staff who are working on the variety of different programs. We are also ensuring that we are investing . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Minister. I just need a number of FTEs for AISH. Like, they do a lot of work, and they are overworked. I get that. I'm appreciative of everything they do. I just want to know how many fewer people will be working in AISH by attrition or whatever the reason. What is that number? Their caseloads are already extensive. I mean, they're huge, and regionally, geographically they're huge. I just want to know: what's the number that you project to reduce in terms of FTEs for AISH?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** As I said, the reduction in FTEs will take place through attrition, and we are going to, as a ministry and department, do our level best to make sure that the front-line services have the supports and have the staffing that they need to serve our vulnerable Albertans, including those who are applying for AISH.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So you don't have a number.



Okay. I'm going to move on. Currently AISH policy states that benefits generally commence on "the first of the month in which complete information supporting the decision to provide benefits was received." However, judicial review decisions in 2013 and 2015 from the Court of Queen's Bench considered that commencement dates for AISH are to be assessed by considering all the evidence without restrictions set by the date that evidence was submitted.

I'm curious: are commencement dates set by calendar or by urgency? Are you able to clarify that at all? Does everybody start AISH at the same time, or is there a consideration for urgency? One of the things that I was hearing over the summer is that people were getting calls from an AISH worker saying: "Yes, I can confirm that you've been approved for AISH. However, we're going to set a commencement date two months out." I'm just wondering how commencement dates are set.

11:30

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You've stated a very specific example. Can you just elaborate on that? I just need some more clarification around your question.

**Ms Renaud:** Is there an extra step in approval and commencement for AISH? If someone submits their documents and they get a call, "Yes, you're approved for AISH; done," is there a delay from the time that they're approved to the time that they commence? Is there an extra step in there that pushes their benefits back a few months?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Okay. There isn't an extra step. Thank you for clarifying that.

I am going to ask Deputy Minister Shannon Marchand to actually elaborate on this.

**Mr. Marchand:** Right. Thank you, Minister.

**The Acting Chair:** Sir, just identify yourself for the record, and then continue. Thank you.

**Mr. Marchand:** Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services. The commencement date: once an individual is approved, their eligibility is approved, a commencement meeting is set up with the worker. I think that would be perhaps the timeline, but the commencement date is defined in policy as the day all the material was available to make the decision. If the commencement meeting happens four weeks after all that material was received or it happens four months after all that material was received, the individual will receive payments backdated to the day all the information was there.

**Ms Renaud:** For sure, the retroactive benefits are great. That's great. I appreciate that very much. However, my concern is with the extra step in setting up a commencement meeting or a commencement date sort of sometime in the future. Although they will get retroactive funds, the day-to-day living or the monthly expenses, like paying rent, some people are struggling with. In that sort of middle few months, where they're waiting for commencement, they're not able to survive. I'm just wondering: is that a new step?

**Mr. Marchand:** No. It's been a long-standing practice that the AISH worker in the community meets with the individual, primarily to confirm that the financial information that was provided at the time of application remains relevant and accurate so that they are provided with accurate benefits. That's not a change in practice.

**Ms Renaud:** Is there a way to speed that up if there is sort of an urgent case or if there's financial – I mean, everybody has got financial need, obviously; they're applying for AISH. But is there a way to sort of speed that up if it's urgent?

**Mr. Marchand:** I think that if there was an urgency that was identified, yes, we would look at it.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That's fair. Thank you.

I understand that there's a requirement that Albertans apply for other benefits which they might be eligible for, including things like CPP disability or CPP in general. Would AISH recipients under 65 ever be directed to transfer from AISH to CPP before the required time of 65?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Sorry. I'm just thinking about your question. No, they wouldn't be.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So there would never be a time where someone, before age 65, would be encouraged – I guess that would be the word – to apply for early CPP benefits.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I need some clarification. Are you referring to AISH recipients under the age of 65 being ready to transition into retirement benefits? What exactly are you referring to?

**Ms Renaud:** No. Let's say that they're on CPP disability, and they get additional benefits through AISH. We've heard, I've heard that some people are encouraged to apply for early CPP retirement, you know, old age, at 65. Would there ever be a time where AISH would encourage Albertans who are not 65 to apply for CPP?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** There's no requirement to do that.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Excellent.

