



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Community and Social Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 3, 2020
3:30 p.m.

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair

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* substitution for Nathan Neudorf

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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Community and Social Services
Hon. Rajan Sawhney, Minister
Jason Chance, Assistant Deputy Minister
Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister

3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

[Ms Goodridge in the chair]

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

The Chair: I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everybody here today. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, when it comes your turn, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. My name is Laila Goodridge, MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and chair of this committee. I will look to my right to continue with introductions.

Ms Sigurdson: Lori Sigurdson, Edmonton-Riverview. I'm deputy chair.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rutherford: Brad Rutherford, Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Turton: Searle Turton, MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

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

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

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Amery: I am Mickey Amery, MLA for Calgary-Cross.

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm Rajan Sawhney, MLA for Calgary-North East. To my far left I have ADM Jason Chance, to my left I have ADM Chi Loo, to my right I have Deputy Minister Shannon Marchand, and to his right is Olin Lovely, senior financial officer.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, MLA for St. Albert.

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

The Chair: I would just like to note the following substitutions for the record. We have Mr. Rowswell substituting for Mr. Neudorf; Mr. Turton is substituting for Ms Glasgo.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. I'd like to remind everyone to please set your cellphones and any other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting.

A total of six hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates of 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 in 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's. A reminder that all conversation must flow through the chair at all times regardless of

whether or not speaking times are combined. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to myself or to 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 having a break?

When we adjourned our meeting this morning, we were about three and a half minutes into an exchange between Mr. Rutherford and the minister. I will now invite I believe it's going to be Mr. Turton to complete the remaining time in this rotation. You have six minutes and 25 seconds, Mr. Turton.

Mr. Turton: Perfect. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much, Minister, for coming out here today. I just want to quickly say as well that your leadership in this portfolio has been noticed, especially down in my neck of the woods out in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain.

You know, over the last 10 years or so my riding has had the privilege of having some unique challenges just with being one of the fastest growing areas in the country. It's also telling that I had the privilege of following Mr. Rutherford from Leduc-Beaumont because there are a number of things that we have in common, both with our fast-growing ridings and obviously the needs of the disabled community – that's really what I'm going to be focusing my questions on – that continue to increase, as many of us know, in our fast-growing urban areas.

On page 134 of the fiscal plan it shows a slight increase to the disability services budget compared to the 2019-20 forecast. My question on the first point is: how does Budget 2020 support people with disabilities? In my previous role as a city councillor for the city of Spruce Grove I had the fortune of working with our FCSS programs and really being involved with members of my community when it came to either programs or dealing with people that had disabilities. It's been refreshing to hear you, Minister, talk about the different approach that you're willing to take in terms of actually meeting the needs not just for today but for many years to come.

On page 45 – this pertains to my second question – it really has to deal with economic development and finding economic opportunities for people with disabilities. Page 45 of the ministry's business plan mentions that the ministry "supports the participation of Albertans with disabilities in the labour force." At this time I'd like to just really quickly quote from Bruce Uditsky, who is the CEO of Inclusion Alberta. On his website he states that between 70 and 80 per cent of adults with developmental disabilities can be employed at least part time; however, in Canada and Alberta there are unemployment rates of between 70 and 80 per cent.

Quite frankly, I find this unacceptable. Many people that have disabilities want to have an ability to be able to be productive members of society, yet it just seems as if sometimes internal processes are holding them back from, you know, being a greater benefit to society in terms of economic output. My question is: how is the ministry promoting employment for people with disabilities?

Now, I can think of countless stories of people when I was going door to door. They were begging us for new solutions, new programs to be able to help them. You know, they were being mired in red tape. I know, Minister, that you've been talking quite a bit about trying to make it more efficient or making your department run in a more efficient manner so that people with disabilities can access the programs and services that they need.

You know, key objective 2.1 in the business plan says: "Provide employment support services to help Albertans get back to work."

Getting Albertans back to work is a top priority for this government, and this includes Albertans with disabilities, which I find gets lost in the often-reported-on employment metrics like overall job numbers and employment rates. Minister, in my area finding economic opportunities for people that have disabilities is a huge matter.

I'd like to also just bring to mind Cohesive Communities, which is out west and run by, you know, Amy Quintal. She was my guest at the throne speech earlier this week. She's told me story after story about people with disabilities that are trying to access programs and services, trying to find those opportunities that they can tap into so that they can improve their lives. Even before the session started today, I was talking with Amy, and she was telling me some of the stories about how things need to change.

The status quo is no longer acceptable in terms of the way we've been providing these programs and services. People are craving something different. I know the term that you, Minister, have used many times is the word "transformational," that we need to look at a transformational change when it comes to providing a more efficient public service. There are families and there are individuals in my riding – I'm thinking of their faces, family members – that are saying: "We want new ways of doing things. We are struggling here. The status quo, how we've been doing things for many years, is not working."

I see that the ministry has allocated . . .

The Chair: Mr. Turton, I have to interrupt you as you have now gone to five minutes.

Now on to the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you. Thank you, Member Turton, for your very concise, clear, and even somewhat emotional articulation of the problem that people with disabilities are facing today in terms of extensively high unemployment rates and finding those opportunities that really do provide meaning and dignity for individuals. I mean, we all know that the work that we do does so much for us in terms of defining our days and giving us purpose and joy, and it's unfortunate that we don't have the same type of opportunities for people in the disability community.

You know that I'm a storyteller, so I'm going to share a bit of a story. My husband's cousin is a person with a developmental disability. A few years back – actually, I think it was in 2007 – I took him around for several days to our local businesses to see if I could help him find employment. English is his second language, but he is absolutely capable of doing so much. During that time, when I went to these various businesses, I could see the wariness in the eyes of some of these folks in terms of wanting to provide him an opportunity for employment, and that speaks to what I was saying before about empathy.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes that 10-minute block.

Now on to Ms Renaud.

3:40

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, I agree with Mr. Turton and the minister that there is a great deal of dignity in work, and for people who are able and choose to work, they should be supported to do so.

I'm going to ask a few questions about employment. I noticed that you are making a \$5 million investment in employment. I would like to know if these are new dollars or if they are being moved from persons with developmental disabilities. Community supports: are they coming from either community access or

employment supports? Are these new dollars? Where are they coming from?

I would also like to know – I did note that this was indeed a platform commitment from the UCP. I think it's on page 78 in your platform document and says that you'll "build on successful partnerships like Abilities at Work or the Rotary Employment Partnership by providing \$5 million." I would like to know: if this is already predetermined, which provider will get this funding? Is it already determined that Inclusion Alberta will be providing this service? Now, don't get me wrong. I think, actually, they've done amazing work and are very often leaders in their field, but it's not for me to say who should and shouldn't get government funding because it's not our jobs to pick and choose winners and losers.

That being said, I would like to know if this is already a done deal, and is Inclusion Alberta the group that will be providing 5 million dollars' worth of employment supports per year, which is great? I do know their track record. Their Rotary project: I think they've been around, like, 15 years, and they've placed 500 individuals, which is good. So I would like to hear more about that.

