



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
3:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 30-1-9

**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)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UCP)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)**
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UCP)
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

* substitution for Laila Goodridge

** substitution for Rakhi Pancholi

Also in Attendance

Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (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

3:30 p.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. Well, thank you very much. Good afternoon to everybody. 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, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am Mike Ellis the MLA for Calgary-West, and I'm substituting for Ms Goodridge as chair of this committee. We will continue starting to my right.

Ms Sigurdson: Good afternoon. I'm Lori Sigurdson. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview.

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

Ms Glasgo: I'm Michaela Glasgo, MLA for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

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

Mr. Walker: Good afternoon. Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Rutherford: Brad Rutherford, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Rajan Sawhney, MLA for Calgary-North East and Minister of Community and Social Services. To my left I have Mr. Chi Loo, assistant deputy minister. To my right I have Deputy Minister Shannon Marchand, and to his right is Mr. Olin Lovely, senior financial officer.

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

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, Calgary-McCall.

Ms Ganley: Kathleen Ganley, Calgary-Mountain View.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. We had two members just joining us. We'll start with Mr. Yao.

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

Mr. Amery: Good afternoon. Mick Amery, Calgary-Cross.

The Acting Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much. I'd just like to note the following substitutions officially for the record. We did have Ms Renaud for Ms Pancholi.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and 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, the speaking orders, and time. Okay. A total of six hours has been scheduled for consideration for the estimates for the Ministry of Community and Social Services. For the record I would note that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities has completed three hours of debate in this respect.

As we enter our fourth hour of debate, I will remind everyone that the speaking rotation for these meetings is provided for in the

Standing Order 59.01(6), and we are now at the point in the rotation where speaking times are limited to a maximum of five minutes. Members have the option of combining their speaking time with the minister for a maximum of 10 minutes. Please remember to advise the chair at the beginning of your rotation if you wish to combine your time with the minister. Discussion should follow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time is combined.

If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to the chair or the committee clerk about the process. 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 to having the break? Seeing none.

When we adjourned our meeting this morning, we were approximately two minutes into the exchange between Mr. Long and the minister. I will now invite Mr. Long or another member of the government caucus to complete the remaining time in this rotation. Mr. Long, you have eight minutes and four seconds. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Chair. Once again, thank you, Minister, and the ministry staff. You know, I can't really pick up where I left off because I can't remember where I left off, so I'll sort of start again if that's all right. In my communities in West Yellowhead, obviously, I get to represent rural communities, and the ministry that you represent makes a major impact in my communities. I just want to commend your front-line staff in my communities. They are absolutely fantastic people. They wear their heart on their sleeve, and I can't say enough about the job that they do to make our communities better. I know that's something that you exude as well, just your heart on your sleeve. You want to get the job done and you want to get it right, so that flows down through your ministry.

You know, I chatted with one group, and they said that it gets lost sometimes everyone that they're serving and helping in the community. They put a little tag on it that they serve everyone from cradle to crypt. Like, they're so involved and enmeshed within the lives of the members of that community. As I say, there isn't enough time today to say all of the good things of the front-line staff and their contributions into making people's lives just a little bit better. From my office I just want to thank you and your ministry for what they're doing in our communities.

That said, I do have a few questions today. If I can start here, this morning we did hear a number of question about AISH, and we know it's an important initiative. It's vital for you and for this ministry to uphold AISH. There are many Albertans that are benefiting from the program. There have been some concerns, though, about the sustainability of AISH, and so I was wondering if you can speak to the sustainability of the program?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. First, I'd like to thank you for your kind comments. They're deeply appreciated, and I'm very fortunate that I have very capable and dedicated staff within the ministry and department. I'm pleased that you are able to see that as well. So thank you for that.

In regards to sustainability I know that I had mentioned it many times this morning, and sometimes when you're talking about a concept and you're talking about it over and over again, it can tend to lose meaning. We can become a little desensitized to a word that gets used several times in a context. So when it comes to sustainability, I'm going to tell a little bit of a story if I may. You'll indulge me.

I have a colleague that I used to work with back in 2007, and at that time when I knew him, he was newly married, and I had just – actually, I think it was in 2009. It was, because I had just given birth to my twins at that time. So when we would have conversations, I would talk about my children and he would talk about his various travels. About a month ago I received an e-mail from him, and we haven't really been seeing each other a whole lot over the years. In this e-mail he shared a family photo. He has three daughters. Two of his daughters are maybe four, maybe two, I think, and he also has a newborn.

So in this e-mail he congratulated me for the election and for being minister, and he also said that he and his wife were struggling because their newborn daughter was born with Down's syndrome. I haven't had a chance to actually touch base with him, but I've been reflecting on that e-mail. I've been reflecting on my relationship with this gentleman and the things that we spoke about, and when I was thinking about his daughter – and she may or may not need supports with FSCD or PDD and AISH. It's hard to say, but let's assume that she would. So as I was thinking about this beautiful little girl, I thought – you know what? – God willing, she lives a long life. And he sent me a photo and she's smiling and she's absolutely precious. If she is going to need these supports – FSCD, PDD, AISH – in the future, she'll need them for 80 years and more. I'm not going to be here 80 years from now. Nobody in this room is going to be here 80 years from now, but I'm committed to doing whatever I can to make sure that these programs and these services are going to be here for at least that amount of time and more.

There are so many stories like this that I can share with you. In my personal life before becoming minister, before becoming an elected servant, public servant, one of the comments that I used to hear more than anything else from parents who have a child with a disability is: what happens after I'm gone? That's every parent's greatest fear: "What happens to my child after I leave? What services and what programs will be available for that child or adult?"

Those are the conversations that keep circling in my mind, and as I move forward in terms of wanting to undertake a comprehensive review of all of those programs, that's a lens that I use to try to understand. What can we do to ensure that this program is around for the long term? What that absolutely requires as well is economic recovery. How do we fund these programs? They are funded through corporate tax revenues, they're funded through income tax revenues, they're funded through resource revenues, so this is a vital part of the puzzle in terms of having that conversation about sustainability, having that strategy around sustainability. So when I talk about things like my values 100 per cent aligning with this budget that we put together for 2019, that's what I'm talking about. We need economic recovery. We need to increase our government revenues so we can ensure that that these programs are around for a long, long time.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. So from what I have seen in my communities that I represent, I witnessed that the staff there understand that rural Alberta needs to be handled a little bit differently than urban Alberta. It's substantially different in some cases compared to major centres. Even still, I really admire what I'm seeing as far as their co-operation with other community programs and trying to find wraparound services and work on efficiencies. The communication that I see from the front-line staff within my communities, it is honestly second to none, to look for those efficiencies. Inevitably, they're so focused on making sure that the people who are relying on this ministry don't get lost or missed or forgotten.

3:40

That is absolutely, obviously, essential for our communities, to not just stay where they're at but for them to move ahead and not forget the people who do need our help – right? – whether it's getting back on our feet or . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Long.

We will now go to the Official Opposition side. Member Renaud, go ahead, please.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to dive right in, and I'm going to look at the section about employment and income support. There are a number of lines.

Again, I don't have a lot of time, and I do have a lot of questions and some information to clarify. I understand the philosophy that we talked a lot about this morning, but I'm wondering if we can just focus on if there are some very specific answers that you have. If not, I'm happy to get anything in writing before we vote on the actual budget. That would be super helpful.

I'm going to go to page 52 of government estimates. I note an overall increase in employment and income supports from 2018-19 actuals of \$60.5 million, for a total of \$985 million. That's great. Any time there is an increase, obviously, there is a lot of pressure on this program. However, when I look at the ministry business plan on page 30, I see a significant decrease in the targets for the next three years. If you look at page 30, there's a reduction of income supports of \$47.2 million for '20-21, a further reduction of \$81 million for '21-22, and another reduction of \$64 million for '22-23, for a total reduction in income supports of \$192 million. Just to clarify. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is projecting to cut employment and income supports by \$192 million by '22-23. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That is correct, and . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay. Line item 2.1 – oh. I'm sorry. Did I cut you off?

Mrs. Sawhney: Oh. Well, I'm happy to expand on that.

Ms Renaud: No, that's all right. I get it.

Line item 2.1 on page 52 of government estimates states that program planning and delivery is being cut by \$4.9 million. I'm just wondering. I know you mentioned it earlier today, about locations around Alberta currently offering on-site employment and income supports. Will that number be reduced or consolidated? Like, will offices be consolidated at all? I think there were around 50 or so offices.

Mrs. Sawhney: There are 52 Alberta support centres throughout the province. I'm sorry. Can you clarify your question again? You're talking about 2.1.

Ms Renaud: Two point one on 52. Yeah; 2.1 under employment and income supports. So we've got program planning and delivery. I'm just – actually, I'm going to scratch that header. I'm sorry about that. I skipped ahead to another question.

Let me just ask a more broad question in this section. You said there are 52 locations around Alberta. I think there are four in Calgary, four in Edmonton, and the rest are probably just throughout Alberta. Can you just tell me if any of those are being closed, or are any being consolidated?

Mrs. Sawhney: No.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Excellent.

Line item 2.2, which is income support. Now, again, there are the two programs: income support for people expected to work and income support for people with barriers to work. Line 2.2, which is income support for people expected to work, saw a pretty healthy increase of about \$82 million. Clearly, you had some numbers to work with to make this increase. Can you tell me what the annual growth or intake is, or caseload growth even? I noticed on the fiscal plan you talk about AISH, PDD, and FSCD but not income support. So is there an annual, like, caseload growth or program growth?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, the year-over-year change in this particular program is really varied over the years. I can tell you that for 2019-20 the projection is at around 2.9 per cent.

Sorry. Just to go back. What was the number that you were referencing in terms of the increase?

Ms Renaud: Line 2.2, wasn't it? Income support for people . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: What number were you using in terms of the increase in the budget? We're going back and forth between estimate and actual . . .

Ms Renaud: Yeah, we are. Okay. Let's just settle on that there was a significant increase to income support for people expected to work, whether or not we're comparing to actual or budget. All I'm saying is that that's great. That's great.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay.

Ms Renaud: Just so we're clear, people who receive financial benefits under this line – that would be income support, expected to work – are people who are able to sustain employment but don't have the resources to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, child care, transportation. Essentially, they're unemployed and not receiving employment insurance benefits. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: That's correct.

Ms Renaud: Okay. A single person receiving income support, expected to work, receives a monthly amount of \$745. Correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: That's correct.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Could you tell me: do you know – you know, you may use a different mechanism to measure this – what the income cut-off or poverty line is in Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: The market-basket measure, I believe, is slightly more than \$1,600. I'm not sure what the LICO is at this point.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So roughly twice what someone would be getting on income support.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, twice the core rate that you just quoted, but of course income support has so many other aspects to it other than just the core rate. There are benefits. There are supplementary benefits.

Ms Renaud: Right. But a single person wouldn't likely qualify for, like, child care and all of those things, so this core rate, \$745, is pretty close to what a single person would get.

Mrs. Sawhney: That is correct, but also keep in mind that there's also an allowance or an exemption in terms of earning income on top of that. Of course, I mentioned the supplementary benefits, too.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Okay. Fair enough.

Does the ministry plan to introduce any eligibility criteria changes to income support, expected to work, in the next few years?

Mrs. Sawhney: There are no plans as of now. Again I'll go back to what I was saying earlier today. Everything is currently under review, and it's early days to say definitively, in any way, shape, or form, anything to do with eligibility.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I'm going to move to line 2.3, which is income supports for people with barriers to full employment. They saw a quite a bit smaller increase, although an increase nonetheless, than income support, expected to work. Income support, barriers, saw an increase of I think it was \$5 million. Can you tell me: do you have an approximate number of Albertans who received support in 2018-19 in this, income support with barriers?

Mrs. Sawhney: I would say, just based on the numbers I have here, that it's a little bit less than 23,000.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Is there a number that you're looking at, like, a target, for 2019-2020, or are you just going off the actual numbers from the year before?

Mrs. Sawhney: No. We're looking at historicals as well. We do have a projection that is slightly less than 23,000 as well.

Ms Renaud: Less? Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. Less than 23,000.

Ms Renaud: Just based on the state of the economy and jobs and knowing what you know, I guess I'm wondering: why would your projection or estimate be lower?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, we do have a flat projection because some of these folks do end up applying for AISH, and they do end up entering the AISH program.

Ms Renaud: Sure. But that's always been the case, so I'm assuming that would have been the case in other years. What makes this year different?

Mrs. Sawhney: I think that's been consistent with previous years as well.

Ms Renaud: Okay. But you said that the projection for next year is going down.

Mrs. Sawhney: No, I said that it's flat. It's going to be relatively flat.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Just flat. Fair enough.

Again, in order to be eligible for income support, barriers, a person has to, among other things, be unable to pay basic needs, not have, for example, more than \$5,000 in RRSPs, \$10,000 equity in a vehicle, not be eligible for another program. I noticed it was either in – your platform or your business plan talked about investing \$500,000 to expand access for people with disabilities to RDSPs. I'm just wondering: would that also be included, RDSP exemption? I didn't notice it. Maybe it's in the policy somewhere. Are RDSPs also exempt, or is there an amount in here?

3:50

Mrs. Sawhney: That is not included as an exemption in the program.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Any considerations to change that?

Mrs. Sawhney: No, not at this time.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Would it be fair to say that some of the barriers as defined in the legislation, regulation include, for people that are eligible for this kind of support and do not qualify for AISH – those would be folks that, say, have chronic severe mental health issues, people diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or autistic Albertans.