Is it fair to say, would you say, that there's a difference in terms of the medical services coverage between AISH and CPP disability? One of the things that happens when people transition from AISH to CPP is that, obviously, there's a financial benefit decrease. But the medical services provided under the AISH program are really essential for people with profound disabilities, and that changes at 65. Is there an ability for them to get sort of a medical services top-up once they transition from AISH to CPP at all? Is there a provision at all for that – other than seniors' benefits, I mean – specific to AISH?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I mean, they are different programs. I can't comment on the discrepancies between the two programs because I know the AISH program, but I'm not familiar with the CPP program in terms of what's offered in terms of medical benefits.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I can give you an example. Someone on AISH: let's say that they were getting an extra \$50 a month in the specialized supports to help pay for the maintenance of a service dog. Once they transfer from AISH to CPP, they lose that benefit and other medical services benefits. Is there a way at all to support Albertans with profound, severe disabilities after 65 under the AISH program?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** What I would say is that as long as individuals are eligible under AISH, they would obviously be eligible for the medical benefits, but if they leave the AISH program, then they would be subject to the benefits that are provided by the program that they transition into.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I know I asked this earlier, and you didn't have an answer, or maybe I don't recall the answer correctly. Whom did you consult when you decided, other than the people focused on the sustainability, as you describe it – did you consult anybody else about deindexing AISH?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** This is how I'm going to answer this question, because this is not a simple yes or no answer. There is no simple answer to this. When we were sworn in as government earlier this year, we became very quickly aware of the fact that revenues were vastly overstated as compared to what the expectation was. What that necessitated was a very concerted effort to ensure that we did everything that was possible to get our costs under control. The government-wide decision to suspend indexing was taken, and it affects several ministries – as you know, I've already mentioned that – Treasury Board and Finance, Seniors and Housing as well as Community and Social Services.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. I don't have a lot of time, so I'm just going to ask it one more time. There are these bodies that have been put in place for many years – one is new – to advise government and different ministries, not just CSS, and those are the Premier's council on the status of people with disabilities . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Member. We're going to have to hold that thought.

We're going to now go over to the government members side. I believe we concluded with Mr. Yao, and we will continue with Mr. Yao. Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much. Previously I had asked you a question regarding transit, specifically the budget line. On page 28 of your business plan you're providing some funding to Edmonton and Calgary for this low-income transit, and you weren't able to finish off and explain to me what these programs were all about and who we're targeting and whatnot. If you could expand on that.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Right. Thank you. I'd be happy to expand on that. I think I was talking about affordable transportation being one of the determinants of health. It allows folks who are low-income folks to be able to access transportation so that they can, you know, participate in society and feel that sense of inclusion. The cities provide a share of this funding, and they design and administer and set the fare structure for their programs to best meet the needs of people in their communities. We know that over 100,000 people in both cities have accessed the programs each month between July 2018 and June 2019.

Many civil society organizations and Albertans, actually, you know, even in my constituency – my constituency is Calgary-North East. I have a number of people who approached me and spoke about the value of the low-income transit plan. It's very important to folks who live in Calgary-North East. I would say that even in the constituencies of MLA Sabir, MLA Devinder Toor, and even yourself, MLA Mickey Amery, there are a lot of people who access this program. If you look at a heat map, you can see that a large portion of Calgarians reside in this area and actually are quite dependent on the low-income transit pass to help them travel through the city. Again, I've heard from many organizations and constituents and, generally speaking, Albertans, elected officials as well, who have personally told me about the difference that this program makes in their families' lives in terms of increasing access to social services and fulfilling the goals of participation and inclusion.

11:40

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much for that.

Now, that said, that is focused on Edmonton and Calgary. Other communities, like, certainly, Fort McMurray or Sherwood Park and St. Albert and Medicine Hat and Lethbridge, all have varying levels of public transit as well. If I understand correctly, they do tend to be underutilized, but they are supported because they do seem to address a niche for a segment of the population that does require these services. Will your ministry be expanding funding to any additional communities?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Yeah. Thank you for that question. As we're all aware, with the fiscal challenges that our province is facing right now and our commitment to meet our budget targets, the low-income transit funding is not being expanded in this budget. The ministry does continue to provide supplemental transportation benefits to AISH and income support recipients across the province based on clients' needs.