I'm going to move on to PDD, actually, because we don't have much time. I'm going to move on to persons with developmental disabilities. This will be looking at line 4, line 4.1, line 4.2, and so on. First of all, yes, there was an increase in this budget line. You know, typically, if you're going to keep pace with growth, you have to do that. I am appreciative that there's not a cut on this line, but as you know, it's not meeting the caseload growth that's stated in the budget documents, so I would like to know what the plans are to address the shortfall. I'd also like to know: how many Albertans apply for PDD supports every year?

Also, going back to the last estimates, we talked a little bit about wait-lists. Now, I know that people like to point fingers, that it was this government, that it was that government. It doesn't really matter what government it was; what really matters is how many people are on the wait-list. I think that with the two-tiered wait-list that you described, one is really, actually, the wait-list, where they'll go to a provider or get an FMS contract, and the other list is in planning stages. I think you called it service planning. I would like to know: out of the I think it was – actually, I'm going to back up a bit. We have about 13 people on the actual wait-list, and I think we have about 2,300 people on the service planning wait-list. I would like confirmation of those numbers. More than that, I would like to know: what is the criteria to move from service planning?

I've done service planning, certainly been involved with it, for many, many years. I actually know all the steps that are involved in that, so I have a fairly good idea of how long it takes to collect medical information and otherwise. I would like to know: what is the criteria to move from the wait-list that you call service planning to the actual wait-list, that you currently have 13 people on in an entire province? I would like to know: what is the average timeline to move from the service planning wait-list to the actual wait-list, and what are the criteria to move from the service planning wait-list to the actual wait-list?

Now, I go back to some of the comments you made this morning. You were reassuring Albertans that, you know, these are legislated benefits or supports and that certainly anybody that meets eligibility – we'll get to eligibility later – will be served or will receive the services that they require. And fair enough. That's wonderful. So let's look at the criteria for service for PDD. They're actually fairly simple on paper; they're a little bit more complex in life.

But I see that I am running out of time, so I am not going to break this up. I am just going to stop there. I think I have about five seconds left. I will stop there and wait to hear your answers and then move on to PDD eligibility when the next round comes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

On to the minister for your five-minute block.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you, Member Renaud, for all your questions. I wrote them all down, and I'm going to try to answer all of them.

Before I get to your questions, I did want to refer back to your comments about funds being transferred from FASD into the service dog funding. We did look into that over the break, and the answer is that these were coded to the wrong program. This information was pulled from the accounts payable system, and when we do the corrections, we correct the GL, the general ledger, so it's not captured in the AP data pull. In other words, we did not use FASD funding for service dog agencies, so that has been corrected.

In terms of your first question – are they new dollars for our platform commitment, the \$5 million to increase partnerships and create job opportunities? – those are new dollars, and they are not reallocated from PDD.

The second question was: is Inclusion Alberta predetermined to be the organization that we're going to partner with? No. There is no predetermination. In fact, in the coming weeks we are going to engage in consultations with various different organizations and really have an objective process in place to determine who we're going to partner with. That is going to be under way.

The third question was PDD meeting budget documents. Sorry. I think I'm going to have to come back to that one because I quickly wrote down the note.

I think that your question was: how many new clients do we have in the PDD program every year? I think that in the order of about 500 clients per year is what we've seen historically. It does vary, but I'm giving you an average number. I'll confirm that as well.

In terms of the wait-list your numbers are correct: 13 on the wait-list, about 2,300 in service planning. I will confirm that. You had asked questions about the criteria around the in-service planning, and I'm going to get ADM Jason to answer that question.

Mr. Chance: Thank you. The question was: how do people move from the service planning to the wait-list? The fact is that they generally do not. The wait-list is usually – and the people are on the wait-list when there is no service provider available or they have complex needs and there's no capacity in the system at this time. When people are moving into service, they will often move directly from the service planning list into either an active service agreement with a contracted service provider or through an FMS agreement, and those are approved on the basis of, generally, at this point using critical and urgent criteria. That's what we're using to ensure that people are safe, so if their circumstances change or they're in immediate risk, say if a family member had passed away or gone into hospital and they're without natural supports, then they would be deemed critical and urgent, and we will make sure that they receive the supports they need.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you for that.

I also wanted to mention that in Budget 2020 we have increased funding for PDD by \$8 million. I've talked so much about caseload pressures, and I've mentioned as well that priority for PDD services is being given to those with critical and urgent needs. You know, I did also talk about publishing the wait-list and how that was a request from the disability community, and it also aligns with my personal values as well in terms of being quite honest and transparent with the data. Part of the incentive and motivation of releasing that data was to actually work with our service providers to try to get some more recommendations and suggestions as to how

we can break apart this in-service planning list to serve these clients a little bit better, how we can engage more with community partners to find better solutions so that they're not waiting in that queue for as long as they are.

I believe I've answered all the questions that you had asked in regard to PDD. I'm just trying to think of some other things that I would like to take this opportunity to share. I did mention, as did Member Renaud, that the PDD wait-list did exist prior to this government coming into place. It was in place before. Of course, nobody is finger pointing. This is nonpartisan. We're all here to serve vulnerable Albertans.

3:50

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we're back to the government caucus, and I believe that it's Mr. Turton to continue with his questions.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you again, Minister, for being here. Just to kind of continue on a couple of the questions that I had, and I'm looking forward to hearing your responses because it just seemed as if you were – I don't know if it was short or whatever, but I am looking forward to hearing your answers afterwards.

Regardless, I guess my first question – I really want to talk about sustainability on page 133 of the fiscal plan. I know that you talked a little bit about this with a couple other questions, but I just kind of want to narrow down my specific question about: why do you think, Minister, that caseloads for disabilities are growing at such a fast pace, and what does this mean for the sustainability of our vital programs that so many Albertans require on a daily basis? As I mentioned in my last round of questioning, you know, I think that all the elected officials in this room would just have to go door to door, talk to our friends and families and neighbours, and there's a real concern out there in terms of saying that the long-term sustainability of the programs and services that they rely on – they want to make sure that they're looked after, not just for today but for many years to come.

You know, there are families, for example, where their kids are getting to that age where they know that they're going to have to start looking at different types of programs, and they're asking questions. I know that a big part of this Budget 2020 and some of the conversations that you've had in public, Minister, are about making sure that how we provide programs and services here in the province of Alberta is sustainable and that Albertans have that trust in their government to be able to provide those services for many, many years to come.

I also didn't have a chance to finish off my secondary question that I had, but the question would be, you know: can the minister explain how the amount of \$5 million to build successful partnerships is supporting those employment opportunities for Albertans with disabilities? Just describe that in a little bit more detail about how those partnerships are occurring, who the partnerships are with, and perhaps maybe just explain a little bit about how your approach, Minister, is differing today and moving forward compared to perhaps the last couple of years when it comes to having those conversations with our private-sector partners or other nonprofits. The language coming from the ministry is a lot different in terms of looking at those transformational ways that we need to be able to look at in terms of providing a new type of service delivery model or those new types of conversations because Albertans are depending on us to have those conversations.

The last couple of questions I have are, really, regarding FSCD. The ministry estimates show a 1.3 per cent increase in the family support for children with disabilities budget compared to the 2019-

2020 forecast with increasing caseloads and expenditures. How does the government in this regard plan to support families of children with disabilities? Also, can you explain the growth under that caseload pressure? As I mentioned before, ridings such as Spruce Grove-Stony Plain just happen to be one of the fastest growing in the country, and it's becoming a bigger and bigger issue as people that require special programs or services are coming more to those urban areas such as Spruce Grove-Stony Plain or areas like Leduc-Beaumont. We have to make sure that those services are there.