Mrs. Sawhney: I think that when we're looking at the clients who are accessing these services, I mean, there's a diversity in their needs and their disabilities. Certainly, I won't make any assumptions at this point as to what characterizes . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now go to the government caucus side. We last concluded with Mr. Long. Do you wish to continue, sir?

Mr. Long: Yes, please.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Mr. Long: To start with, Minister, there was something that was brought up early on by the member opposite about things, some funding – was it from income supports? – and you wanted to expand on that earlier. Did you still want to expand on that?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm sorry. You'll have to remind me what that was.

Mr. Long: Sorry. I just caught that there was a cutting of \$190 million from something, I thought, but you had wanted to expand on it earlier. I just wanted to know if you still wanted to expand on that. If not, that's fine.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I think, yeah, this is – you know what? Why don't we just move on to the next question, but I'm happy to talk about that afterwards. I think the overall message was that we're not cutting anything, that the budget has actually increased.

Mr. Long: Okay. Thank you for confirming that. Appreciate that.

On page 93 of your fiscal plan it says that the ministry is pausing the indexing of AISH and income support. Would you be willing to explain what that means and why the indexing is being paused?

Mrs. Sawhney: Absolutely. First, I just want to emphasize and reiterate – I mean, it's worth saying many, many times over because I think there may be folks who are listening and folks who might be reading later on. I want to, as I said, emphasize that I know how important social programs like AISH and income support are for the tens of thousands of Albertans who rely on them, and this government knows how important these programs are. It goes back to the comments that I made around sustainability for future generations. We know, if we look at the historical data – and I think everybody in this room will agree that the caseloads have been growing at a rapid rate, an unexpectedly rapid rate. I knew right away, looking at the numbers within two weeks of becoming minister, that this was going to be an issue in the future, the sustainability question. As has been mentioned, AISH caseloads have grown by 17 per cent in the last four years.

But I also want to remind and state once again that in January of 2019 the benefit rates for AISH and income support were increased, and that was based on the CPI from the years prior. So right now we do have the highest rates for AISH in the country, and in fact the rates are at a historical high. They've never been this high. We are committed to maintaining those rates. It was the right thing to do, to bring them up in January. You know, those benefits are also

supplemented by health benefits and supplementary benefits in addition to the low-income transit pass. I mean, there are a number of things that I could speak about.

Having said all of this and having an understanding of how the caseloads are growing and will continue to grow – I mean, we're seeing an increasing prevalence in disabilities as well, and we're experiencing population growth, improved diagnoses, and more awareness of the program – it was a decision, a government-wide decision, that was made to pause indexing, which actually was supposed to commence in January of 2020. Thus far, there hasn't been any indexing of these benefits. That needs to be clear as well. They historically have never been indexed.

The government-wide decision was made not to commence indexing in January because, quite frankly, we need to work our way back to balance. We need to get our finances in order. We need to ensure that we focus on growth in our economy, that we're creating jobs so that we're able to increase government revenues, ultimately to pay for these social services.

Mr. Long: Okay. Thank you, Minister. I'm assuming that a lot of the people who have given push-back weren't aware that the indexing hadn't actually happened; it was going to happen then.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Mr. Long: Yeah. Like, I appreciate the explanation. Thank you for that. To that point, will the ministry consider indexing in the future?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. As soon as we come to a position where we've experienced some financial recovery as a government, as a province, yes, there will be consideration to index the benefits to CPI.

Mr. Long: Again I'll keep on this for another little bit. For 2019 the savings by pausing indexing, I'm assuming: it's estimated that the savings will be \$3 million for income supports and \$7 million for AISH. What will the projected savings be through to 2023?

Mrs. Sawhney: That's a good question. Pausing indexing of AISH and income support benefit rates will save more than \$300 million by 2023. It's really important to put this into context and point out that funding is indeed being used as well to support caseload growth in order to have sustainability built into this program.

Again, you know, I just do want to emphasize – I'm actually going to go back to the original point that you made, that maybe there isn't a lot of awareness that these programs haven't been indexed. That is the case. When I've been speaking to folks – I have family members, by the way, who are recipients of AISH benefits. I have a first cousin who is also a PDD client. Despite having received AISH for many, many years – her sister and I spoke – she herself didn't know that these benefits were not indexed, so, you know, I walked her through it and explained about that. They have never been indexed since inception of the program. Indexing was to commence in January of 2020, and that's been paused simply because we're not there. Like, financially, we're not there, and we really need to make sure that we're taking a hard look as to how we're going to keep these programs viable in the long term.

Just that discussion alone with somebody who's very up to speed and knows these programs: it was very revealing to me that there needs to be some more communication, some very compassionate, some effective communication to folks who are out there who are worried that somehow this means that they're going to lose benefits. That's not the case. The case right now is that the core benefits were increased in January of 2019. They are going to stay there, and we stand by that increase.

Of course, members of this government who were in opposition when that was approved – I mean, we stand by that decision. It was the right thing to do. But indexing itself, as a government-wide decision: it was a fiscally responsible decision to make across the board to suspend indexing at this time with a focus of revisiting in the future.

Mr. Long: Okay. Thank you. Again I'll stay with that. What particular indicators would you expect to occur that would actually bring that indexing back for Albertans accessing these programs?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'd like to say, first of all, that we haven't repealed any legislation in regard to indexing. It can easily be reinstated by amending the regulations in the future. We are all, all of us in this room, invested in economic recovery. We're all invested in bringing jobs back to Alberta, bringing investment back to Alberta, and that's what we need to see. Keeping that in mind, it's really difficult to speculate on exact timelines or exact dates as to when indexing could commence.

4:00

Certainly, it is on pause right now while we work our way back to balance, and based on our economic assumptions – you have probably seen those in our fiscal plan – they clearly outline economic recovery. We see unemployment rates going down by 2023, we see revenue projections also increasing in those years, and that's reflective of a certain level of economic recovery. When that happens, that will be potentially a good time to revisit it, and hopefully it'll be sooner, right? This is what I'm trying to say, that it's very difficult to speculate on the date. It's very much dependent on our financial situation and economic recovery.

Mr. Long: Well, thank you for that, Minister.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition. Member Renaud, go ahead, please.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you. Just carrying on where we left off, you mentioned that the approximate number of people on income support with barriers for last year was almost 23,000, and then you said that your projection for the next year – so it would be 2020-2021 – was going down. Right?

Mrs. Sawhney: It was going to be flat.

Ms Renaud: Oh. I'm sorry. Flat. That's right. I keep making the mistake.

Okay. You said that it was going to be flat. Now, I'm assuming it's actually some of the same officials that probably put this information together – maybe they can speak to it – but when I look at the numbers for barriers to full employment from 2014 to 2018, they go up quite a bit every year. In fact, in 2017-2018 it went from 20,794 to 22,638. I don't really understand where the flat comes from because they've gone up significantly every year.

Mrs. Sawhney: And they did go up significantly in those years because we had a very significant decline in the economy, and we just had . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay. So we're still having trouble. Now, keep in mind . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: We still are.

Ms Renaud: . . . that this is less about employment, right? These are folks that have significant disabilities in some cases, mental

illness, and they have significant barriers to employment. So chances are that employment is not something that's going to come easy for them, but they don't qualify for AISH yet. They only get \$866 a month. My question. This rate hasn't changed for years, and it's less impacted by unemployment numbers, but your projection is to keep it flat. I guess I'm worried because with that, coupled with the consistent decline in funding or monies that you've dedicated to this program, I also see that going down over the out-years. I'm just wondering where the flat projection comes from.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I am going to let Shannon, actually, my deputy minister, respond to that to give you some more detail.

But before I hand the floor over to him, I just want to make a slight correction. Earlier I had said that RDSPs are not exempt, and they are exempt.

Ms Renaud: Oh. Great. Excellent.

Mrs. Sawhney: I just wanted to clarify that before we move on. Shannon.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services. There has been the past growth in the program. A significant number of people who are receiving the barriers to full employment benefits are also making application for the AISH program, and based on, particularly over the last couple of years, the growth in the number of people receiving AISH, we forecast and have a pretty solid sense that we are going to see that barriers to full employment number remain basically flat, with, you know, a little bit of growth offset by individuals going onto the AISH program.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So you've got young people, you know, with Children's Services – and I know you can't speak for Children's Services. We've got, let's say, potentially 500 people, and probably a fraction of those will qualify for AISH, because it is kind of tough. So you're going to end up with people on income support. If you're keeping this number flat – and we've identified some other areas where funding will no longer be available – where do these cost pressures come in? Like, where is this budget responding to those new cost pressures from other ministries?

Mrs. Sawhney: What are you specifically referring to? What other ministries are you . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay. Kids that were in foster care, kids that were in care: they used to be supported until age 24, and that's been changed to 22. The comment was that these young people would either be funded by AISH or some other mechanism. You understand that eligibility for AISH is significant. I'm thinking that a lot of these folks that will lose that funding will end up on income support, but you're telling us that this is a flat projected growth. I'm guessing that cuts to other areas, other ministries, other programs will result in people needing the social safety net of income support with barriers, yet your projection is flat.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, these are our best estimates at this time. Certainly, I had mentioned before that we are working closely with Children's Services. We do realize that additional supports will be required for those young folks who are impacted. We also know that there's going to be a slight intake in CSS, but it's really hard to say at this point where that uptake is going to be, whether it's going to be in income support for those expected to work or in barriers for full employment or in AISH. I cannot give you a specific answer to your question.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thanks, Minister.

I just wanted to make a comment. You talked a lot about sustainability. Let's remember that these are folks that have not qualified for AISH but have significant barriers to employment. They're trying to live on \$866 a month. Now, the indexing included income support. It's not a big increase. Yes, it was the first time that we did it, and it was a great thing, actually, because it meant that people with disabilities or barriers to employment didn't have to wait for the price of oil, let's say, to go up. I'm just saying that. I'm not saying that they're directly related. But they didn't have to wait till other things got better for them to be taken care of. For someone who has significant disability or barriers like fetal alcohol or like, you know, being autistic but not qualifying for AISH, to live on \$866 a month is brutal. I think that you would agree.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, you know, what I want to say to that – and it does go back to sustainability – is that there are going to be a number of Albertans who are going to need these supports. Yes, I'm glad that the benefit rates increased. It boggles my mind a little bit, to be quite frank, that it happened so late in the previous government's mandate. I mean, certainly, if it was as much of a priority as has been indicated, I'm surprised that it wasn't done earlier. However . . .

Ms Renaud: Well, it took 44 years of a Conservative government. We had four years. I wish it would have happened 30 years ago.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, that shouldn't be a reason.

Ms Renaud: I agree with you there. I agree with you. It should have happened a long, long time ago, but what my point is . . .

The Acting Chair: Members, we're getting argumentative here. Again, a question and an answer. Okay?

Ms Renaud: Okay. But what my point is here is that for somebody to try to live on \$866 is impossible. What then happens is that the pressure gets added to other organizations like, say, the food bank or to other programs like rent supplement, like affordable housing. If you couple all of the problems that we're hearing about – you know, we're tightening up here; we're changing this – we're stressing out a social safety net that has been in place, that needs to be in place particularly for people on income support with barriers, because \$866 without a cost-of-living increase is really tough to live on.

I guess my question is: how do you sustain the system? How do you sustain this? Like, how is this sustainable? How is it sustainable to keep these rates for income support with barriers? How is that sustainable in terms of the larger community?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. First, I'll start off by saying that when we look at our interjurisdictional comparators – and I know that the previous government looked at them as well; certainly, that's a common practice when you're looking at any kind of social services program – Alberta's rates are higher than our comparators. In fact, the rates that we have right now are higher than they've ever been.

I appreciate your comments about the actual rates. You know, it would be wonderful if we were in a period of economic recovery right now and we had more government revenues and we could do more. We're just not there right now. So in regard to sustainability, that's why we have to go back and that's why I have to go back and do a very, very deep-dive, comprehensive review of all of our programs to try to determine what we can do, going forward, to ensure the sustainability.

4:10

Ms Renaud: Okay. Well, I would suggest that it's more about choices than waiting for something to happen. It's about making a commitment to people, to Albertans. I mean, again, these are people living on \$866 a month. They don't have big voices. I would suggest that this is about choices.

I'm just curious. This is about income support for barriers and for expected to work. Can you tell me approximately how many FTEs are in this area, work in this area?

Mrs. Sawhney: I believe we have about 1,300 FTEs.

Ms Renaud: About 1,300? And that's all across Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I think the target was 233 FTEs sort of lost or gone by attrition or whatever else. Do you anticipate losing FTEs in this area?

Mrs. Sawhney: The numbers that you just quoted, 223 . . .

Ms Renaud: Two hundred and thirty-three.

Mrs. Sawhney: . . . that's across . . .

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

We will now move back to the government caucus side. We concluded with Mr. Long. We'll go now to Mr. Guthrie. Is that correct, sir?

Mr. Guthrie: Were you done?

Mr. Long: Yeah.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Who is it? Mr. Nixon?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Yes, please.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Back and forth between you and the minister?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: For sure.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here and for the dedication that you've already shown to put into this file and to vulnerable people here in Alberta.