You know, I also want to take this opportunity as well, because I think it's important to talk about this. In this budget we are maintaining \$100 million for family and community support services, which, as you're aware, help municipalities and Métis settlements across the province address local needs, and we'll continue to partner with communities and civil society organizations across the province to support anybody who might be in need.

**Mr. Yao:** Well, thank you so much for that. Again, we do have to recognize that, yes, the fiscal situation that you inherited is a very difficult one.

You know, I want to commend the member from across the way, the Member for St. Albert, for her quality and her understanding of the social services related to PDD and whatnot because that's great knowledge to have. You've identified a lot of deficits in our system. What I feel really sad about is that the previous government didn't listen to you when you were in their own caucus and that a lot of the situations that our minister has inherited your government caucus also chose not to heed your words on. Again, they chose to spend money on things like train cars and . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Member, let's just direct the questions to the minister, please.

**Mr. Yao:** Absolutely.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Yao:** Minister, performance measure 2(a) on page 28 of your ministry business plan is about the percentage of Albertans who obtained employment after receiving assistance from the income support program. I'll tell you what. In my community there's not too much of that going on; there's more of the layoff side of things going on than there are people finding work. That said, can you tell me how the ministry will increase the success rate over the next cycle to help get Albertans back to work?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, you know, your comment about people in your community not having jobs, experiencing layoffs: I mean, that underscores why we have to work really hard to make sure that Albertans get the support that they need in a very efficient and timely manner. One thing that we are doing is that we are removing red tape and streamlining how we deliver our programs and services to ensure that they indeed are being effective. Our priorities do include sharpening our focus on helping Albertans get back to work. As everybody is aware, we've taken a number of measures

to ensure that we do what we can to revitalize our economy, and we're encouraging investment and job creation in the province that will help us meet those goals.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much.

To clarify, you are striving, obviously, to look at how the services and programs are run, and you're striving to improve those things, but if we don't increase funding in these areas, how will you accomplish this objective?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Funding for income and employment support has increased by \$61 million in Budget 2019, but we do expect funding in future years to be reduced as our expected to work caseload decreases. That's a function of seeing economic recovery; it's a function of seeing decreased unemployment rates. As I've mentioned earlier, the caseload is closely linked to the unemployment rate, and we will be moving towards a more historical rate, in the range of 5 per cent, by 2023. I also want to say that we have 52 Alberta Supports centres across the province, and they will continue to help Albertans access a range of social services and supports when required.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much for that. Now, a lot of these issues, a lot of variables that impact your department boil down to our basic economy. Currently many of the companies that are willing to invest are either fleeing or they're in a holding pattern. We're at the whim of a federal government who still has to demonstrate how they will be organized in such a manner to follow through with decisions that they're going to make at the federal level. These decisions all impact our industry here, the ability to get the pipelines in, the ability to export our products out to other nations so that we can help them to endeavour to lower their carbon footprints. If the economy does not improve, if we see that this Prime Minister and allies in the federal government who would align themselves with him don't do anything to support our economy and they don't recognize that the money that comes from this province supports so many of the social programs in the other provinces, how will you continue to help unemployed Albertans when you're faced with this difficult task without that financial wherewithal of a good economy?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, clearly, we're all working toward the same goal, to try to see and achieve economic recovery. It's important that we never lose sight of that goal. In answer to your question, our government will continue to provide stable funding for employment and income support to try to help those Albertans who are trying to get back to work. Our primary focus is on helping people re-enter the workforce. That's clear. Alberta Supports centres will continue to inform Albertans about the services that are available and link them to these supports and services based on their needs. As I mentioned before, there are 52 Alberta Supports centres across the province, where . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. You'll have to hold that thought.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition and Member Renaud. Thank you very much. Go ahead.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to actually, because we're running out of time, come back to specialized disability services, which include everything from postsecondary education to service dogs and supported employment and then income support and homelessness. But for now I'm going to pass my time over to Member Pancholi.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here and answering our questions. I'm just going to be brief because we do have a limited amount of time, and I apologize if I do interrupt at any point.