Speaking of programs that support children, I know that this is a little different, but what can you share about the reduction in the 2020 budget for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder? This is something that a couple of residents have talked to me specifically about. I know that it was a focus in the past, but I was hoping perhaps maybe you can kind of talk about the slight change in approach about why that reduction is there and some potential impacts that it could have to the people that rely upon that funding.

Those are the questions that I have. I'd like to turn over the rest of my time to Member Yao.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Turton: How much time is left?

The Chair: Thirty four seconds.

Mr. Turton: Okay. Actually, maybe I'll just follow up on my question before I pass it over.

I mean, this is something, obviously, with the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder – it is definitely something that has been a concern that has been brought to me. I know that when I was looking at the budget, this was something that – it was just an anomaly, I guess you could say. When you look at all the different types of increases that we've had in other types of program and service delivery, this is the one that kind of came out.

I guess that would be it, and I defer the rest of my time over to you, Minister.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Now back to the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Turton, and great questions. I will just go over them one by one here.

The first question was in regard to the 1.3 per cent increase in – sorry; that was the last question. I'll start with the last question first, the 1.3 per cent increase in the family support for children with disabilities budget compared to the forecast. We did increase funding for FSCD by almost \$3 million over the last year of this forecast for a current total of \$211 million. I recognize how valuable this program is for children and families, and I've done extensive stakeholder engagement with families and service providers and have had a real insight and understanding of how meaningful this program is in terms of developing capacity and resiliency within families. When you have a child with a disability, everything is harder, and this program helps support families to get through those difficult times.

Across Alberta more than 15,000 children and their families access this program. But, as you mentioned, caseloads are not sustainable. They've risen almost 30 per cent in the last four years, and likewise, expenditures for direct services have risen 54 per cent since 2013. What this means is that if we don't work together to find solutions to these pressures, we will expect families to have to wait longer for services.

To protect this critical program and to help it evolve, I have been consulting with the disability community – in fact, we all have within the ministry and department – including the Provincial Parental Advisory Committee, on ways forward. At our last meeting they provided a number of recommendations in regard to red tape reduction initiatives. As we review this program and take steps forward to bring about any kind of changes, we are committed to undertaking those red tape reduction initiatives as well. This committee, whose members include parents and guardians involved with FSCD and which acts as a voice for families, has provided valuable insight, as I just mentioned. Other families and community stakeholders have also shared their perspectives over the last few months, including participants in my recent Disability Advisory Forum in February, and I'm very, very grateful for the insight that all of these members have provided.

We believe that a new investment, which is one of our platform commitments, will help FSCD families, 1 and a half million dollars towards family resource centres in St. Paul, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, and Edmonton. As FSCD families already manage many aspects of their children's agreements, these centres will provide them with needed support, mentorship, and community.

Now, you had asked: what is driving the growth of the FSCD caseload? I had mentioned that the average yearly caseload has been about 7.7 per cent from 2012 to 2019 whereas the annual population growth of Alberta's child population was 2 per cent, so that's significantly higher. We attribute this caseload growth in FSCD to a number of things: increased awareness and diagnosis of disabilities like autism spectrum disorder, earlier diagnosis, an increase in survival rates of children with disabilities, and I would also say increases in mental health illnesses and autoimmune disorders.

Again, I'm consulting with our stakeholders, including the provincial group representing FSCD families, on how to evolve this important program so that it's sustainable in the long term, and I will be undertaking a study to try to understand why the prevalence of disabilities is on the rise. I think it's a very important question that needs to be answered, and it's come up time and time again with government members as well as families. They're wanting to know what is happening that we're seeing so many more children with disabilities.

The reduction to the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder budget line – I'm just confirming here. The reduction of \$500,000, or 1.9 per cent, is going to be achieved through the ministry reducing its own supplies and service costs, so it's internal savings that we have. There's going to be no reduction to the grants that we are going to be giving to the network. Those savings are going to be achieved internally. The 12 FASD service networks are located throughout the province. The networks are made up of community agencies and organizations that deliver prevention, diagnosis, and assessment supports.

4:00

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you, Minister.

Next we are back to the opposition, and I believe it's Ms Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Yes. Thank you. Okay. Just going back to something Mr. Chance said earlier, about the 2,300 people that are sitting in service planning and that that is not a wait-list, I'm wondering if you could clarify that for me. They're just going to sit in service planning until when? My question is: what would cause them to move to the actual wait-list? I'm struggling to understand how we only have 13 people waiting for service in an entire province.

The other comment I think it was Mr. Chance made was that there was no service provider availability. That's really just not jibing with what I'm hearing, that there's no service provider availability.

What I am hearing is that there's no money for service providers. They may have a vacancy, in some cases a partially funded vacancy. Let's say that they have a condo. They have two roommates. One roommate dies or moves out, and they can share a staff, but that vacancy is not getting filled if they need a top-up. So I would like an explanation or if you could expand on what that means.

I'm going to go to PDD eligibility. It's very basic, actually: it's a developmental disability before 18; intellectual capacity, or IQ, below 70; and then, using an adaptive skills inventory, the person has to be unable to independently manage at least six of the 24 skills. Those skills are, like, knowing when someone will harm you, able to use the bathroom, finding and keeping a job, things like that. It's very straightforward, and your comment this morning was: if people were eligible, they would be supported. I'm confused by this because I continue to get letters from people that demonstrate the need – they meet the eligibility requirements – but they're getting letters back that say that they are denied because it does not meet the criteria of urgent or critical at this time. What that tells me is that you've introduced another criterion for people to be eligible.

Here's an example of a family with a profoundly autistic adult son, IQ between 30 and 50, a lot of behavioural challenges. I can't even begin to describe them; I don't have enough time. But they moved to Texas. They gave up their supports, moved to Texas for work, got supports there, moved back, and were denied. The letter says that they're denied because they do not meet the criteria of urgent or critical at this time. So that leads me to believe that indeed we might have PDD eligibility.

We have a two-tiered wait-list. It's not clear to me how people move from these 2,300 people sitting in service planning to an actual wait-list now of 13 people. The eligibility is very clear to me. It hasn't changed. That legislation has not changed. Yet there's a demonstrated need: they have had the supports before, they moved away, they came back, and suddenly they're not eligible. So I would like to know: what are the criteria to move from the service planning wait-list, which is a wait-list – let's be honest, right? It's 2,300 people that need supports. They're waiting for supports. Really, that's the definition of a wait-list. They're waiting for supports. Twenty-three hundred people: it doesn't matter to me why they're waiting; they're waiting. And the problem is that there's a lot of risk to that waiting, not for everybody, certainly.

Let me give you an example. There are a lot of people with developmental disabilities that have lived at home their entire lives with their folks. Suddenly their parents are older. They're unable to provide for them – for whatever reason, they just can't do it – but they're not considered urgent or critical somehow. So they're sitting and lingering on this wait-list, waiting for some kind of service planning that I don't understand. Are there new criteria to define what is critical, what is urgent? Are people going to sit there until when?