I'd like to echo what the Member for St. Albert just said, that this is about choices, and I think that you've made a lot of good choices in here. When you take a look at the last four years and the choice to plunge Alberta \$63 billion in debt and increase our debt financing to \$2 billion a year and put us on a trajectory to paying \$4 billion in debt financing, which, I have to note, is the size of your budget, I have to ask: if we're spending \$2 billion to \$4 billion a year in debt financing, how does that impact your ability to serve vulnerable people in our communities?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, clearly, those are dollars that are not being spent on vulnerable Albertans, and we are all very well aware that we are on that trajectory of reaching \$100 billion in debt. I think the numbers translate to more than 5 and a half million dollars per day in interest charges, and as Minister of Community and Social Services it's painful for me that we are spending this money on servicing our debt, which is why it's even more important that as a government we're razor focused on economic recovery. That's why

I'm very supportive of our job-creation tax cut, because it's really going to be the mechanism that's going to bring investment back into this province.

I know that when I was working in the oil and gas industry and I was having conversations in 2015, 2016, when the previous government had put some policies in place that actually signalled to investors and people who were planning to invest capital in this province that maybe this might be a politically risky environment to invest in, I knew at that time that something had to change. Otherwise, we were going to be going down this downhill spiral, and that is indeed what's happened.

So, circling back to your question, yes, absolutely, it's an untenable situation. It's untenable. It goes back to my comments about being unsustainable, and the sooner we get back to balance, the sooner we'll have more options and more choices, as you just mentioned, in terms of how we're going to deliver social services.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Yeah. I appreciate that. It is obviously a big part of the reason why I ran. As you know, my background is in working with the homeless population in Calgary. I worked with a lot of people on AISH.

I know my hon. colleague just asked a few questions on AISH that I wanted to ask, but he's asked them already. I want to get on the record with this in regard to my strong support for AISH and making sure that we're funding and helping the most vulnerable people in our community and, actually, to acknowledge the former minister in regard to the increase for AISH support. I think, you know, it is acknowledgement that we are the most generous province in regard to AISH support, support for people who are severely handicapped in our community. I think that's something that we should be proud of, and I thank you for continuing to fund that. You know, I think that just because we pay a lot more doesn't mean that we're paying too much. I think it means that the other provinces have a little bit of work to catch up, so thank you for maintaining that.

When I was working with folks at the Mustard Seed, often we'd work with folks on AISH that would come in on our shelter floor. Because the payments were so low, they couldn't afford a home, or they couldn't afford food, or they couldn't even afford those necessities. I think that this was a big bump, and combining that with efforts to increase affordable housing and other supports in place for vulnerable people in our community, I think we can go a long way in making sure we have a great community for all people.

But I have to note the shame that four years ago we did not work towards curbing this massive spending and that we've put at risk these vital social services and supports in our community. I commend our government in their efforts towards trying to curb that so that we can protect these services going forward. I also want to acknowledge that in spite of 3 per cent cuts across the board, 3 cents on the dollar, this government has invested more in regard to social services supports and just how critical it is that we don't lose the progress that's been made in this area in regard to helping people rise above poverty and connect in the community in meaningful ways. I wanted to make sure I got that on the record.

The other thing is that I support indexing. Since I first ran in 2012, 2015, I advocated for indexing because I talked to so many people at the door who, without that certainty of kind of ongoing funds, kind of every six years were begging the government to give them a little bit more. It didn't make a lot of sense. I appreciate that we need to get our fiscal house in order and get back to balance, and I'm fully supportive of pausing indexing as we work towards that, but, you know, I think in the future we need to get back to it and acknowledge that. So thank you.

Diving into my questions, one of the comments earlier was talking about civil society. I think civil society is more than just our not-for-profit organizations and community volunteers. It's also our families and our communities. It's bigger than just NGOs. Speaking of families and kind of making sure that our province is working towards partnering with civil societies, we hear stories about parents who are struggling in our community with children with disabilities, and we know that we want to provide appropriate support and timely support. I've heard stories of families that drop off children with Children's Services because their child is disabled, and they don't have the support and resources to be able to help support those kids. I think it's so important for us as a community to get behind these families, which are part of our civil society, and help strengthen those family units, whether that be through respite or funding.

My question is that in the summer some disability advocacy associations raised concerns about slowdown in the review process regarding applications for persons with developmental disabilities and family supports for children with disabilities. I just want to know: is there funding in the budget to address this and these concerns from my constituents?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Well, thank you for your question. I always enjoy hearing about your work experience and your background because you have rich experience that you bring as a member of our caucus and as a member of our government. You've been able to provide valuable advice to me as well on occasion, so I thank you for that. I'll echo your commending our colleague the former minister, MLA Sabir, as well for the good work in terms of bringing up that rate because, obviously, we all think it's the right thing to do, to bring that core rate up, and we stand by it. Unfortunately, indexing is paused right now, as we all know, because financially we're just not there.

In answering your question, as you know, Budget 2019 for disability services is \$1.3 billion, and that's an increase of \$66 million, or more than 5 per cent. There's a clear recognition that the PDD program and family support for children with disabilities, or the FSCD, program are important resources for individuals who have disabilities and their families. That's why Budget 2019 increases the funding for caseload growth for both programs, so the money is definitely there in the budget. Currently PDD helps about slightly shy of 13,000 adults with developmental disabilities, and slightly shy of 15,000 children and their families are receiving FSCD.

4:20

There were concerns in the summertime regarding timelines for application and review processes for PDD and FSCD. I do want to assure you and everybody who's here and who's listening that eligibility has not changed for these programs. It never did. My staff continues to complete service agreements and renewals with very consistent and thorough decision-making, and it is standard practice that those Albertans who have the most critical and urgent needs will continue to be prioritized for services.

As I've mentioned many times today, we've seen tremendous caseload growth in these programs. On page 2 of our fiscal plan you can see – we've outlined it there – that caseloads for FSCD have increased by 30 per cent and PDD by 14 per cent over the past four years. If you contrast that with the population growth . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. I hesitate to interrupt.

We will continue with the Official Opposition. I see Member Sabir. Okay. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you both, MLA Nixon and Minister, for all the praise. Let me begin by saying that I was in charge of this file. I may not have fixed everything, but I left this ministry in a better place than what I got. We made a number of changes to pretty much all of the programs, whether that was increasing employment supports and indexing them, increasing AISH and indexing it, making a number of changes in response to the Auditor General report, making changes to PDD and FSCD. Quite frankly, I think I should give credit where it's due, to all the CSS staff, led by Shannon Marchand, John Stinson, Jason Chance, Chi Loo, Olin Lovely, Jinting. There are many that I can name. They worked really hard because we had opened quite a few reviews, quite a few initiatives, policy changes. I think that they showed a tremendous amount of commitment to improving these programs, and for that I am thankful to all of you.

I have specific questions, but where should I start? I can start with asking about the Disability Advisory Forum. I also see a Premier's charities council. At the same time, we do have the Premier's council, consisting of very passionate advocates, and also have an advocate office. Can you tell me a little bit? Help me understand what precisely these two bodies, and more so the Disability Advisory Forum, will do that is different from the Premier's council's work or the advocate office's work.

Mrs. Sawhney: That's a good question, and I'm happy to provide some more clarity around that. The Disability Advisory Forum was put together in response to the PDD review panel report. That report, as you may be aware – obviously, you're aware – had a number of different recommendations related to things like eligibility. Out of my meetings with the review panel members it became very clear that more work needed to be done before we could proceed to any specific recommendations. That's why we decided to put together the Disability Advisory Forum, to help tackle some of those questions that needed to be looked at; for example, in regard to eligibility. That in itself is a very, very big topic, and there was a desire on my part to ensure that I liaised and interacted with stakeholders, including self-advocates, including agencies, academics, anybody who's in this space who could provide some more feedback to me on things like eligibility.

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. The next question – and before I say that, if I cut you off, by no means do I mean to be disrespectful or rude. It's just that either I have gotten the answer or I'm wanting to ask something different.

Will the Premier's council have any formal role, or the advocates office any formal role in implementing those PDD recommendations?

Mrs. Sawhney: All of these bodies, whether it's the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, whether it's the Disability Advisory Forum: everybody will have a role in advising and providing information in helping me come to decisions as we move forward in terms of what changes we may or may not make to programs. They function in an advisory capacity.

Mr. Sabir: They were left out of quite important decisions like deindexing of AISH, deindexing of these programs. That's why I'm asking.

Okay. Let's move to the PDD program. A couple of questions. Earlier you mentioned that there is a wait-list of only 12 individuals. To be on the same page, I take that wait-list as when people are approved for the program and they're waiting to get services. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That's correct.

Mr. Sabir: Then you also mentioned another number, that 2,200 people are in the planning stage. What does that mean? Have they been approved for the program and are planning to get . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: They are in service planning, and I think that where they are in that continuum varies, depending on their particular needs.

Mr. Sabir: Have they been approved for the program? Do they qualify for PDD?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'll just expand on that as well, and I'll just start from the beginning. Right now we have about 2,100 individuals who are currently in various stages of service planning. Activities in service planning – and this will provide more clarity – include assessing the person's support needs, identifying services to meet those assessed needs, and identifying service providers to provide those services.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. So these 2,100 or 2,200 people: have they already been qualified to receive PDD services? I do understand what planning will involve, but the question is: have they already been approved by the department as eligible to receive PDD services?

Mrs. Sawhney: This number would also include individuals where we're still assessing eligibility.

Mr. Sabir: What percentage of this number are those individuals who you are still assessing, and what percentage consists of those who have already been assessed and qualified?

Mrs. Sawhney: This number right now is a point-in-time number, and of course the number changes every month. It's relatively consistent. I'm going to ask Shannon to actually expand on this to see if we can give you a better breakdown of what that looks like.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services. The people, as the minister has described, the number includes individuals who are in the various stages of service planning, including the assessment – right? – the determination that the IQ threshold has been met for the program, as defined in regulation, and the adaptive skills inventory, also defined in regulation. I don't have with me the number of the breakdown between where people are at within those various phases of that.

Mr. Sabir: For the minister: if you would undertake to provide us with that information.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I can provide that information.

Mr. Sabir: Six months ago, when I left, the PDD wait-list was more than this, significantly more than this, and I do recognize that it's not always a function of money. Sometimes it's availability of service in different regions. I think I'm pleased to see this number. It's a bit hard to believe, too good to be true. That's why I'm asking these questions.

Second question with respect to PDD is that in 2017-18 there were a couple of projects where we were working with some First Nations, one down south around Lethbridge. They have started providing some services on-reserve. It's my understanding – we had that discussion before – that under the ARA, administrative reform agreement, that covers the provision of AISH on-reserve, and it was my understanding of consensus, to some extent, that ARA will cover the provision of PDD services on-reserve. Have there been any developments, and what's the status of those programs?

4:30

Mrs. Sawhney: That's a good question. That was also – and I think I mentioned this earlier today – a platform commitment as well, to ensure that we can get effective PDD services on reserves. I mean, my department has been working quite diligently to ensure that this is happening. We know that it's a need in the community, and our government, obviously, believes that indigenous people deserve equal opportunities to have access to these supports. Again, I can tell you that our department is busy working hard to make sure that this happens and that we deliver on this platform commitment.

Mr. Sabir: Through those initial programs do you have any numbers, how many indigenous Albertans are being served through those initiatives?

Mrs. Sawhney: I don't have those numbers.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Member. We'll have to pause there.

We will now go back to the government caucus side, where you concluded with Mr. Nixon. Do you wish to continue, sir?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Yes, please.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I just wanted to go back to the process for FSCD and PDD a little bit more. This past summer we saw a bit of a slowdown in the approval process for FSCD and PDD. I've certainly heard from a few of my constituents on this as well as a family member. I'm just curious what the reasons were for that slowdown and how we've worked to address that in this budget. Obviously, we know with families impacted by this that a timely response is pretty critical.

Mrs. Sawhney: I know that you and I have had some conversations about this, in regard to how it impacted your constituents. I'm glad that you did come to me to let me know because we did take immediate action as well, and you weren't the only one. We heard from other MLAs as well.

Again, funding and eligibility did not change. However, over the summer for the FSCD and PDD programs, we were looking at an improved process to ensure consistent and very thorough decision-making. As a result of that, there was a little bit of a slowdown, but, again, it had no impact on program eligibility or services provided. When I became aware that there was a slowdown, we took immediate action. My staff worked quite diligently to address any delays as a result of the process. I do recognize it was a challenging time for families.

Certainly, I personally also made a very concerted effort to encourage families and individuals who were impacted to contact the ministry and department to see how we could help them in a more expedient fashion. On that note, as always, I would encourage families and individuals with questions to speak with their caseworkers as well as to get in touch with the department if they have any questions.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Awesome. Thank you for addressing that for us.

Switching gears just a little bit here, as you know, I have scope in URSA, Disability Action Hall in my constituency. It's pretty awesome to be able to represent some amazing organizations like them. I'm just curious. I'm kind of following up on a question that was asked earlier: how are you working to ensure the disabled

community is involved in developing any long-term solutions to make programs more sustainable?

Mrs. Sawhney: Another really good question because it's important to have the voices of those who have lived experience and self-advocates, to have their perspective as well to help with bias, myself, as we go forward. Ongoing consultation and collaboration will help us to balance efficiency with care and service for vulnerable Albertans. As I'd mentioned, we will engage the disability community on all issues that matter to them, and that will happen through the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the FSCD provincial and regional parent advisory committees, and, of course, the provincial Advocate for Persons with Disabilities. It's important to make sure that we liaise and engage with all of these bodies because these groups do know best what their communities need, and they can provide very important insight into both the FSCD program and the PDD program. I'll give you an example. The FSCD provincial and regional parent advisory committees are made up of parents and guardians of children with disabilities, and they interact directly with the system. So they know the system, and they would have good insight and good feedback to offer.