I just want to speak to page 26 of the ministry's business plan. Under Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives it indicates there that "in 2019-20, \$100,000 is allocated to establish an Alberta version of Clare's Law," which passed earlier this session. But I also note that on page 52 of the estimates, specifically line 5.3, women's shelters – and the minister mentioned this a number of times. You indicated that the funding for women's shelters is maintained. It has not notably increased. I mean, there's a slight increase, but it's really just maintained.

Minister, given the passage of Clare's law and your comments in the House on that law, where you indicated you hope that this bill would seek to eradicate domestic violence – and we had repeated conversations about the importance of the effectiveness of the bill being on actually providing resources to women who are in situations of domestic violence – if the bill were to work as I believe the minister hopes it will work, we will see an increase in the number of women who might actually seek to leave their violent domestic situation upon having information about their partner's violent criminal background. My question, though, is that I see a little bit of a disconnect between what is allocated in the budget with respect to implementation of Clare's law as compared to the funding that's being provided to women's shelters. Frankly, if more women are going to be leaving this domestic violence situation, they need to have the resources, and one of those key resources is making sure that there is accessibility and space in women's shelters. Given that there is no notable increase – as you've mentioned several times, it's simply maintaining – how do you see this budget supporting women leaving those violent situations?

11:50

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you for that question. Implementation of the disclosure to protect against domestic violence, or Alberta's version of Clare's law, is going to take place next year, as you may be aware. If we're looking at our estimate to actuals, there is a slight increase in funding for women's shelters of almost half a million dollars. You know, we've also put some increases into community supports and family safety. You'll notice that that has increased by almost \$4 million between the actual and the estimate. We have maintained funding for FCSS as well, and that funding is also preventative in nature. So there will be some supports that will be at the community level that will help support this legislation in the future.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

Does that mean that you anticipate in future budget years that more money will be allocated to women's shelters?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Right now we are maintaining the funding for women's shelters, and I think that if we go back to the legislation that was introduced, it's another tool that's preventative in nature. What I'm expecting to see is not necessarily that we'll see more women or individuals accessing shelter services but that they'll be in a position where they can make informed decisions about the relationships that they may potentially be entering so that they never even get to that point where they'll require shelter services. That was the intention of that legislation, to actually prevent that situation from occurring in the first place.

**Ms Pancholi:** Right. Just to be clear, though, the bill is actually about allowing women who are in violent partnerships, relationships to find out about their partner's background and

criminal background; therefore, they're already in those situations. It is to support them leaving those situations, so the hope is that that information would empower them or perhaps allow them to take that final step to leave. As we've talked about in the House, those are actually critical times. When a woman is seeking to leave a violent partnership or relationship, it's actually when they are most at risk, when they are most in need of resources. Again, I go back to: is there an intention to increase funding for women's shelters once the act is fully implemented?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Again, you know, there are probably a variety of different situations that we can anticipate in terms of this legislation and how it will apply, and it's really difficult to anticipate what they all might be. But right now funding is maintained for women's shelters, as I've said, and it looks like it will be . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I do note that . . .

**Mrs. Sawhney:** I just wanted to . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** . . . a number of the stakeholders that are involved are pretty clear that the need for women's shelters space and access will actually increase.

Along that note, if I may, Minister, I just want to ask a question about women's emergency shelters that are in rural indigenous on-reserve locations. In particular, I understand that there are currently fee-for-service agreements with five rural indigenous on-reserve women's emergency shelters. What is the capacity of those shelters? It looks like the budget amount in 2018 was approximately \$800,000. Will there be a change in that support for these on-reserve shelters?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** That's a great question. That is part of the review that we'll be undertaking to try to get, I guess, a better understanding of what the capacity shortfalls are, which stakeholders we need to be engaging with more closely so that we have more information to determine what those needs are going to be.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I understand that probably my colleague will ask a little bit more about that this afternoon.