I understand that the people, the 13 on the actual wait-list, are likely complex. I don't know if they're sitting in Alberta Hospital or Ponoka or Michener. I don't know where they're from. I imagine that they are very complex. I've certainly supported a number of people where I didn't understand how complex they could be, and there is a very big difference between very complex and complex. I get that. But I would like to know how this ministry is justifying having 2,300 Albertans that clearly have met PDD eligibility, because they're in that stage – they've obviously met the criteria in terms of IQ, intellectual capacity, the adaptive skill, and developmental disability, the age of onset. I'd like to know what that is.

I would also like to know: is this ministry introducing any income testing for any piece of these supports?

I would also like to know: is the ministry aware of agency vacancies, whether they're funded, unfunded, or partially funded?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Renaud.

Now we're back to the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to get ADM Jason Chance to answer the first question.

Mr. Chance: Sure. I guess, just to reiterate, people do not move from the service planning list to the wait-list. The wait-list is those in communities where, very clearly, there are not service providers available to serve those specific needs of those individuals. When people do move from service planning, they are moving into the capacity that you noted, Member, in the service provider community or with an FMS agreement.

In terms of the vacancy issue, that is something that we've been discussing with the Service Provider Partnership Committee in terms of: when a person exits the program for whatever reason and there is a space available, how do we work with that service provider to ensure that that service capacity can be used as quickly as possible, that it's not just left there? We've got plans to do that in the coming months, and we've been discussing that with ACDS, which is the core group of our partnership committee.

In terms of urgent and critical, what that refers to is just the fact that we are constantly looking at the people that we are working with through the service planning. The examples that you used, Member, in terms of family that is breaking down, are certainly at the top of the list. I see those every week in terms of: these are families that need some extra respite; these are some families that may need some extra community access just to provide respite or something like that. We are responding as we're able and within our budget capacity and within our service provider capacity.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you.

You know, honestly, there are no easy answers to some of these questions because the pressures on the system are real. The level of complexity that the clients bring in some cases, by some service providers, from what I've been hearing, is unobserved before it's unprecedented. I know that right now our priority is on those individuals who have urgent and critical needs.

I'm just going to tell you what the definition of that is. Critical or urgent needs are assessed by considering the risk the individual poses to their own safety or the safety of others, their risk of being exploited or harmed by others, and their risk of losing housing. That's how the priority is allocated to clients who are waiting for services. When this program was first legislated, in 1997 – and that was following deinstitutionalization – I don't think anybody anticipated the level of complexity that we would observe in some of these clients.

I have had multiple conversations with stakeholders. I've got a whole list of them here. At one of my disability advisory forums we talked about the need to work collaboratively and the need for everyone to come to the table to come up with some solutions and recommendations based on their experience, based on best practices and also, dare I say, thinking outside of the box as to how we're going to collectively determine how this PDD program needs to move forward, because right now the priority is, as I said, for those critical and urgent clients, but there are those other clients as well who are indeed eligible that we do want to serve.

Unfortunately, given finite resources and given caseload pressures – I think the increase in this program was almost 18.1 per cent, actually, in the past four years, and that's a concern because, as I said, you know, my budget is \$3.9 billion, and I'm trying to use

every cent of that budget to make sure it goes to the most vulnerable. That necessitates a deep, deep look at this program.

I am heartened by the fact that I'm not alone. Government is not alone. We have a lot of people around the table who are supportive of our efforts to find ways to make this program more sustainable. We have the service provider partnership, that has given extensive feedback in terms of what we can do to reduce red tape. Disability Advisory Forum: our first session was on eligibility, but it quickly morphed into a conversation about complex clients, and we're certainly looking – actually, not even looking – more than looking into accreditation for our service providers to understand how to deal with complex clients.

Again, I think I've met with hundreds of people about all of our disability programs, so we're . . .

4:10

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back to the government caucus. I believe it's Mr. Yao.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Chair. Minister, thank you and your team for being here. I do not envy you in the position that you are in. A \$3.9 billion budget, and you're able to maintain that when we're trying to cut so many other areas: I commend you for your stand in Executive Council on that. Not only that, but you actually got an increase compared to many other departments. You got a 7.6 per cent increase compared to other ministries. Again, that's commendable, that you were able to get that, especially with the situation you inherited from the previous government. It's fantastic that you are focusing on the most vulnerable while still balancing out the fact that we have to ensure that future generations aren't paying for these fiscal decisions that you have to make.

I have a lot of friends who are social workers, and I couldn't help but notice that over the years the things that have always stuck in my head that they've complained about were the fact that there are a lot of people that abuse our systems, that take advantage of our systems. It was aggravating to them as social workers because they could also identify so many people that were on these wait-lists that could not access these resources. There's certainly that balance that we have to identify. I commend you for trying to address those issues, that my friends had, of trying to ensure that the most vulnerable truly get those supports and the people that maybe are exaggerating their circumstances find other alternatives. I want to commend you for that. This fiscal burden is, again, difficult.

You show an estimate of an \$8 million, or .8 per cent, increase in funding for PDD, the persons with developmental disabilities program, compared to the 2019-2020 forecast. I'm just wondering if this will be enough to support the caseload growth and other cost pressures that are affecting this area in particular. Again, as our population grows, as our society becomes more aware of these situations, it's difficult to keep up to that growth, especially, again, with the financial situation. Can you imagine if the previous government didn't spend money on railcars, those billions of dollars, or a superlab, the millions of dollars?

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Chair: Yes?

Mr. Sabir: Standing Order 23 I will rely on. The member is making a statement which is likely to cause disruption. Also, these railcars have nothing to do with the ministry estimates or whatever we have in front of us. I went through the ministry business plan, the ministry's fiscal statement 2020 up to 2023. I went through all this, what's in front of us, estimates. I didn't find any line item, any mention of these railcars. I would suggest that we keep discussion

respectful and on these numbers instead of making even unfounded allegations like social workers helping people misuse and people exaggerating their circumstances to get supports. We should ask questions that relate to these estimates.

The Chair: And the government?

Mr. Amery: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order under 23(h), (i), or (j). I'm not sure that the member referenced any of those subsections. Having said that, this is a matter of debate. The member is providing his opinion and tying it to a subject matter for discussion. He's done a very good job of itemizing his position, his opinion, what relates to his particular constituency and his particular concerns. It is a matter of debate. He hadn't even actually finished his sentence before the member interrupted him, so I would submit it is not a point of order. He hasn't continued his thought, we don't know where he's going with this, and we would ask that you allow him to continue.

The Chair: Well, thank you for that information, both sides. After considering and reading through and referencing the standing orders, in this particular case I will have to agree with the government caucus that I do not believe that this was a point of order, but I will caution the member to make sure that he is respectful in his tone and gets to his question.

Mr. Yao: Absolutely. I did ask a question in there.

Sorry, Chair. How much time do I have left now?

The Chair: You have two minutes and eight seconds.

Mr. Yao: Excellent. The second question I have is regarding online data regarding PDD. I know that it was asked before, but I wasn't quite clear on it. I just need to understand: what purpose is it to have the data online? Is there going to be information online to assist persons with developmental disabilities? Are there applications online? Is it there to ensure that members of the public can access information related to the persons with developmental disabilities program? Again, how many people are on the PDD wait-list, as an example?