In addition to that, we'll also engage diverse stakeholders in the disability community through the two new groups that I've created. The Disability Advisory Forum, which had its first meeting this past fall, helps government gain insight and perspective on specific disability-related topics. The Service Provider Partnership Committee brings together members of the Alberta Council of Disability Services, a leading network of agencies across Alberta, to talk about how we can reduce red tape and administrative challenges so that we can better serve Albertans. I'm quite confident that with the support of these dedicated individuals, families, and advocates across the province we'll be able to look at what changes need to be implemented to ensure that we have enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in our disability service programs.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Awesome. Thank you very much. I know you've already been out travelling the province and connecting and doing all that great work to connect with our civil society partners as discussed. I think one of the good examples of that is the inclusion of the low-income transit pass. Certainly, the Disability Action Hall advocated pretty hard for that and other constituents, so I think that's great to see that in this budget and continuing with that. Thank you.

Overall funding for disability services has increased, which is great to see, according to page 52 of the government estimates; however, persons with developmental disabilities direct operations was reduced by \$4 million compared to 2018-2019 actuals. Can you tell us a little bit about the reason for this decrease?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. First, I'd like to say that I'm pleased to say that the program is serving approximately 98 per cent of PDD clients in community living. That's the PDD program. PDD supports to Albertans, as you had mentioned, have been increased by \$50 million as compared to the 2018-19 actuals. We're making sure that individuals receiving PDD supports have the services that they need, and we acknowledge that caseload growth is a key driver. According to our fiscal plan, we've indicated that caseloads have grown by 14 per cent for this program. If you compare that to population growth, which is just over 5 per cent, there's quite the discrepancy there.

Out of the 12,800 Albertans that we serve under PDD, only 2 per cent of those clients receive services through government-operated

residential facilities, so direct operations, and the budget which supports these facilities is \$43 million. That's a reduction of \$4 million, as you had indicated, compared to the 2018-19 actuals. We expect that fewer clients will live in residential facilities and will instead live in the community with families or in homes operated by local service providers. You know, people pass on as well, so we are seeing fewer clients living in these facilities like the Michener Centre, for example. It's very much a continuation of the trend that we've seen over the last few years.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you. I actually got a little emotional about that. I think just helping people to get involved and be included in community and part of our community and not separate needs to be an initiative that we need to continue to push for, all people. I appreciate that that's the trend and am looking forward to continuing to see efforts towards that end. That said, in 2014 the government of the day reversed its decision and committed to keeping the Michener Centre a residential facility in Red Deer. I'm wondering if we're going to maintain that commitment to keep the Michener Centre open.

4:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for that question. It's a very important question. Our government is committed to maintaining operations for the remaining residents of the Michener Centre in Red Deer. We recognize that in 2014 the government did commit to residents that it would stay open, and, of course, we'll honour that promise. All the residents who live there right now will live out their remaining years there or move into community if they choose to do so. They'll continue to receive the same high standard of care. Currently, there are 18 group and three facility-style homes on-site at Michener, and I was very fortunate that I had the opportunity to go on-site and visit. In addition to what I just mentioned, there are also two group homes in the community.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Awesome. Thank you very much. I kind of continued down that inclusion path, and just, again, recognizing the importance of helping all people to be able to connect into community and be included in community, I'm just curious what we're doing to support individuals who will be moving from residential facilities into our communities.

Mrs. Sawhney: If you look at objective 2.3 in our business plan, it does commit to supporting "[people] with disabilities to participate in community life and for families to promote the development of their children with disabilities." That clearly speaks to our government's values. Regional service delivery staff in my ministry . . .

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

We will now go back to the Official Opposition. We concluded with Member Sabir. Will we continue?

Mr. Sabir: Yeah.

The Acting Chair: Yes. Member Sabir, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I left off asking you to provide the number of Albertans receiving services on-reserve, and if you could undertake to provide that. If you don't have that ready, I can move on to the next question. You'll provide that?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I'll provide that information.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

With respect to the AISH program – before I get into it, like, in previous years these business plan statements used to start with an accountability statement, which reads, "This business plan was prepared under my direction, taking into consideration our government's policy decisions as of [this date]." That statement is missing, and with that, I think there are a number of things that are not in your business plan anymore.

I can tie them back to the line items if you want to, but simply the question is that there used to be a new measure that was introduced to measure the performance of the AISH program of the time between an AISH application completion and an eligibility decision. That was the measure that was introduced into this business plan on the recommendation of the Auditor General, because it's a \$1.2 billion program, and just one measure of how many clients were satisfied receiving that cheque is not enough. We need to measure how we are delivering this program, so that was a very important measure that was important from the Auditor General report's point of view, and it's not there. If you want to comment on why it was removed, you're more than welcome to do so, but I also need: what's the average time now between AISH application completion and eligibility decision?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm going to ask Deputy Minister Shannon Marchand to answer that question.

Mr. Marchand: The current time from the time the applications are completed and we have a complete application to the medical eligibility decision is within our target of six weeks.

Mr. Sabir: I think back in 2017 – I'm looking at the previous budget – it was down to 4.7 weeks.

Mr. Marchand: Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: So it's still higher than that.

Mr. Marchand: Well, yes. It varies a little bit from, you know, month to month, but it is under six and it's been around four and a half, up to five and a half, but it's consistently under the six-week target.

Mr. Sabir: With the hiring freeze and doing some attrition to reduce the size of the public service, will this time be affected?

Mrs. Sawhney: It's not expected to impact the time because we are going to ensure that we have very capable and dedicated staff at the front lines. If there is a reduction due to attrition, we'll make sure that the front-line staff is not impacted.

Mr. Sabir: Good. Thank you.

Another related question. In 2017-18 there were union grievances of casework for the AISH employees, and there was a WAM, workload assessment model, that was a collaborative effort between the department and union representatives. According to that, we needed more staff for AISH. Can you comment: how many full-time employees do we have in the AISH program? What is their caseload? Are there any grievances, and if there are, what level are they at, and what are we going to do about it?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I am, obviously, familiar with what you've mentioned about the staff grievances. Certainly, staff do have the right to file grievances in accordance with the collective agreement. I can tell you that we take these matters very seriously, and we follow the appropriate processes for resolving any concerns that might arise.

Mr. Sabir: How many are there, and at what status?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm going to have to defer this question to Shannon. I don't believe we have exact numbers for what you're asking for.

Shannon, can you elaborate on that?

Mr. Marchand: I don't have exact numbers with me.

Mr. Sabir: But can you undertake to provide that?

Mrs. Sawhney: Can you clarify exactly what numbers you're looking for, just so I know? I want to make sure I get that.

Mr. Sabir: The question I asked was: how many full-time employees? What are their caseloads in comparison to the WAM, workload assessment model? How many grievances have AISH employees filed, and what stages are they at?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm not sure I can share some of this information. I don't believe that – I mean, it sounds to me that sharing the types of grievances and what stage they're at: I don't think that's something that I can readily share. I'll have to confirm that.

Shannon, would you like to weigh in? Is that information that's readily shared?

Mr. Marchand: I don't . . .

Mr. Sabir: It's FOIPable.

Mr. Marchand: Yeah. I don't know that it's readily shared. I think we would certainly be able, Minister, to endeavour to do our best to provide as much of the information that the member has requested.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Moving along, we made other changes to AISH as well, raised income exemptions, child benefit, supplemental benefits, and then change occurring – the livelihood policy. Will those things stay intact? Are you going to . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: You know, I'll have to go back to what I was saying before about program review. I think I have to start at the very beginning. I have to take a look at this program in depth, in detail, because I've talked extensively about sustainability. I've also talked about efficiency and effectiveness, so I can't definitively answer that question.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Let's talk about program review. Are you planning on reviewing every single program in your ministry?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Will there be terms of reference, a time frame for those reviews, and dollars allocated?

Mrs. Sawhney: It's early days right now to even talk about the framework of what that review will look like because, quite frankly, we just got through budget, and we just got through estimates.

Mr. Sabir: Will there be terms of reference for those reviews? I did review PDD, small pieces. Once I reviewed safety standards. There were terms of reference on that which we were reviewing. Then we reviewed the PDD program. There were terms of reference. You're reviewing every single program in the ministry. I just want to know: will there be terms of reference that will be available for the public and us to see what you will be reviewing? Will there be some timelines? These reviews do take a lot of time. Like, on PDD it took me almost two years.

4:50

Mrs. Sawhney: Right now the review that I'm planning to undertake – and like I said, I haven't even developed the framework as to what it's going to look like, but it's going to start within my ministry as an internal review of every single aspect of all of these programs. Then once we have sort of a better understanding, if we need to move forward to develop a more formal, mechanized framework, at that point I can provide you with some more information. But as this point . . .

Mr. Sabir: You may have heard the disability community saying Nothing about Us without Us. You will review the PDD program internally without including the disability community?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, the review right now that I'm proposing is simply that, just a review, just a study, just an understanding of what these programs look like, what they entail, how they compare to interjurisdictional comparators. I think that's a fair place to start. Certainly, if there are any next steps, of course we will talk to a diverse set of stakeholders, and I'll also rely on the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Disability Advisory Forum, the disability advocate . . .

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister.

Let's move to the income support program. I think I will also follow up on the question that, earlier, my colleague asked with respect to barriers to full employment. You're projecting that it will be a flat line. As far as I can remember – I looked at these numbers from the time we had this data available – in every year, this caseload number has gone up from 1,000 to 2,000 numbers, and it's not the function of market, economy, unemployment. These are people who for any number of reasons are not able to get into the marketplace, so I would say . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. I hesitate to interrupt.

We will now go back to the government caucus side. As per the agreement of the committee, we will break after this next round. We concluded with Mr. Nixon. Will we continue with Mr. Nixon?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I'll pass my time over.

The Acting Chair: Member Glasgo. Okay. Thank you very much. Back and forth between you and the minister?

Ms Glasgo: Yes, please.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for having your staff here and for being so transparent in these discussions. I know that this can be a very emotional topic as it affects people with disabilities and vulnerable people within our province. I mean, I know that your heart is in this fully, and I know from conversations with you that this is something that you take very personally and that you endeavour to improve upon. I also understand the fiscal reality that our province is facing. We're on a reckless track – we were – and I believe we have an accredited path to balance here. Your leadership on this is something to be noted, so thank you for what you're doing as well. I really believe that there needs to be transformational change in order for us to make things happen that will benefit the next generation, including all Albertans. Thank you for your leadership as well as your department's and, all of you guys, for being here today and for what you're doing.

I have a question just following up on what MLA Nixon was talking about before. In our platform we indicated there would be

an IQ review in the PDD requirements. I was just wondering if you could give us an update on that and if there's anything coming up with that. I have a constituent in Brooks-Medicine Hat who, for all intents and purposes, requires PDD and requires extra assistance. His IQ is just barely above the threshold, but for all intents and purposes he needs this funding. I feel like it's a real barrier for some who are wishing to access this support, so I wondered if you could elaborate on that.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes, I'd be pleased to elaborate. First of all, thank you for your kind comments. I appreciate it. Indeed, I have great people that I'm working with and very dedicated staff within the ministry and the department, so thank you for noting that and . . .

Ms Glasgo: Minister, sorry. Would you be able to move a little closer to the mic? I have . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: Oh, sorry.

Ms Glasgo: It's okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. In regard to your specific question around eligibility, first of all, this was identified in the PDD review panel report, that this is of significant concern to many folks in the disability community. As you had pointed out, it was also a platform commitment that we should look at the eligibility criteria in terms of the IQ and potentially increasing it or taking a more comprehensive look at all of the programs within our ministry and perhaps collapsing everything – PDD, FSCD, FASD, all of the programs – into one comprehensive program. Certainly we're, again, in early days, and we haven't made any definitive plans to move one way or the other.

But one of the things I felt was really important to do was to put together the Disability Advisory Forum. I've spoken about that many times today. The first topic of discussion was around eligibility. The first meeting was actually on October 4, and we had about 27 individuals attend – a number of self-advocates; as I mentioned earlier, we had some academics, we had some leaders in the not-for-profit sector, we had individuals who run agencies – a very fulsome discussion around eligibility itself. What it revealed is that there are no clear answers. It's a very complex topic, but we did get some more feedback, and as we move forward in determining what eligibility is going to look like, we're going to incorporate some of these learnings and feedback.

I know that you're probably looking for a more clear answer on what direction we're heading in. We're committed to getting there as soon as we can; we're just not quite there as of yet.

Ms Glasgo: Minister, I definitely respect that. I know you can't predict the future, and obviously there are things that are going to be evolving as this goes on. We're here to talk about this budget, so that question was purely as a point of interest. I respect that you have things that you can't elaborate on at this time.

I'm looking at page 29 of the ministry's business plan. It talks about the \$100,000 that is allocated to the Disability Advisory Forum and Service Provider Partnership Committee. I know that you've talked about this a lot today, so a couple of my questions have already been asked, which is great because that means that this committee is really engaging with the issues here. I was just wondering if you could talk or maybe expand on if there are any other ways that the ministry is engaging with the disability community besides this \$100,000 allotment to the advisory forum and what you're doing personally to make sure that you're really representing those people at the cabinet table.

Mrs. Sawhney: We have spoken about the Disability Advisory Forum, and we touched on the Service Provider Partnership Committee. Those are two panels that we've put together so that I can interact more closely with the disability community, but in addition to that we also have the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We've had some good discussion with several of the members who are on that council. The disability advocate's office also liaises quite frequently with the department, so I do get feedback on that. The annual report has been tabled. It's available online.