I just wanted to ask one more question. We note that you've mentioned a number of times that you've worked collaboratively with the Minister of Children's Services to address – overall, there's a lot of overlap between the needs of those people who access services for both ministries. In particular, we know that the Ministry of Children's Services has cut supports, the support and financial assistance agreements for youth who grew up in care who are now transitioning to adulthood. They reduced the eligibility, and therefore 500 young people are no longer going to have access to that support. The Minister of Children's Services has stated that that is because she believes that those young people will be seeking access to supports such as AISH, PDD. I'm just wondering if you have worked collaboratively with the Minister of Children's Services to account for within this budget the 500 additional young people who will be seeking supports, not only to manage that increased caseload but also to address wait times since these young people will have their supports cut off in six months.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** In answer to, "Have I worked with the Minister of Children's Services?" absolutely. We work very closely together in terms of understanding where our ministries intersect, and we will continue to work together to support these adults who will be moving out of the child intervention system. Our ministry is going to assist with employment supports, income assistance, housing,

disability supports if and when required. This will mean that we are going to have a slight intake in our CSS programs, and that is planned for. Again, we'll work very closely with Children's Services to make sure that . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. When you say that it's been planned for in terms of maybe the increased caseload that will result – although I note that a number of these young people, had they been eligible for AISH or PDD, would have been determined to be eligible at the age of 18. So if they were not at 18, are you making special accommodation for them now at age 22? Additionally, would you say that you're going to fast-track these young people in terms of their applications given the short timelines before they were cut off their services right now?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** What I will say is this. I'm working very closely with Children's Services to determine what the needs of these young individuals are, and we have planned for a slight intake in our CSS budget in support of these individuals. Of course, we'd have to work very closely, have a better understanding of what their needs are. So there would be some interaction with . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Then, Minister, that evaluation of those particular 500 young people has not already taken place?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** We're working together, and we are having conversations. We're determining the next steps as we speak.

**Ms Pancholi:** Minister, thank you.

So it's possible, then, that when those 500 individuals – I agree. Those assessments have to be individualized, right? They have to be based on the particular needs of that young person. Therefore, it's quite possible that a number of those young people who are now going to be cut off of those assistance agreements won't actually be eligible for AISH or PDD. Is that correct?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** You know, I can't comment on that because I don't know the specifics of what these individual circumstances are. I wish I could. I wish I had more . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** So those conversations did not take place before the decision was made to cut those people off that assistance?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, no. No. We had a conversation, and we've been working very closely together to determine what is the best way to support these vulnerable individuals.

**Ms Pancholi:** What is the decision around what the best way to support them is?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Well, as I've just mentioned, I know that there will be a slight increase in the intake in CSS to help support these individuals, and we're committed to doing that.

**Ms Pancholi:** That includes potentially fast-tracking those applications if necessary?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** If you're asking me specific information about these 500 individuals in terms of their individual needs and assessments, I can't comment on that at this point.

**Ms Pancholi:** Well, the reason why I asked . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Member. Thank you, Minister.

We will now go back to the government caucus side. It is my understanding that Mr. Guthrie will continue. My apologies. Mr. Long will continue. Go ahead, sir. You have a couple of minutes.

**Mr. Long:** Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for your time today. I know that in our time getting to know each other, you have exhibited the heart that this ministry needs. This ministry is more than dollars and cents. It is dealing with real people who need you to approach them at the level that they're coming in at. I believe, from my experience in getting to know you, that you have the right heart for this ministry. So thank you for that.

I've met already in the last few months with a number of community services personnel in my constituency of West Yellowhead, which, as most people know, is rural, and rural Alberta has no shortage of need for community services. What I've found from your front-line staff is that, again, they exhibit this passion for people. It's second to none, really. The one group I talked to: they were telling me about one of their programs with youth, where they take youth and they actually go to the seniors' facility in town because they know that that benefits both the youth in their

development and in their interaction with the seniors, and obviously it benefits the seniors as well because a lot of the seniors at that particular facility don't have family close by. So for them to interact with those youth like that, it . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Member. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise that the time allotted this morning for this item of business has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet this afternoon at 3:30 p.m. to continue our consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. There is a note of a change, that we will be in the Rocky Mountain Room this afternoon, so please be mindful of that.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]