Secondly, I have questions surrounding the family-managed resource centres. Now, I know that, certainly in our consultations prior to this Legislature being opened, you know, some of the things people expressed concerns about were that they had to go to different places for different supports, and there were thoughts about perhaps streamlining that entire system. So, to that effect, I'm wondering if these family-managed resource centres will help to address that issue of that one-stop shop, if you will, for supports for family and whatnot. I mean, I guess: ultimately, does that enable easier access for people to identify resources available to them? Where are these centres located? Will this program, if it's effective and efficient, be expanded, or are we just remodeling the way things are done? I'm looking to understand that a bit more because certainly that was something that I understood.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Yao, for your questions. I'm just going to touch briefly on the comments around fraud and, particularly, fraud prevention. We don't see rampant issues with fraud within our programs, within AISH or income support, but having said that, they do exist in the range of what's typical of these programs. Nonetheless, there will be more of a concerted effort to put more resources in this area because, again, these resources are finite, they're very valuable, and we want to make sure that they are indeed going to the vulnerable.

In regard to your question about the \$8 million increase in funding for the PDD program, we are obviously continuing to fund and protect supports for the vulnerable while planning for the future of these important programs. Again, due to caseload pressures, priority for this program is being given to those with critical and urgent needs.

I've already mentioned that I've met with numerous stakeholder groups to discuss these and other challenges facing the disability programs in Alberta. This engagement is ongoing. One important step that we've taken to find solutions has obviously been the release of the PDD data online. That was released I believe it was last week. I think the transparency that it shows and the fact that that data is available to our stakeholders to view will actually allow for further and deeper and more meaningful conversations around this wait-list. Anyone can view our active caseload or the list of people that are waiting for services.

We're also providing supports that will help the disability community. For example, we've dedicated 1 and a half million dollars to establish the four new family resource centres, that you had mentioned. These centres will offer new support for families managing services for a family member with a disability. And they will build on existing local, regional, and provincial resources to strengthen the capacity of communities where families and individuals live. This was a very, very important platform commitment, and I think it will have tremendous value in terms of serving the disability community.

4:20

We're also partnering with civil society through an action group to advance a registered disability savings plan, an important long-term savings plan for individuals with disabilities. This is such an important platform commitment as well. It can be quite challenging to get these RDSPs set up. It's a lot of paperwork. So anything that we can do to help individuals get further on in getting this financial instrument set up will be very beneficial.

Despite these new supports, we recognize that the caseload pressures facing PDD are very, very complex, and I'll continue to engage with the disability community, including the Disability Advisory Forum, which represents an open dialogue with the disability community. I've said before and I'll say it again: there are no easy answers. Government knows this, and from my discussions with the disability community, I know that they understand this as well. We will continue to work together on how to help this program evolve to ensure its long-term sustainability.

You mentioned the PDD data that's online, and I've talked about our government's commitment to openness and transparency. The disability community did ask for this. I was happy to provide it, and I'm working on providing the data for the FSCD program as well. If you do want to take a look at this data, simply go to open.alberta.ca and search PDD in the open-data catalogue.

As you'll see if you view the data, reporting on service planning and wait-lists has been inconsistent. As of January 21, 2020, there were 13 people on the wait-list – you had asked that question, and I had mentioned it before – but more than 2,300 in service planning. Service planning lists for PDD existed prior to our government being elected, as I've mentioned, and we expect these lists to continue to rise as a result of caseload pressures. The term "service planning" means that an individual has a caseworker assigned to them to assist their needs, work with them and their family or community, and develop an outcome plan. We've already talked about that. I know it's confusing and that most people fall into this category and very few are on the wait-list. That's why I've asked my staff to shift how we report data to clearly track who is waiting for services. That work is ongoing, and we should have better

metrics and better descriptors available towards the end of the month. It'll be posted, actually, later this spring.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Next back to the Official Opposition.

Ms Renaud: Just one quick comment or, actually, a question. You mentioned earlier that you were looking at developing some accreditation around complex needs. As far as I know, there already is accreditation around complex designations. It's a fairly complex process, actually. So I'd like to know if that's changed. Has that changed?

The other thing is that I would like to know, if possible, in the spirit of transparency: what are the wait times? What is the average wait time for someone to get on the service planning list or whatever? What is the average wait time? Are there different wait times or different measurements for people that will wait on that list and then sign a family-managed support contract or people waiting on that list to go to a service provider? Is there a difference between them?

Also, in terms of oversight – family-managed supports aren't covered through protection for persons in care, so it's not like you can pick up the phone and call and report and have an investigator assigned – there is very little other than, you know, reporting remittance problems.

Madam Chair, I'm wondering if you could ask the chatter to just go down a little bit. I'm sorry. I'm not feeling very well today. I have a headache.

I just need to know if we're going to be increasing the number of people that have FMS supports. They will have these FMS hubs that actually provide supports to families in the four communities, I think it was, that you talked about, which is great. I'd like to know: in addition to these centres, is there any work that's going to be done in terms of oversight? I think we could all probably agree that FMS leaves a little bit to be desired in terms of oversight and support for the people that manage those contracts. So other than payroll, financial support, and annual meetings with caseworkers, what oversight is provided to the FMS contracts and specifically around abuse reporting?

Also, if people are sitting on this waiting list and they're not really moving and they decide, "Okay; well, maybe it's easier to do an FMS contract" – and I don't know that to be true because I don't know what the wait time differences are. But let's say that that's the case, and they decide to enter into an FMS contract. What kinds of checks are done before you sign an agreement that's worth sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars? What kind of background work are you doing with this family? Is there anything like background checks related to, say, a credit check or an environmental scan, like you would do before placing a child? And I'm not saying that an adult with a disability is a child. I'm just giving you that example to talk about environmental scans. Also, are there any welfare checks or criminal records checks that are done before entering into those contracts? I'd appreciate getting some information on that.

I'll pass the rest of my time to my colleague.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the staff. I would also follow up on this, you know, wait-list question. Minister or ADM Chance, if any of you can help me to understand. We asked this last time as well, and every time that we hear some explanation, it makes me even more confused. Eligibility is defined as having a developmental disability before 18 years of age, intellectual capacity, or IQ, below 70, and adaptive skills inventory. Once you qualify with that, you are eligible for PDD. And from that

time until you get supports, a contract gets signed, that's wait time, the wait-list. It's my understanding now, after hearing the explanation from the minister, that people who are in service planning are approved and those who are on wait-lists are also approved for PDD. So it means that we have a PDD wait-list of 2,300-some individual Albertans who are waiting for services after being approved and qualifying under the criteria that is set out in our legislative scheme. If that statement is correct – I would appreciate it if I could get a straight answer – if the department agrees with that, or if there is something different about these Albertans on service planning, 2,300 Albertans – you can also state if they are not qualified.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Now on to the minister for a response.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you. In regard to the first question, on developing accreditation around complex needs, I'm going to get my deputy minister to answer that question.

Mr. Marchand: Shannon Marchand. Sure. Thank you very much, Minister. Agreed: all disability service providers in Alberta need to be accredited before they can offer client services. That's been in place for some time. The Alberta Council of Disability Services developed the accreditation standard in consultation with the department and is the primary accrediting body although other organizations can also get accreditation.