But at a personal level I've really tried to make significant efforts to meet as many stakeholders as possible within the disability community, and I believe I've met more than two dozen stakeholders up until this point. I was very fortunate to be able to actually visit with some families in their homes. My policy adviser was able to introduce me to some families where I could actually sit down and have some meaningful conversations about their experiences with the programs that their children are participating in, and they were able to give me some very valuable insight as to what it's like to be a child navigating through the system and what opportunities we need to really focus on, particularly as it pertains to employment. We know that the unemployment rate in the disability communities is untenably high, much, much higher than the general unemployment rate. I've had multiple discussions with families about finding more opportunities for people to have employment, because that's how you have more meaning and more purpose and it allows people to have equality of opportunity and live a life of dignity. There have been several opportunities where I've been able to meet with families.

I had mentioned earlier that I have two cousins, my first cousins. My aunt just passed away this past summer. I always think of her because she was a mother of four, and two of her children have significant developmental disabilities. She always worried about them. She always worried about what would happen to them after she was gone. When I look at my cousins – they're both in their mid- to late 40s – I know what it's been like for them. I know the services that they've received and how it's really improved their lives, how it's enhanced their inclusion and participation in society.

5:00

You know, I do have real-life experiences that I draw from, and I think I need to do more. I always feel like I need to go out and meet more people and hear from self-advocates as well as to what some of their challenges are and what some of the opportunities are that they hope we can present to them. But I can tell you that in most cases it's around employment. This is what I'm hearing. People want to have those opportunities just to be included and to participate.

Ms Glasgo: I can certainly hear that. I know in my own community I meet with constituents. Obviously, we all go back on Fridays and have our constituency breaks. I mean, you meet people in the strangest places. Like, in the Co-op you get stopped to talk about things. At least, I do in Medicine Hat and in Brooks. I know that we hear these things from people all the time, and they do want to be meaningfully engaged. You know, I've really noticed that your ministry has an open-door policy with everything. I know that you've said to me before: just walk on in, and come talk to me about anything. I know that your ministry staff has the same outlook on things, so I really do appreciate that.

Earlier in this discussion, I think it was before, the Member for St. Albert was talking about service dogs. I would actually like to go back to that. I'd also like to just start off by saying that I really do appreciate the Member for St. Albert bringing this up because, I

mean, it's an extremely important topic, and I know that she has done some considerable advocacy on this even with one of my own constituents before I was elected. I really do appreciate that, for whatever it's worth.

I think we can agree that Albertans work incredibly hard at what they do, whether that's health care or education or trades, and service dogs definitely help to keep their handlers safe.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. I hesitate to interrupt.

As per the agreement we will take a five-minute break, and then we will return with the Official Opposition. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned from 5:02 p.m. to 5:08 p.m.]

The Acting Chair: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. We will now continue with the estimates. We had last concluded with the government caucus. We will now go back to the Official Opposition. I do see government members, opposition members, as well as the minister.

Okay. Member Sabir, we will continue with you. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. Earlier I was talking about the flat projection for the barriers to full employment. That's completely not a realistic one. That didn't happen before ever since we have been gathering that data.

I'm also seeing that you're reducing budgets in out-years, assuming that the economy will get better. For now what we are seeing is that investment is leaving our province. We lost 27,000 jobs, and I think more and more people will need these supports going forward.

The question I have: before we used to measure incidence of low income as a percentage of the population, low income measured after tax. That was included as a performance indicator to see how well we are doing as a society. That has been taken out. Do you have anything to say about why it was taken out?

Mrs. Sawhney: We're more focused on the indicators that we have put into the business plan. I think that with our government's focus on creating jobs and revitalizing the economy, we felt that there were other indicators that were more relevant and reflective of what we wanted to measure.

Mr. Sabir: There is no indicator showing jobs or anything whatsoever. There was another indicator, incidence of family violence in Alberta: annual police-reported data from Stats Canada, the number of incidents, prevalence per 100,000 population. I do recognize that you have kept domestic violence funding intact. You brought forward Clare's law. But I think that if we want to tackle domestic violence, that was an important indicator for people to see, for Albertans to see, how high this rate is and how we need to prioritize it. You are taking that indicator out as well. Don't tell me that you're focused on jobs. Taking this out won't create any jobs.

Mrs. Sawhney: You know, before I move on to that point, I just want to take a quick second to, first of all, say that the BFE numbers from March of this year to October actually did fall. They fell from 22,788 to 22,305, so we did see a reduction in those numbers.

Mr. Sabir: That's good.

Mrs. Sawhney: While I'm giving you some more information, the Blood Tribe question that you had asked before: the project is under way, and we have 10 active cases for PDD.

Mr. Sabir: That's good to hear.

Back to this measure that was removed about police-reported domestic violence, family violence cases, and its prevalence in the province. Why?

Mrs. Sawhney: You're asking why that was removed from the business plan?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Our business plan is reflective of, you know, our mandate and how we're going to ensure that we receive performance metrics. Right now one of the performance indicators that is in the business plan is the number of women and children admitted to provincially funded women's shelters. That indicator is in there.

Mr. Sabir: There was another one a bit better than that that was added, the percentage of women receiving services from the women's shelter program who report that they are more able to keep themselves and their children safe from abuse. You had started measuring that one as well. I notice that you have removed that one. You have removed incidence of family violence numbers. Both of these things are removed. I don't know if it's reflective of your focus. Clearly, that's no longer the focus. That's not there.

Mrs. Sawhney: Removal or the fact that it isn't presented in a tabular format in this business plan doesn't mean that we're not still tracking it. It doesn't mean that these aren't important indicators. We are tracking this information, but we were quite selective of what we wanted to put in the business plan to make sure that it's readable and that it focuses on the things that are important in terms of tracking. But those elements that you just identified: it doesn't mean that they're no longer being tracked; they just weren't included as content in the business plan.

Mr. Sabir: If I need to find that information, where can I find it? Can you provide it?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. You can contact the ministry or the department, and you can get that information.

Mr. Sabir: Will you undertake to provide it?

Mrs. Sawhney: Pardon me?

Mr. Sabir: Will you undertake to provide whatever data you have available?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Yes, of course.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

I think I have one last question, and that relates to your budget line 5.4, homeless and outreach services. Over the summer you had reduced their budget by \$3.2 million. It's my understanding that there will be new supportive housing units coming onto the market this year as well. How do you think they will fund services in those new units? That's essentially the question that CBOs across this province have who are planning to add more capacity and more supportive housing units.

Mrs. Sawhney: I've been in very close talks with the CBOs, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, and I'm very pleased that we were able to maintain the funding for them. They do get an envelope of funding, but in terms of how they're going to allocate that funding, that's certainly based on their own criteria. They have the discretion to determine how they're going to allocate it to all the organizations under their umbrella.

Mr. Sabir: The funding they have is already allocated to existing units. I was asking about new additional funding, operating funding, for the new units that they will add.

Let's move on to 6.3, family and community safety. Can you provide a breakdown of this \$22 million? How much will go to the family and community safety program grant? How much will go to sexual assault services? I also want to add that we added \$8.1 million to their existing \$5 million budget. Will you maintain that \$8.1 million funding going forward?

5:15

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That funding is going to be maintained.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. And a breakdown of line 6.3?

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure. I think I'd mentioned already that we were going to – the almost \$5 million increase for grants to sexual assault centres is there. That's in response to the increase in demand for specialized sexual assault services across Alberta. The increase also includes a little bit more than half a million that was previously provided through the status of women ministry.

Mr. Sabir: And \$1.1 million was provided through Justice. Are you covering all three of them?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm just going to answer your first question first of all. You'll recognize these acronyms, so I'm going to use the acronyms – all right? – the CCR program, we are at almost \$2 million; victim support outreach, VSO, it's more than a million dollars in funding; safe visitation, almost \$800,000; and family violence prevention, FVP, is almost \$900,000.

Mr. Sabir: And family and community support program grants?

Mrs. Sawhney: We have decided that that program is no longer going to be funded.

Mr. Sabir: So family and community support program grants will be discontinued?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That'll be discontinued. I mean, obviously, we value the important work of these organizations that were previously funded and civil society organizations in terms of preventing domestic and sexual violence, but there was some duplication in terms of some of the services that were offered.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I think for the remaining time my colleague will answer.

You say that you value their work. You are cutting their funding.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, there was duplication in services.

Mr. Sabir: You say that you value AISH people. You're de-indexing their programs. I don't understand all that.

Anyway, my remaining time will be used by my colleague.

The Acting Chair: Member, you've concluded, sir?
Go ahead, Member.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to focus your attention on line item 5.2, homeless shelters. It looks like homeless shelters was increased. I know that this line item of funding is specifically to support the operations of homeless shelters short- and long-term housing in Alberta. At this time, just based on the information that was available, there are 28 facilities in Alberta that provide homeless emergency shelter short- and long-term housing. Would you say that's a fair number?

Mrs. Sawhney: I believe that we have 30 homeless shelters.

Ms Renaud: Thirty? Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: We have 30.

We have housing-first programs, which includes permanent supportive housing, housing with intensive case management supports, assertive community treatment, and support access, too.

Ms Renaud: Can I just interrupt for a sec? How many emergency beds would you say there are for capacity in the province?

Mrs. Sawhney: As I mentioned, we do have 30 homeless shelters. I'm just going to get those numbers, see if they're available.

Ms Renaud: Okay. And if not, you can just submit them at a later time. That'd be fine.

The Acting Chair: I hesitate to interrupt. We will pause for a moment there.

We will now go back to the government caucus side and Member Glasgo. Go ahead.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, you can probably guess I'm going to pick up where I left off. We were talking about service dogs, and I was starting with complimenting the members opposite for the work they did on this because it was commendable. Actually, in my riding I have the privilege of knowing the very first owner-trained service dog that was certified in Alberta. Her name is Kayla, and her dad is Doug. He's her handler. I know that the former minister actually hosted them in Calgary for an announcement. Thank you. I know he really appreciates that.

All in all, Minister, I know that you know that service dogs are very, very important. They really make it so that people who have disabilities can fully contribute, and for some of these people it's the difference between going to work or not, being able to get from place to place. I know for Doug it's a real sense of stability for him, especially emotionally and in other ways as well. Kayla is a very valued member, and she's a very frequent visitor in my constituency office, so I'm a big fan of hers.

Service dogs are funded under provincial disability supports initiatives on page 52 of the estimates, line item 4.5. Can you tell us what your ministry is doing for our working dogs in Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: You and I need to have some further discussions about service dogs because I know that you have some very valuable insight and feedback to offer in terms of what we can do to just make things a little bit better, to make some little tweaks in the program.

Obviously, we value the important role service dogs play in supporting people with disabilities to lead fuller lives. Again, it speaks to equal opportunity, inclusion, and participation. Thanks to a service dog's training and skills, they can help people overcome illness, they can provide support to people with disabilities, and assist with many other physical and psychological challenges. I've had the opportunity to observe this first-hand. Qualified service dogs are more than companions. I mean, they are dedicated working animals that enable access.

Our government is making sure that people with disabilities get full and open access to qualified service dogs by providing more opportunities for service dog training. Albertans who have trained their own service dogs can now get them qualified in Alberta, as you're aware, and currently we have 11 approved organizations in the province training and testing dogs. We're always accepting

applications from new service dog organizations wanting to become approved providers.

Ms Glasgo: I appreciate that very much, and I know that this was a pilot at first. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure that it was one of the first times that this has ever been done, so obviously there are going to be some things that we need to work out. I know that in southern Alberta there is a major deficit when it comes to being able to access service dogs. For owner-trained dogs it's even harder because all the trainers and testers are actually in Edmonton or Calgary, and that makes it very difficult for people who are in the south. So I do appreciate that the ministry actually approved Doug, my constituent, as being a tester for owner-trained dogs. That is something I think that's positive. It's a totally nonpartisan, positive comment that I think shows that we really can work together. I know that this kind of thing isn't partisan.

I'm just wondering if you could explain what that funding is going to look like in the future at all. I know we're talking about this budget, but I guess if you could just expand on what the funding looks like for service dogs for Alberta for the 2019 budget specifically.

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure. Again, thank you for your comments. I'm listening very closely to everything you're saying, and we will have some more conversations around that. Of course, we know that we want to ensure that folks who have disabilities continue to have access to service dogs, and we know that the demand for these dogs is quite high.

Our government has maintained funding for the service dog program, and we've provided \$300,000 for this program, which is consistent with funding in Budget 2018.

Ms Glasgo: That's fantastic. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, with that I would reserve my time to anybody else in the government caucus.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.

The government members' side? Thank you very much. Mr. Guthrie, go ahead.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Minister Sawhney, and everyone for being here. I guess I'll just jump right in. My first question on key objective 2.2 on the business plan on page 27, it says the ministry will "facilitate post-secondary education and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities." Can you share with us, you know, how you will achieve this and how this objective is important to your department?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I'd be pleased to expand on that. I've mentioned it earlier today that employment is very important, but so is education for individuals with disabilities. These are important priorities for the community and for our government. We will build on and actually create more successful partnerships that will create these employment choices for persons with disabilities.

Our government currently supports several key partnerships that promote inclusion in postsecondary institutions and in the workplace. The inclusive postsecondary education initiative is a partnership with Inclusion Alberta, supports students eligible for persons with developmental disabilities in attending a university, college, or technical institute. Currently there are about 70 students in 14 postsecondary settings across this program, and I had the great fortune of actually meeting with a graduate probably early on in the summer who graduated from one of these programs, and it made a tremendous difference in his life and the quality of his life and in

terms of the opportunities that it opened up for him. A very, very important program.

5:25

In terms of employment the Rotary employment partnership is a collaboration between Inclusion Alberta and Rotary clubs across Alberta. It helps business owners create meaningful job opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities. Since 2001 more than 500 employment opportunities have been created, and that's phenomenal. In addition, our PDD program includes employment supports, where community agencies will meet with employers to support individuals with developmental disabilities to find and maintain employment.

My ministry is also assisting the Public Service Commission to make the government of Alberta a leader in hiring Albertans with disabilities. Some of you may recall that that's also a platform commitment that we're very honoured and pleased to be able to complete. Our disability internship program for persons with disabilities helps Albertans find careers within the Alberta public service and is currently transitioning to the Alberta Public Service Commission.

I'm just going to finish off by saying that our government was very proud to join organizations across Alberta and Canada to celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. That was a great moment. We recognize that participation of all Albertans in our provincial economy. We recognize, we welcome, and we want to create those opportunities to have more participation.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thanks.

I guess, next on page 28, initiatives supporting key objectives. It says that "\$3.5 million is allocated to the Residential Access Modification Program." Can you explain how this, you know, funding is allocated and how the program works?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Of course. I was very pleased to actually announce yesterday, as a matter of fact, that funding had been increased to this program by almost 30 per cent. Albertans have relied on this program in the past to make modifications to their homes, whether they own the home or they rent, just to make it easier for them to navigate through their homes. I'd mentioned that we've increased the program by almost 30 per cent, by \$800,000, compared to the 2018-19 actuals. Again, every year RAMP helps hundreds of Albertans by providing grants for people to make accessibility modifications, essentially, which gives them more independence in their homes.

This increase in funding will also allow more Albertans to remain in their homes. I mean, we all know that – you probably recall through your door-knocking prior to the election – people have spoken about this, that as they were aging, they wanted to spend more time in their own homes. I certainly heard that in Calgary-North East, so I know that this increase in funding will be something that's very welcomed in my constituency.

Just to give you some numbers, about 715 Albertans will access a RAMP grant in 2019-20 . . .

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

We will now go back to the Official Opposition. Member Renaud, go ahead, please.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just before I dive back into homeless and outreach supports, I just wanted to say: I absolutely can agree that service dogs are awesome, and we don't have nearly enough service dogs.

I just wanted to follow up really quick. You asked about the budget, and I think, Minister, you mentioned that \$300,000 was available in the budget for service dogs. That's what you said was available the year before, and that's great. Can you tell me what portion of this will be for staffing and what portion will be to the organizations doing the testing or any related grants?

Mrs. Sawhney: I believe that a – well, I don't have that breakdown for you in terms of exact numbers . . .

Ms Renaud: That's okay. You can just get it to me.

Mrs. Sawhney: . . . but a significant portion will be towards the organizations. In fact, I do know that all of the funding will be for the organizations.

Ms Renaud: So there will no longer be a staff member in Community and Social Services to manage service dogs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Of course, there is a staff in Community and Social Services, but that is not included in that \$300,000.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So it would come out of another program year.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Ms Renaud: So \$30,000 would be the funds available to organizations to do . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: It's \$300,000.

Ms Renaud: . . . \$300,000 – I'm sorry – to do the testing of self-trained dogs or other dogs. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That is correct.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Just moving on, I'm going to go back to homeless and outreach support. I think you said there were 30 facilities in Alberta providing homeless and emergency shelter. Can you give me an idea of what the number of beds in the entire province, like, the housing stock sort of question, how many beds are we talking, emergency homeless beds, for the entire province?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I do have those numbers. For homeless emergency beds we have about 2,500 beds, 2,540 to be exact.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: For short- or long-term beds we have 926 beds . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: . . . and additional winter beds: there are 422, so that brings us to a total of 3,973 beds across the province.

Ms Renaud: Okay. That's excellent. It's my understanding that the last PIT count that was done indicated – I think that was 2018 if I'm not mistaken – there are approximately 6,000 homeless people in Alberta in only the seven largest cities. So that didn't look at – which is I'm sure quite difficult to count – the smaller communities in Alberta. Is that correct? Is that the number that you're using?

Mrs. Sawhney: It was about 5,700, I believe . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay, so that's the number that you're using?

Mrs. Sawhney: . . . the last number that I would estimate.

Ms Renaud: Now, maybe it's in your business plan and I missed it, but would you say that your government is still committed to end homelessness?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, certainly, as you're well aware, I attended the conference, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, and I talked quite extensively amongst people who were there, and certainly it was one of the values that was talked about. You know, some of this language is aspirational, but certainly in my work with the CBOs, I mean, they talk quite extensively about how we need to get to functional zero and of course I would support that notion.

Ms Renaud: I'm sorry. Thank you, Minister. We're just getting to the point where we don't have that much time left. I understand. So what you're saying is that there are about 4,000 beds that would meet a need of about 6,000 or a little bit less than 6,000 people, and I guess my question is – in order for us to address this need, there requires some investment, so that's okay. I understand that often it is aspirational language.

Let's move on. I want to talk about, just based on what I could gather, the information I could gather about – and I know I've asked you a question about that – the closing of Marshall House in Fort McMurray. From what I saw in the PIT count for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, it looked like they had just over 200 homeless people that they counted in 2018, and it's my understanding that Marshall House will be closing. Now, I couldn't verify the number of beds, but I'm wondering if you know that. Since you're closing it, you likely know what the cost savings are, but is it true that Marshall House operates 100 emergency beds and 29 transitional housing units?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I'll tell you about Marshall House. It had about 100 beds . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: . . . 70 were provincially funded, but, you know, the capacity was significantly underutilized and, in fact, I think the average number of individuals staying at Marshall House last winter was about 24 individuals.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So what is the capacity of the Salvation Army in Fort McMurray?

Mrs. Sawhney: When we consolidate the shelter services, the Salvation Army, which by the way is also in walking distance, it will expand shelter services to 91 spaces.

Ms Renaud: Okay. The last information that I could find was that the total shelter spaces in Fort McMurray were 137 beds total, between the two. So closing Marshall House, which actually means staff will be losing their jobs, will result in a reduction of homeless beds, yeah? Is that correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: No, that's not necessarily the case. I mean, we're going to consolidate the shelter services, and we're going to be expanding the spaces at the Salvation Army.

Ms Renaud: Okay. But what would you say the total number of beds will be once you expand?

5:35

Mrs. Sawhney: It's going to be 91 spaces. But, again, I just want to point out that, I mean, Marshall House was . . .

Ms Renaud: Okay. Ninety-one spaces is a reduction from 137 spaces, and that's where we were in 2018. The PIT count from 2018 puts the homeless number at over 200 for that area. Again, I'm not saying that I live there and that I have seen these facilities and the folks that need them, but what I'm saying is that that's the information that's there. So if I'm missing something or these numbers are incorrect, just let me know.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, what I can tell you again is that the average number of individuals who were using the services at Marshall House was 24 individuals.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So we're losing homeless beds. We're going from 137 to 90 something. Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, let me answer that question. I don't agree with the terminology that "we're losing." We are consolidating services, and we're putting in the appropriate amount of services. We're rightsizing the number of beds.

Ms Renaud: Okay. That's semantics.
Let's move on.

Mrs. Sawhney: It's based on the usage, and it's based on the data and what we're seeing.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to line 5.3, which talks about women's shelters. In women's shelters it looks like we'll see a zero per cent budget increase in 2019-2020. Again, as my colleague said a little bit earlier, I noted the minister's concern for the astounding frequency of family- and gender-based violence in Alberta, and I concur. Based on the available information that I could find, can you – let me just backtrack a little bit – just briefly comment on your decision not to fund growth given the rates of gender-based violence in Alberta in terms of women's shelters?

Mrs. Sawhney: We had made a very specific platform commitment, that we were going to maintain funding for women's shelters, and we are going to maintain funding. Certainly, through investment through the FCSS program and increases in element 6, community supports and family safety, we're making sure that we're taking a very holistic approach to ensuring that vulnerable victims of domestic violence are getting the supports that they need.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. I agree with you. Is it fair to say, though, that where we are right now with the number of women's shelters, quite a number of women and children are turned away every year because we don't have the capacity to meet their needs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I'm just going to give you some information right now that's based on average occupancy. It's based on data. It's based on fact. That is that the average occupancy for provincially funded women's emergency beds was 57 per cent in 2018-19, and the average bedroom utilization for 2018-19 was 74 per cent.

Ms Renaud: In women's shelters?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That's for women's shelters.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Based on the information, again, that I could gather about the number of women's shelter spaces, it looks like we have about 710 beds in Alberta. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I can tell you that we haven't – I will get you that number.

Ms Renaud: Okay. That'd be great. Thank you.

Also, based on information that I could gather, there are currently 12 second-stage shelters for women and children operating 168 units in Alberta. It looks like the approximate funding in 2018, that I could find, was about \$8.6 million. Will there be a change to that?

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member. We'll pause there and go back over to the government caucus side.

We concluded with Mr. Guthrie. We'll continue with Mr. Guthrie?

Mr. Guthrie: Okay.

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

Mr. Guthrie: Where we had left off there, you were just about to provide some stats regarding the residential access modification program. Do you still have those handy?

Mrs. Sawhney: I do. I think I had mentioned that we have increased funding by 30 per cent, an additional \$800,000, in the program. We were talking about that it was 700 . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Seven hundred and fifteen RAMP applications, I think.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. Individuals that will apply for this grant.

Mr. Guthrie: Right. Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: You know what? I'm just going to give some additional details as well about this program.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Sure.

Mrs. Sawhney: The RAMP grant can pay for important accessibility modifications such as ramps and stairlifts, door widening, flooring changes, bath lifts, and bathtub door inserts. Individuals can apply for a grant of up to \$7,500 per year, per project, and can receive multiple grants totalling about \$15,000 over a 10-year period.

Mr. Guthrie: Oh, great. That sounds like a great program.

Okay. My next question is under key objective 2.4 on page 28. Our government also commits to working "with First Nations, other Indigenous communities, and the disability community to . . . increase access to culturally sensitive supports . . ." I see in the estimates a \$1.3 million funding increase, or about 2.7 per cent year over year. How will this be achieved?

Mrs. Sawhney: Can you tell me what line that . . .

Mr. Guthrie: It's key objective 2.4 on page 28, I believe.

Mrs. Sawhney: Sorry. Would you mind just clarifying your question again? Just the tail end of it.

Mr. Guthrie: It was just pertaining to the government's commitment to working with First Nations and indigenous groups.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Again, this was a very significant platform commitment as well, that we need to ensure that we're working with the First Nations and indigenous communities, as you had mentioned, to make sure that we have increased access to culturally sensitive supports. We're working quite diligently within our

department. I had spoken about this earlier, that there are steps that are being undertaken. It also requires some liaising with the federal government as well to ensure that we have that relationship in place to make sure that ultimately we are delivering effective supports to those who live on reserves.

I'm just going to expand on that as well.

Mr. Guthrie: Sure.

Mrs. Sawhney: Access to PDD services for members of First Nations is something that the community has told us over and over again needs to be addressed. The PDD review, that I've spoken about earlier, also identified the lack of access to PDD services for First Nations on-reserve. This is an issue that the program needs to address. As I mentioned, the department is diligently working on this. Through ongoing consultation and collaboration with the disability community and indigenous stakeholders we will develop solutions that matter. New engagement bodies, which I've spoken about, which includes the Disability Advisory Forum, will help government to gain insight and perspectives from a broad range of disability stakeholders.

Mr. Guthrie: That's great to hear. It's important.

I guess, you know, my last question is a fairly general one. Just looking at the consolidated statement of operations there on page 57 of the estimates, and I know that you touched on this earlier, there's an increase in budget here, total budget, of about \$275 million, 7.6 per cent. It's a pretty big increase in funding for this department. I know, as I mentioned, that you had talked about this earlier, but I just wanted to see if you could explain a little bit more the significance of this for you, your department, and our government in supporting the needs of vulnerable Albertans and just how it brings about the focus of this government itself.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, first of all, it speaks very clearly to this government's commitment to ensuring that those who are most in need and those who are most vulnerable in our society get the supports that they need. It was the greatest increase across government, across all the ministries. It was a 7.6 per cent increase. I'll just talk a little bit about how that funding has been broken out.

5:45
First of all, we received an increase in the employment and income support program, and we're maintaining the rates that were increased in January of 2019. As part of that funding we also have maintained funding for Edmonton and Calgary's low-income transit pass program. That is something that we heard a number of folks in both cities advocate for, so we're very pleased to be able to do that. I had mentioned earlier that it impacts the constituencies of a number of people in this room, including MLA Mickey Amery, including myself, including MLA Irfan Sabir. It's a very important program that we're happy to maintain.

We've spoken extensively about AISH today. The budget has increased for the AISH program by \$142 million. Part of that is to fund the increase in the core rate. I think it's about close to \$15 million. The other portion is to fund increasing caseloads, which we've talked about extensively today. We've also increased the budget for disability services by \$66 million, and that supports recipients of the PDD program. It supports almost 15,000 children with disabilities and their families in the FSCD program. Again, these budget increases are a clear indicator of my ministry's and our government's commitment to ensuring that we're helping families, we're helping children who have disabilities. We're committed to ensuring that we're providing the supports that they need that are preventative and early intervention.

We also, which we didn't have a chance to talk about today, are maintaining funding for 12 fetal alcohol spectrum disorder service networks. That was a very important commitment as well to ensure that we maintain that funding because there's tremendous work that's being done within these networks in terms of diagnoses and prevention of FASD. I'm very pleased that we were able to ensure that we maintained a budget for that.