A complex-service-needs designation has been developed and is starting to be implemented within ACDS. As defined in policy, complex-needs individuals are those who are eligible for the program but pose a significant risk or are disruptive to themselves, others, or property. There would then be sort of specific training associated with the designation for disability services staff, that it's tiered, and it would include specific courses on topics such as harm reduction, interacting with clients with a trauma-informed approach, and de-escalation, confrontation skills.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the wait-lists now. The question was that we have 2,300 people in service planning, 13 people on the wait-list. Ultimately, yes, there are more than 2,300 people who are waiting for services. I did say that there are no easy answers to this question. This wait-list issue was pre-existing, and I did inherit it. Unfortunately, we do have finite resources, and it's a challenge.

4:30

We need to pause here and really understand how we're going to get to the bottom of this wait-list. This is a situation that has been occurring for a long period of time, and nobody has really stopped and said: what can we do to improve this program, and what can we do to make sure that we can serve these vulnerable Albertans right now? I'm in a position where I have this historically high budget for PDD – it's never been this high – but priority has to be given to those with critical and urgent needs, right? And we have those other individuals who are waiting for services. I don't have the answers to it. There are no clear answers, and the answers are not simply just to provide more money, to provide more funding. I fundamentally disagree with that because this program needs work. It needs time, it needs attention, and it needs some significant reform, and I'm committed to doing that.

It's inordinately difficult. I've stayed up nights trying to figure out how we're going to move this PDD program forward, but I am heartened by the fact – and I've said it before – that I'm not alone. I have support from the disability community, from members of the Disability Advisory Forum, and there are people at Inclusion

Alberta that I've spoken to. We've all come to the conclusion that we need to work together. We need to break down this wait-list a little bit better. I don't even like how it's defined. I don't like these terms in service planning. I think we need to have more clarity around definitions. We need to have more clarity around: who are these individuals? Who are these clients who are on the wait-list? What are their needs, and how are they characterized?

There's a lot of work that needs to go into this, and that's why I want to be transparent. Community and Social Services has nothing to hide. Everything is out on the table: these are our challenges; this is our budget. It's not going to change. Believe me, I fought for that initial increase; I fought really hard for it. I'm thankful I got it, but this budget is as it is, and the overwhelming message that I want to give is that all of these programs that we have have to be sustained within this budget.

I am going to continue to work with my partners, with the stakeholders to find ways to get to the bottom of this list – literally get to the bottom – to make sure that we're serving these people to the best of our abilities. This work is ongoing; it's under way. I don't have anything to report at this time because the reviews are still ongoing, but I hope to have, perhaps mid-year, perhaps in the fall, some more information about how this PDD program is going to evolve.

There was also a question on FMS and oversight, and the comment was that there's very little oversight.

I hope you feel better, by the way.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.

Now back to the government caucus. We've got Mr. Yao.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Chair. Before I get into my question, I just want to say that I really appreciate how you've chosen to do this split-time questioning. I notice the members opposite were commenting on it, but I appreciate this primary option for debate that is listed under 59.02(1) of the Standing Orders. This is the primary and main way that questions are asked compared to combining respective times. It's also reflective of how our question period works. I do find it more civil. I'm able to hear your answers, and I think that's fantastic. I believe last estimates we couldn't hear your answers because you kept getting cut off by members who would stop you and would ask more questions, which is more of a political strategy than actual desire to ask questions.

Let's talk about the fiscal plan, shall we? On page 154 it confirms that the government is spending \$7 million in capital funding for the Red Deer integrated emergency homeless shelter. Again, I find it amazing that we're able to find some funds for these very necessary projects, but I'm curious as to the description of an integrated emergency homeless shelter. What does that all entail? Is it a facility that provides many services under one roof? I would certainly like to understand more about this project. I find it very, very interesting.

Secondly, we heard recently about some capital funding for the Hope Mission's Herb Jamieson Centre right here in Edmonton. Again, I know that over the past decade or so municipally and provincially there has been a lot of investment in shelters and whatnot. What outcomes are we expecting from providing this capital funding for another shelter here in Edmonton? To that effect, I mean, how does the government's budget for 2020 support all these infrastructure investments? I mean, they're no superlabs, but these seem to be more practical solutions to issues in our communities. I'm wondering if you can just again provide more detail on these issues. What are our objectives when addressing this?

I'm wondering if we're going to get more support, specifically federally. I understand that the federal government over the last couple of years had announced various funding routes for a lot of these things to the provinces. But, again, as a member of the Fair Deal Panel we're identifying that we might not be getting our fair share of the funding formulas that Ottawa is providing to the various provinces. They tend to identify Alberta as a province that doesn't quite need the supports because we provide so much to the rest of the nation. I mean, to the tune of approximately \$20 billion we provide to other provinces. We're able to support a lot of their services, and I'm sure that if you had access to those funds, you would try to provide more.

Again, I'm just looking to understand these investments in the various homeless shelters, understand the definitions around integrated emergency shelters. What does that all encompass? What does that all entail? Where do you see the future going with how we provide these supports? Again, I think that our main driver in our society is the hope that people will become independent, self-supporting, with less reliance, because it not only benefits society; it benefits the individual, their self-worth, their self-satisfaction. I mean, we can get into the nitty-gritty of Maslow's hierarchy and ensuring the very basics that we have, shelter and food, but once they get that, they can move on and progress to the other aspects that we consider to be very important. Again, it's very noble for us to provide the homeless shelters.

What is my time, Chair?

The Chair: Eighteen seconds.

Mr. Yao: Eighteen seconds. You know, I'll just leave it at that. I did have some other questions on that, but I will conclude with that and await your answers on these particular issues, Minister. Thank you so much for all of your hard work and that of your team.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Yao. I'm very happy to answer those questions. I was so focused on the disability files back in April, when I was first sworn in, that I didn't really get a chance to look at the homelessness file to the extent that I wanted to. In November, December, January I read a bunch of books that my deputy minister gave me to learn more about this file, and I visited as many homeless shelters and emergency women's shelters as I could. I think I visited every shelter in Edmonton and Calgary, a couple in Grande Prairie and in Red Deer.

I knew that there was a dire need in Red Deer for shelter services, so one day I drove out. I drove from Calgary, and my chief of staff drove from Edmonton, and we went to the Safe Harbour site. There's an ATCO trailer right adjacent to it, which is a warming shelter, and the overdose prevention site right next to it. It was quite horrifying, to be quite honest, to see that and to see the lack of services and to see how these very vulnerable homeless individuals were just kind of not being served the way that they should be. So I was happy to be part of the team that made the recommendation for this shelter. I worked very closely with Minister Pon. The city of Red Deer advocated for it extensively. It was not a new effort in advocacy. I mean, it's something that's been talked about for a number of years. Luckily, that funding came through.

4:40

In terms of the integrated shelter, this is all in flux. It hasn't quite been determined yet because the city of Red Deer and Safe Harbour and some of the other shelters will be working together. It will be integrated in the sense that there will be a dry component and a wet component to the shelter. That's all I know at this point. Like I said, it's still in flux. The funding has been approved. That's the good

news. How it will all come together at the end of the day, we will find out.