We have also maintained funding for the homeless and outreach support services. We understand the importance of the community-based organizations, you know, across the seven cities. The work that they do is invaluable. They support a number of organizations under their umbrella that provide housing first and provide supports to vulnerable Albertans who are experiencing homelessness. That, again, was very important that we were able to maintain that funding.

Of course, FCSS, that program: I think I had more people across this province reach out to me about FCSS, including MLA Renaud. I mean, she spoke very passionately about that program and the impact that it has on members in her constituency. It's something that impacts every municipality throughout the province and the Métis settlements. We're very pleased that we're able to also maintain that program.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. It's an important one. It's important in my constituency as well. Thank you for the work that you're doing. You're doing a terrific job.

I'll pass on now to Member Yao.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Guthrie. I see that Mr. Neudorf has indicated he would like to . . .

Mr. Neudorf: Can you just let me know how much time there is there?

The Acting Chair: About 20 seconds.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. Thank you very much, Minister. I do appreciate all the work that you're doing. A significantly challenging portfolio, trying to balance the needs of individuals with disabilities and the funding restraints that we have. I look forward to talking to you a little bit more in the next set a little bit more about some specific questions that I have.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, sir.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition. Member Renaud, go ahead, please.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Maybe I'll just repeat my question where we stopped. Based on available information that I could find, there are currently 12 second-stage shelters for women and children operating 168 units in Alberta, and it looks like last year the funding was approximately \$8.6 million. Will there be a change to this?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm just going to backtrack a little bit, if I may, because you had a question about the number of beds.

Ms Renaud: Yes.

Mrs. Sawhney: I do have that number.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Great.

Mrs. Sawhney: We have 710 beds and 30 women's emergency shelters.

Ms Renaud: Yep. That's what I said.

Mrs. Sawhney: I think you said – yeah. Okay.

Ms Renaud: How many of those would be wheelchair accessible?

Mrs. Sawhney: That is a good question. I don't have the answer for that, but a very good question. I'll get back to you on that.

Ms Renaud: That'd be great.

Will there be any change to the 12 second-stage shelters?

Mrs. Sawhney: There are no changes planned at this time.

Ms Renaud: No changes. Okay. Great.

It looks like there are also 16 emergency beds for seniors and two family violence shelters. I think the 2018 budget was just over \$800,000. Will there be a change there?

Mrs. Sawhney: There is no change.

Ms Renaud: Perfect. It's also my understanding that there are currently fee-for-service agreements with five rural indigenous on-reserve women's emergency shelters. What's the capacity? Do you know? Like, how many beds? Do you know how many people are potentially able to be served?

Mrs. Sawhney: I don't have that answer.

Shannon, would you know?

Mr. Marchand: No, I don't know that.

Ms Renaud: Would it be possible to get that information?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Ms Renaud: Okay. That'd be great.

It looks like the budget for 2018 was approximately \$800,000. Will there be a change there?

Mrs. Sawhney: There's no change. It's the same.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Great.

In any of these shelters was there any sort of, I guess, specific investment towards energy efficiency that you know of that maybe your department would target to help or to try to take advantage of any kind of cost savings so they could redirect those funds to front-line services?

Mrs. Sawhney: I don't believe that there was sufficient capital or there was any capital, for that matter, allocated towards that, but I can confirm that there wasn't.

Ms Renaud: There was nothing?

Mrs. Sawhney: No.

You know what? I'm going to get Shannon to expand on that.

Mr. Marchand: Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services. I'm not sure it will be an expansion but to say that there is not . . .

Ms Renaud: An investment.

Mr. Marchand: . . . funding available for that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. In 2018 outreach and counselling grants provided by three programs received just over \$300,000. Will there be any changes to that?

Mrs. Sawhney: There are no changes to that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Excellent.

Are there any funds specifically aimed at addressing LGBTQ2S youth homelessness, housing, and shelter?

Mrs. Sawhney: There are no funds specifically allocated to that, but, I mean, we've maintained funding for homeless shelters and outreach support services. So that funding has been maintained for some time.

Ms Renaud: It's my understanding – and I could be wrong about this – that the work that had been going on was to address, I guess try to get a handle on the actual problem, which is quite large. I didn't even realize. I think the next step was investment into creating safe spaces and shelter spaces for these particular youth. I'm just wondering if there's any investment in this budget.

Mrs. Sawhney: At this point in time there's no new investment allocated to that, but, I mean, certainly I'm happy to have further conversations with you on that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. In August of 2019 CTV Calgary reported that the Calgary Homeless Foundation, an organization that funds 30 other homeless-related agencies in Calgary, was facing an 8 per cent, or \$3.2 million, cut. I think it's important to note that these supports focus on the prevention of homelessness. So will the Calgary Homeless Foundation be cut and how much and over what period of time if they are being cut?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, as I've said, we've maintained funding for homeless outreach support services. There are no cuts. They're going to be getting the same level of funding that they received.

Ms Renaud: So no cut for Calgary Homeless Foundation?

Mrs. Sawhney: No cut.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Great. That is great.

I am going to turn the rest of my time over to Member Ganley.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Member Ganley, go ahead. Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I'll apologize ahead of time. I'll potentially be covering some ground that some of my colleagues covered. I'm just trying to get some additional information, so I may try to move us along at one point.

The first question I wanted to ask, just because we're sort of seeing in the out-years the numbers in terms of employment and income support dropping, which I assume is based on an expectation of lower caseload growth – Treasury Board and Finance sort of predicts what employment and unemployment will be in the out-years for the government so that they can make their revenue projections based on how much income tax they're expecting to get. Do you use the same numbers that Treasury Board and Finance uses to project those income numbers to get the number of people you expect to be subscribed to Alberta Works and those programs?

Mrs. Sawhney: We do, yes.

Ms Ganley: So those are identical numbers.

Mrs. Sawhney: We use the same assumptions.

5:55

Ms Ganley: The other questions I had were with respect to AISH, lines 3.1 and 3.2, and then disability services, 4.1 through 4.7. I'm

just going to start with AISH because I think it's a comparatively straightforward example. Once you qualify for the program, each person in the program gets approximately the same amount of money. It's sort of a direct link between caseload and costs. Your deputy will probably remember several conversations at Treasury Board about caseload growth in terms of AISH. My understanding was that at the time it had been growing at 6-plus per cent a year every year and had been that way for the decade preceding and was projected to continue to be that way significantly into the future. I ran those numbers based on your estimate in 2019-20 in terms of what those budget numbers would look like in the out-years if you project based on 6 per cent caseload growth, and they come out almost \$131 million short by the '22-23 year. I'm curious to know: what are the numbers you're projecting for caseload growth? It doesn't need to be an exact number but just in terms of percentage.

Mrs. Sawhney: First, I just wanted to state that the 6 per cent growth rate that you had just quoted is a little bit on the high side. It's actually a little bit less than that. We're talking about maybe an average of about 2,500 individuals per year. I'm sorry; can you just repeat the last part of your question?

Ms Ganley: I'm just wondering: what is your projected caseload growth for the out-years for the AISH program?

Mrs. Sawhney: The overall average monthly caseload for 2020-21 is about 69,000. We're looking at almost 2,300 cases added in 2020-21.

Ms Ganley: Sorry. Is that every year, or is that just between '19-20 and . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: It's going to be roughly 2,500 individuals on average in the out-years.

Ms Ganley: Each year?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah.

Ms Ganley: Okay. You know what? I guess I can probably calculate that percentage.

With respect to disability services, obviously this total number for number 4 on page 52 and I guess on page 94 of the fiscal plan the line for disability services, it's broken down into various streams, but the largest component tends to be for payment of services. Again, my understanding had been that the caseload growth in there was roughly 6-ish per cent and was projected to continue into the future also, a little bit higher for the supports to children just because of better diagnostics. That's the FSCD program. I'm just wondering: what are you projecting for caseload growth there? Because there are so many items in here, I just took the assumption of, like, 5 per cent growth a year, but it comes out \$136 million short on that assumption. I'm just curious what your projected caseload growth is there.

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm just looking at the historicals here. Five per cent is a little bit on the high side as compared to historicals. They're more, like, in the 4 to 4.2 per cent range. You're asking about what projections might look like for 2019-20. We're looking at 494 individuals. That's a caseload change from the prior year.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. I hesitate to interrupt.

We will go back to the government caucus side. We concluded with Mr. Neudorf, and we will continue with Mr. Neudorf. Thank you very much.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, I just want to go back to some of the homeless things so I understand correctly. In Fort McMurray the Marshall House is being closed. There were 100 beds, 70 beds which were provincially funded, but the average occupancy was 24. So we were actually paying for three times as many beds as were being used. How many beds were at the Salvation Army? How many are you adding, and how many beds total will we have? What is the expected occupancy rate at the end of that if you don't mind clarifying?

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure. I think, as you pointed out, the occupancy was significantly under capacity, which speaks to inefficiencies. We were paying for a facility where we weren't utilizing it to the extent – well, it wasn't being utilized. That meant that we needed to make some changes.

I'm just going to give you some more information. As you've mentioned, the annual provincial funding was to operate 70 spaces for sober individuals experiencing homelessness, and the total capacity was 100 spaces. With the additional 24 spaces the Salvation Army emergency shelter will have a total capacity of 91 spaces. That's 56 sober spaces and 35 intox mats. That is right-sizing, the term that was used earlier. We're providing the right funding for what we expect to see in terms of usage.

Mr. Neudorf: Sorry, Minister. Would you expect that to be at 100 per cent capacity every night. How do you project that? What would you expect the usage to be?

Mrs. Sawhney: Based on what we've seen, on the evidence – and certainly the Member for Fort McMurray can attest to this as well – it wouldn't be at capacity.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. We're, as you said, right-sizing and trying to effectively and efficiently use the dollars that we have to meet the needs where it's needed most.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That's correct.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much for that.

Over on page 52 of the government estimates it shows roughly \$93 million in funding for homeless support outreach services. Can you just describe, again, your entire ministry's approach to homelessness and how you're trying to utilize that across the province? We have a very clear picture of Fort McMurray now, but if you could share a little bit about how you see that provincially, are we addressing with the same or similar means in different places as well?

The Acting Chair: Members, if we could just keep the side talk down. I'm just having trouble hearing the question. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: As you have mentioned, the budget provides \$93 million for homeless outreach support services. This funding is provided to CBOs, community-based organizations, in Alberta's seven major cities to support permanent supportive housing, housing with supports, and outreach programming using a housing first approach. I'd be happy to speak to you about that at a later point to describe what the philosophy is behind that approach. It also supports local homelessness priorities.

In addition to that funding, Budget 2019 also provides almost \$50 million for homeless shelters. As you know, homeless shelters – we've talked about this – provide a safe place to stay for individuals and families who are experiencing tough times and are without

housing. In 2018-19 over 2,800 individuals stayed in emergency shelters each night.

I had mentioned that, just to backtrack, we've provided \$93 million in funding for the CBOs, so homeless support outreach services. I'm going to share some numbers with you just to describe the magnitude of the support that is available. More than 19,000 Albertans since 2009 have been provided with access to supports in housing. These individual self-report that they relied less on emergency public services and have increased income. Shelter use has declined, and homelessness overall has decreased. That's in part because of the good work of these CBOs.

It's a significantly different outcome than what was projected 10 years ago, before the housing first approach. Ten years back the prediction was that homelessness in Alberta was actually going to increase by 7 per cent, so it's very reassuring and very heartening that we've actually reversed that trend and we've decreased situations of homelessness.

The plan is to continue the momentum, and that's why that budget was maintained. It protects services for Albertans affected by homelessness by maintaining that funding, as I just mentioned, not only for homeless shelters but for women's shelters as well.

6:05

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you for that, Minister.

On page 53 the government estimates also show, in my understanding, no capital investment in homeless support outreach services for 2019-2020. Will the government be following through with its platform commitment to provide capital funding to help rebuild Edmonton's Herb Jamieson Centre?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. We are committed to honouring our platform commitments. I have spoken about that extensively today. From 2019 to 2022 \$8 million in capital funding in the Seniors and Housing budget will support the redevelopment of the Herb Jamieson Centre. Hope Mission's Herb Jamieson Centre does play a vital role in Edmonton's system of care in serving the homeless. I was just going to say that I had the opportunity and privilege, in my mind, to actually visit Hope Mission and to speak with the CEO there as well. We discussed the needs within the community to ensure that we undertake this redevelopment because it serves so many people in the downtown area of Edmonton.

The redeveloped centre will feature improved accessibility – that's very important – increased safety measures, and also offer enhanced supports to those who need it. The plan is that we're going to continue working with organizations and our civil society partners to ensure that for vulnerable Albertans who are experiencing homelessness, we're addressing the challenges that they face and we're prioritizing services to make sure that we're meeting the most critical of needs.

Mr. Neudorf: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

I'm just going to change course here a little bit on the questioning. I know you've worked very closely with some of the other ministries that would intersect and link in the transfer of patient care as they move through the system. Considering that there is a transition of benefit programs for these individuals, how does interprovincial or intraprovincial migration impact applications for these programs, and how are Albertans affected if they move? I don't know how much of that you track between provinces and how much within the province, but can you just speak to that challenge that you face?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm just going to ask you to clarify that question. You're talking about inter- and intraprovincial transitions. Can you clarify which programs you're speaking of specifically?

Mr. Neudorf: Just the programs: if they're moving into Alberta from other provinces, how do they transition from a program? Or if they're moving within the province from one city to a different city, do those programs transition with them, or are there challenges? Either one that you could speak to.

Mrs. Sawhney: Within the province, I mean, if somebody is eligible for PDD supports or for the AISH program, it doesn't matter where you are within the province. Those supports would remain intact. Of course, if somebody moves out of the province, AISH is very specific to Alberta. It's a provincially designed program, and anybody who leaves the province would no longer be eligible for those supports. Individuals who move into the province would be eligible.

Mr. Neudorf: Okay. Do you see much impact on our budgets for people that move into the province to utilize our services? Is that a factor that you have to consider each year budget to budget?

Mrs. Sawhney: We do take into account migration patterns based on historical information and data, so there are provisions within the budget that will account for potential increases in population. As the population grows within the province – it's going to grow naturally because of the birth rate, and it's also going to grow because of mobility, people moving in and out – that is factored into our planning.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. I do appreciate it. Part of my motivation for asking that question is that that's a significant factor for Lethbridge.

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

We will now go back to the Official Opposition. We concluded with Member Ganley. Oh. Member Sabir, go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I guess when we concluded with Member Kathleen Ganley, you were telling us about the out-year projections that you have based your estimates on. If you want to finish that one, that'd be great.

Mrs. Sawhney: I thought we were sort of at the tail end. I'm sorry. Can you refresh?

Mr. Sabir: The question was that you have included your out-year projections about the caseload growth, and it was around 4.2 per cent. If that continues . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: Oh, for the FSCD program, right?

Mr. Sabir: PDD.

Mrs. Sawhney: Oh, was it PDD? Okay. Sorry, I'm going to ask you to repeat the question again.

Mr. Sabir: We were looking for what data you're using for your projections going forward in terms of caseload growth.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, the primary data source is always going to be historical data to see what's happened in previous years because that will help inform what the trend is going to look like.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Two or three questions. One is about Vision Loss Rehabilitation Alberta. They're reporting that they will close their centres in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie, and that will affect thousands of Albertans. There are approximately 13,000 registered users, and 2,700 of them live

outside urban areas, so it will be a huge impact. Do you want to comment on their closure and how you can support these Albertans?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'd like to start off by saying that obviously the government, the ministry, and department recognize the value that CNIB provides to folks who have disabilities through programs like Vision Loss Rehabilitation Alberta, the program that you mentioned. I do want to emphasize that the funding has not changed. It hadn't changed, and it is stable. That funding has always been there, and we're going to continue working with CNIB to make sure that the folks who need the help are getting the help that they deserve.

Mr. Sabir: So government funding was not an issue. It's their decision to close down. Is that what you're saying?

Mrs. Sawhney: The funding for CNIB hadn't changed. That was maintained.

Mr. Sabir: Just to clarify, the availability of government funding has nothing to do with Vision Loss Rehabilitation Alberta closing its centres across this province?

Mrs. Sawhney: You know, organizations make decisions in regard to operations based on a number of different criteria.

Mr. Sabir: I totally agree with you.

Mrs. Sawhney: But I'm just going to go back to the fact that the funding for CNIB had always been maintained. It hadn't changed. That grant agreement was in place, and it remains in place.

Mr. Sabir: That's why I'm asking. Government funding has nothing to do with their decision to close these centres down?

Mrs. Sawhney: I am not sure what their decision was based on to close those centres.

Mr. Sabir: Okay.

Let's move on to another question that's more in section 5, relating to homelessness. In 2018, I believe, we introduced LGBTQ shelter guidelines to help the LGBTQ youth impacted by homelessness. There was some funding, around \$2 million. Can you talk a little bit about that, if that funding has been maintained?

Mrs. Sawhney: What line item would you be referring to when you talk about that funding?

Mr. Sabir: It will be generally section 5 of your budget. I'm asking where will that money be for that youth homelessness initiative? Will it be in program planning, homeless shelters, outreach?

Mrs. Sawhney: This program that you're talking about: are you saying that it was in place earlier?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm going to have to get back to you on that.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Thank you.

This next question more relates to disability services. After that Betty Anne Gagnon inquiry report one of the recommendations was to start a provincial line where people can report abuse. Is that line still intact?

Mrs. Sawhney: That line is still intact, yes.

Mr. Sabir: Is funding still there for that line?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: With respect to line 1.5 of your budget, page 52, I see that budget for appeal panels has been decreased from \$4.2 to \$4 million and the actual for 2018 was \$4.5, so almost a \$500,000 difference. What do these reductions represent, and how are we going to manage the Appeals Secretariat? Will there be any reductions in staff or people on panels in terms of services?

6:15

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, part of the reduction in staff will be through attrition. I know that about \$153,000 is going to be allocated towards a staffing decrease, and the remaining amount is going to be a decrease in supplies and services. Ultimately, we're just moving back to the 2018-19 budget level beyond that.

Mr. Sabir: It's a \$2 million cut from the estimate and a \$5 million cut from the actual. Line 1.5.

Mrs. Sawhney: What are you looking at, Member? What I'm seeing here is that it's a decrease of about \$500,000. It's not in the millions. It's \$4.2 million to \$4.0 million. It's a \$500,000 decrease from budget to estimate.

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. You're right. So that's mostly . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: What I had mentioned before: supplies and services and some staffing attrition.

Mr. Sabir: There's a slight reduction in strategic services, line 1.3, as well. I think that's the area which will give you policy advice and that kind of work while you're reviewing all of the programs, and I see a reduction there. How about you just talk a little bit about your department's capacity to conduct all of these reviews at one time?

Mrs. Sawhney: For that specific reduction, that is related to a \$200,000, almost \$300,000 transfer of legal services to Justice and Solicitor General. That compromises a big chunk of that decrease.

Mr. Sabir: Back in the disability section, section 4, in 2017 the disability internship program was launched with 20 intern positions within the public service. Earlier you indicated that you will maintain those 20 positions.

Mrs. Sawhney: Currently – and I think I had mentioned this earlier as well – we're transitioning that program to the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Sabir: What does that mean?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I'm going to get Shannon to talk about that a little bit more.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. Thank you. The Public Service Commission is taking the lead in the government's efforts to make Alberta a leader in employing Albertans with disabilities. To make that more effective, the decision was that they will be more effective in terms of rolling out programming across the government as a whole in terms of the internship initiative as well as a suite of other initiatives that will be developed to support the government in meeting that objective. Ultimately, we'll see the available funding and accountability for the internship program shift over to the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Will that mean that they could be hired in other ministries as well?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'll let you expand on that.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. Thank you. Yes. I mean, I think part of the intent is that we believe – notwithstanding our best efforts to promote hiring in other ministries, we had some uptake but not always as much as we hoped to get. At the core of this is the belief that, I think, if the Public Service Commission is leading that initiative, it will be more successful in making it happen across the government.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I agree that's important.

I think one question I have with respect to elder abuse . . .

The Acting Chair: I apologize for the interruption, Member.

We have to go back to the government caucus side, and my understanding is that Mr. Walker would like to continue. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Chair. Through the chair I would say to the minister: I like to think that they save the best for last. Thank you so much for being here, Minister, and thank you to your staff for being here to discuss the Community and Social Services estimates. You know, this is such an important ministry, as members on both sides have talked about, one of our major ministries in terms of expenditure. I just can't thank you and your staff enough for the great advocacy you guys have done. I'm just so excited that our government, as we move towards balance – we do need to as we were left with a massive and troublesome debt and deficit – is investing in Community and Social Services, and I'm just so happy about that.

I would also like to take the time – I wish Member Renaud was here because I'm here to agree with her. It's nice. We had the service dog point as well for agreement – lots of harmony here – but I just want to thank and recognize especially, Minister, your office for being so effective at getting back to members with their concerns, their casework.

Mr. Yao: Agreed.

Mr. Walker: Yeah, absolutely.

I know this will be recorded forever, and I'm okay with that, for it to be. Out of every ministry I have dealt with – and, you know, at this point six months in I've dealt with them all – your ministry is the most effective, best, and most timely in getting back to a member, at least in Sherwood Park. Maybe you're preferential towards me; I'm not sure. I just also wanted to recognize your chief of staff. He has done a tremendous job. He's absolutely terrific and great to deal with, as are all of your colleagues.

Also, Minister, I just wanted to quickly say that the Gujarati community in Alberta is so happy and proud to see you as the Minister for Community and Social Services. I know you're building strong relations with them – and I have deep links as well – and they're just so happy that you're in your portfolio. I know the community clusters in northeast Calgary, as it does in southeast Edmonton, so they were excited to see you at Diwali here in Edmonton, too.

My first question: page 52 of the government's estimates says that the ministry will provide \$100 million to family and community support services, or FCSS. What is the focus of this program?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'd be happy to talk about FCSS because we're very pleased that we were able to maintain the funding for this program. I'm just going to backtrack a little bit. On some of the remarks that you made – thank you. Thank you for that. I'm extremely proud of my staff within the ministry, and within the department I feel very privileged to be working with such great, competent, capable, dedicated individuals. I mean, I just can't say enough. The honour is entirely mine. I'm glad that everybody was quite responsive and that, you know, your questions were answered. I mean, that's what we strive for, so thank you for that positive feedback.

I'm just getting to know the Gujarati community here in Edmonton, so you'll have to help me facilitate that. I did end up going to their Garba, actually, over Navratri. Yeah; that was prior to Diwali. It was super fun, so we'll have to attend the next one together.

Mr. Walker: For sure. They love you there and in Calgary as well.

Mrs. Sawhney: It's mutual. They're a great community.

In regard to the FCSS program it's a unique 80-20 funding partnership between government and participating municipalities and Métis settlements, and there are 315 municipalities across the province. Through this budget, as I mentioned, we're maintaining funding at \$100 million, and what this program does is that it helps deliver local preventative social services and innovative social-based programs to enhance the well-being of individuals, to promote inclusion and participation, and just ensure that families are taken care of within their communities.

I'm a firm and ardent supporter of the value of prevention, and certainly our government believes that prevention can reduce the likelihood of families experiencing a crisis. That's very important, and that's why it was important to maintain this program.

We look to programs like FCSS to increase stability and participation, as I mentioned, and also help reduce costs to the health, justice, and child intervention systems through preventative programming. I mean, this is a value of prevention, that we are seeing cost avoidance in some of these other ministries and it can be quite significant, particularly if we are undertaking prevention and early intervention sooner rather than later.

6:25

Currently over 99 per cent of Albertans reside in communities serviced by FCSS programs. It touches virtually every community in the province, and most people are touched by this program in different ways and they don't even realize it. So when we have conversations about events that maybe somebody has attended – and, you know, I'm learning more and more about these programs. I can say: hey, well that was a part of the FCSS program in your local community. Some of the programs address the root causes of family violence, bullying, poverty, homelessness, mental health and addictions, and more.

It's a tremendous long-standing partnership with municipalities and Métis settlements, and we're committed to continuing working with our community partners to ensure that we're meeting the changing needs of people across the province. So that's the FCSS program.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much for the answer to my question. I really appreciate the thoroughness of it, and throughout today I really appreciated the theme you spoke of, about our government collaborating with civil society and harnessing the power of civil society to bring about greater results in Community and Social Services.

Just quickly, in Sherwood Park we have the Robin Hood association, Minister. This was established in 1963 as a service to help individuals with disabilities live a good life and be contributing members to society. They now serve almost 800 people. They have five major facilities, four in Sherwood Park, one in Fort Saskatchewan. Myself and Minister Glubish have had time to go out there and tour with them. Your ministry is so important to them, obviously. They're a collaborative partner with us, and it's just a great example of how we can harness the power of civil society and nonprofits to bring about great outcomes.

One of my best memories there was that I met with a lot of the people who go there from day to day, people with disabilities, and they have karaoke on Tuesdays or Wednesdays. I was there that day; I think you know where this is going. They were singing, and they said: "Hey, we want the MLA to sing. Let's get him to sing a song." So I sang Bon Jovi, *You Give Love a Bad Name*, and the place went wild. It was one of the best memories I've ever had. Thank goodness it's not on video.

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm just visualizing that.

Mr. Walker: Anyway, on that and on the importance of all these programs, I guess, with the time remaining my last question, which I'd really like to get to, is: Minister, in the last four years recipients of AISH in Alberta have grown three times, as indicated in the fiscal plan on page 94. There are also other programs in Alberta that are available for individuals with disabilities. Can you explain if there is any crossover between benefit programs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I'm glad you asked that question because sometimes there isn't a great understanding amongst Albertans as to what that crossover is. I had mentioned earlier that we have 12,800 PDD clients, roughly, and what I can tell you is that 87 per cent of those clients – roughly 87 per cent based on our last data – are also AISH recipients. So that's one clear example of where, you know, programs intersect where support is required. There are other examples as well.

You had mentioned caseload growth as well. Is that what you had mentioned in your earlier comment, before you asked the question?

Mr. Walker: Yeah. It had grown about three times the amount.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah; three times higher than what we're seeing in terms of . . .

Mr. Walker: AISH.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. AISH, in terms of population growth. We'd also talked about caseload growth in FSCD and PDD. Yeah. There are instances where the programs do intersect.

Mr. Walker: Okay. Well, thank you so much for that response. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Acting Chair: Ten seconds.

Mr. Walker: Ten seconds. Okay. Time for some Bon Jovi now.

I just want to thank you, Minister, for your time and for taking my questions and being so candid and frank with us. Thank you for your time.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Mr. Walker. I appreciate it.

All right. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded. I'd like to thank everyone who has participated for the last, we'll say, 12 hours over the last two days. Thank you so much for all the committee members who've been a part of that.

I'd like to remind the committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on Tuesday, November 19, 2019, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Thank you very much. This meeting is adjourned. Have a great evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]