I'm just going to give some more information about the city of Red Deer. It has advocated for funding to build a new shelter for many years, as I mentioned. With a regional population of more than 350,000 the current shelter capacity simply does not meet the needs of the vulnerable population, and I was obviously able to see that with my own eyes. A new integrated shelter will add about 160 new shelter spaces to help address the need for a larger, more functional shelter space to accommodate increased demand. The new shelter will also offer enhanced supports, which could include housing referrals, medically supported detox, public health initiatives such as vaccinations and STD testing, mental health and addiction support, and cultural activities for indigenous people. As I mentioned, our ministry is pleased to work with Seniors and Housing to approve funding for this project.

Now, in regard to your question around federal supports I was very fortunate to be able to go to Ottawa and meet with my federal counterparts, with Minister Hussen and Minister Qualtrough. I did, obviously, advocate for Alberta. I talked about our homelessness situation here and how we definitely need more supports. The federal government does provide funding to the housing first program. We also provide funding to the CBOs, the community-based organizations. Minister Pon is responsible for the housing component for shelters that are eligible for the federal capital funding, so she can definitely speak to that a little bit further. But I definitely made my pitch.

In that regard I also spoke to Minister Qualtrough quite extensively about our disability programs, about our challenges. I asked her about the national autism program, which is part of her mandate letter, which is something that I personally am very interested in, which this province and our stakeholders are also very interested in. I don't know how long it's going to take before we hear some more details around that program, but I will be keeping a very close eye on it.

You had mentioned that the Premier recently announced capital funding for Hope Mission's Herb Jamieson Centre in Edmonton. I've also been there a couple of times. The Herb Jamieson Centre will play a vital role in assisting Edmonton's homeless population. The current building has fallen into disrepair and no longer meets the needs of the men who are seeking emergency shelter there. This new 24/7 emergency shelter will provide men struggling with homelessness with a safe and accessible place to stay and access supports.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, I will propose that we take our five-minute break. We are going to be setting the alarm here, so please, everyone, make sure you are back in this room precisely in five minutes. It is now 4:44.

[The committee adjourned from 4:44 p.m. to 4:49 p.m.]

The Chair: That's the timer. I would ask all members to return to their seats as we will be starting again and this one with the Official Opposition.

I will assume it's Ms Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. It's just me.

An Hon. Member: That's a good guess.

Ms Renaud: That is a really good guess.

Okay. Thank you. I'm just going to ask this question again because I feel like I didn't get an answer. If possible if I could just get something in writing because there are a lot of people that would like this information, and I don't think that it's been clearly answered. It's very clear. The PDD eligibility for supports, whether it's FMS or a service provider, overnight or community access – it doesn't matter – is very clear. It is a few things: developmental disability before the age of 18, intellectual capacity or IQ below 70, and the adaptive skills inventory, which is that the person is unable to independently manage six of the 24 skills, and I've mentioned some of those skills.

4:50

Now, unless you have added an additional assessment that we're not aware of or income testing or some kind of cap, I don't know. Unless something has been added or changed, I don't understand how people can sit on a waiting list, whether it's service delivery or the actual wait-list. I don't understand how people who are eligible for the service – now, I'm talking: if you think about the intellectual capacity of somebody that has under 70 IQ points and that is testing with that adaptive skill inventory with at least six of those areas, that's pretty significant. I don't understand. If somebody is meeting the eligibility to be eligible for PDD supports, yet they're not being supported, they're not moving on. I don't know why. I understand that there's a slight increase in the budget. I understand that increase is not meeting the caseload growth and pressure. I get that. I understand it. But if you're going to keep people on a list without knowing what's happening, then perhaps I would suggest that you need to change your eligibility. I don't understand what the problem is.

I'm going to say it again. There was a person, an adult, who I think is pretty severe on the autism spectrum with a number of other complicating factors. They were receiving support here. They chose to move to Texas for work. When that work was done they came back, and suddenly they were not eligible. They were denied because they didn't meet the criteria of urgent or critical. I think that if you're going to be making decisions about who is eligible for PDD supports and who is not, then I think that we need some clarity about the eligibility. So I would like to request that.

I'm going to move on really quickly. I'm going to talk about PDD supports, but I'd like to talk this time about direct operations, which is line 4.3. As you know, those are the services provided by government. Those are large institutions. They've been around for a long time. I'm not even going to comment on that but whatever. For example, Michener Centre is in Red Deer. It is a massive complex that used to house, or I would suggest warehouse, approximately 2,400 people at its peak in 1970. My question is: what percentage of the land and buildings, including the group homes that are at the periphery of this facility, what percentage of that site is being used by people under direct operations? I would also like to know – I asked this four months ago, but I'm going to ask it again: how many Albertans receive support by direct operations and how many specifically at Michener Centre? And are we still at a zero-intake policy for Michener Centre? What is the average amount of time that people have lived at Michener Centre? I would like to know their age range if possible and then how many males and how many females. I would also like to know how many FTEs are being lost in direct operations. I'm assuming that's where probably a good chunk of the jobs that we're losing in this ministry are coming from, but if I'm wrong, I'm happy to be corrected. If we could get the numbers of how many in direct operations are being eliminated.

I'd also like to know a little bit more about your emergency preparation for direct operations. Obviously, in a facility like

Michener Centre that will look quite different than a small family trying to isolate themselves in the event – you know, it's infection management. I'd like to know a little bit more about that.

I'd also like to know – in Budget 2019-20 the capital plan allocated \$683,000 to CSS capital budget with \$260,000 going to Michener Centre. If possible I would like to know what that's for. What was the investment into energy efficiency?

Budget 2019-20 capital plan allocated \$220,000 for Calgary. I'd like to know what that's for, please.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now to the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you for those questions. I've noted them, and I hope to answer all of them in this time period.

In regard to getting something in writing about PDD eligibility, I can certainly send that to you. Nothing has changed. We talked about the waiting list extensively. I know that I've mentioned several times that we are having a sustainability issue with this program, and right now we are prioritizing those who have critical and urgent needs. I've also given the definition of what critical and urgent needs are.

This is a challenge. It's a challenge that I have shared with my partners and stakeholders to come up with some recommendations and solutions. We're working together. Again, I hope to be able to share some more information about what that's going to look like later on in this year. I can tell you that my stakeholders and everybody that I have engaged with is in agreement that the only way that we can resolve the caseload pressure issues on this program and try to introduce some sustainability is if we work collaboratively.

In terms of direct operations, the budget has decreased. I'm just going to address that. I know you probably didn't ask that question, but it's due to a declining proportion of PDD clients utilizing direct operations facilities. In terms of the number of individuals who are at these direct operations sites: our direct operation sites include Graduated Supports, and there are 33 individuals there. At the Michener Centre there are 129 people. I've been there, and I can't really tell you what proportion of that facility is used. I did tour it. I'm sorry; I don't have a gender breakdown of those 129 individuals. We also have residential and support services, and there are 54 individuals there. The total number of individuals in PDD direct operations is 216.

In terms of the number of FTEs for direct operations, I know that we have a table that talks about – we have 383 FTEs for direct operations.

In regard to emergency preparation, I will ask my deputy minister to talk a little bit about emergency operations for direct ops.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. I don't have a lot to say other than the direct operations are a very critical part of our emergency planning in terms of how we will sustain services. We've been working to develop contingency plans in terms of how we will, you know, reallocate staff or take other measures to provide continuity of services in the event we needed to do that.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Now I can provide some information on the capital budget, the 2019-20 capital investment spending. Edmonton PDD direct ops: the bathroom retrofitting was \$20 K. Central Michener PDD direct operations: therapeutic tubs in four group homes was \$100 K. Central Michener PDD direct ops: air conditioning replacement in all group homes was \$160,000. Calgary PDD direct ops: house window replacement was \$10,000. Again in Calgary: bathing and tub lift systems was \$50 K. Calgary again: house renovations was \$160 K. Alberta Supports Lethbridge

office space configuration was \$90,000. Other amounts were still under consideration for allocation to projects for about \$93,000.

In terms of 2021 capital investments, amounts have not been set aside for specific projects at this time. Possible projects are being reviewed and prioritized to utilize the available funding.

Okay. I believe I answered all the questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now back to the government side and, I believe, Mr. Guthrie.

5:00

Mr. Guthrie: Good afternoon. I know that safety can be a significant concern for caseworkers and it can add considerable stress to an already demanding job. In October 2019 there was a caseworker that was killed while working alone with a client. That client had complex needs. Naturally, this was tragic for the caseworker's family and your department and everyone involved. Obviously, everyone, you know, needs to be assured and feel safe, and staff need to feel safe in the environment that they're meeting and working in. They need to feel comfortable there. So I guess my first question here is: how does your ministry's 2020 budget protect the staff?

Then continuing on with that, with persons with developmental disabilities, the PDD caseload, there are more and more clients that have complex needs. How is the ministry making sure that organizations that are working for you have the abilities and the tools necessary to support their clients while keeping their staff safe? You know, has your department changed any protocols, offered training, or changed procedures to make sure that organizations supporting that ministry have everything that they need in order to provide the highest level of service while keeping workers from feeling unsafe and put into high-risk situations? What sort of, I guess, derisking has been done from that perspective?

I guess, keeping on that same sort of discussion line, I have from a personal perspective someone that's close to me. They're on AISH, and they have developmental issues. He's a great young man, but I worry about him because he's someone that could be taken advantage of. He's very kind and sweet and wouldn't hurt a fly. I focused thus far on staff, but what about PDD clients and their safety? What is the ministry doing to make sure that clients receive the help and all the supports that they need? The individual that I'm speaking of is very passive, and he won't complain or fight back. You know, he could easily be taken advantage of. I feel that others like him need someone to advocate for them. So what does your department do, and how do you help those individuals that need it most?

I guess that's about it. That's the end of my three questions. They're kind of heavy ones. Sorry to put those on you. But, you know, I know that there's a great deal of concern about safety that is kind of overhanging since last fall, and I think it's good to be stated not only for staff but also for the clients themselves. They both could be put into some situations where they need protections. If you can elaborate on that, that would be great.

Thank you.

The Chair: Minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you. First of all, I'd like to take a moment to remember Ms Deborah Onwu. I was at her memorial service alongside Minister Madu. She sounded like a beautiful, beautiful person. I listened to the testimonials from her friends and family, and it was very emotional. We left, Minister Madu and I, and we said: we promise to do better.

The death of youth care worker Deborah Onwu is a tragedy, and we are working to ensure that this never happens again. Together with the Align Association of Community Services and the Alberta Council of Disability Services, also known as ACDS, we are creating information and training to help front-line staff and their employers through a staff safety initiative that will be implemented between now and next year. I'm just reading this verbatim from my notes because I want to make sure that I communicate this very clearly to anybody who might be listening that we are taking this very, very seriously, so I want to be very precise in my language.

Initiatives to enhance staff safety have been ongoing since the 2016 fatality inquiry into the death of Valerie Wolski, a worker who was killed by a resident she was caring for. We have contracted the Alberta Association for Safety Partnerships to deliver new resources for staff. The association is a nonprofit organization certified to help a wide variety of Alberta employers incorporate health and safety systems into their workplaces. For us, materials will be targeted toward front-line staff who may encounter violence and harassment in the course of delivering services to Albertans. Key activities and deliverables will focus on sector-specific responses pertaining to violence and harassment prevention in the workplace, working alone, emergency response plans, hazard assessments, training, monitoring, and reporting. Together with our partners we will continue to support people caring for vulnerable Albertans.

Now, the second question that you had asked was about more clients in the PDD caseload that have complex needs. How are we ensuring that organizations have the ability and the tools required to support these clients while keeping their staff members safe as well? We are supporting these organizations by implementing additional accreditation standards, and Deputy Minister Shannon Marchand spoke about that briefly. These standards focus on the care of people with disabilities who have complex needs and a history of harming themselves or others. This will help increase workers' safety by confirming minimum expectations for staff skills and staffing levels to care for complex needs clients. All disability service providers in Alberta, including those that contract with the PDD program, will need to be accredited with this complex service needs designation. The training for staff is tiered and includes courses on topics such as harm reduction, trauma-informed approach, and de-escalation. This accreditation supports one of the recommendations from the 2016 fatality inquiry report into the death of Valerie Wolski.

Occupational health and safety inspections also look at a number of disability worker concerns such as ensuring that hazard assessments are done and policies are in place. Two phases of inspections have been completed, and a third phase is scheduled to take place in 2020. These inspections informed the work of Align and the Alberta Council of Disability Services in assisting us to develop the staff safety initiative. I'm very grateful for these organizations to come together and help us bring these initiatives together.

Thank you for sharing your story about the individual who's very near and dear to you. I think many of us have friends or family members who have a disability. I have a cousin who has a developmental disability, who's on AISH. He's also very sweet, vulnerable. Luckily, he's got a great job at Peters' Drive-In, so he has a good mix of having meaningful employment and also having the financial stability afforded to him by AISH.

The safety and well-being of adults accessing our PDD program is paramount. New accreditation standards for those serving clients with complex needs, once implemented, will help to support our

service providers to keep themselves and our clients safe, so it's for the providers as well as the clients. The comprehensive nature of the training will ensure that workers have the specialized training they need to support clients with complex needs. I do want to emphasize that all disability service providers in Alberta must be accredited before they . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now on to the Official Opposition and Ms Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just for clarity, it's my understanding – maybe I'm incorrect about this – that the complex designation process, whether it was through the department or ACDS, has been in place for quite some time. I actually remember going through it probably about eight years ago. So maybe just some clarity that this is not a new process or that these are not new standards, or maybe you're talking about a different set of standards. I don't know. I'll give you the opportunity to do that.

5:10

Just a couple of quick cleanup questions about PDD, direct operations. I'd like to know, out of all of the direct operations in the province, if any of the individuals – and I think there are only a hundred and some that we're talking about – have been moved to long-term care and where that is, which long-term care facility. I'd also like to know, if it's possible, if there are any pending lawsuits related to institutionalization. If you can tell me that, I would appreciate that.

Then I'm going to move on to family support for children with disabilities, which is specifically line 4.4. I'd like to know if you can tell me: in this particular line area how many FTEs will be lost in this particular purge of 136 jobs? I'd very much like to know that, if you can let me know. Will your ministry be introducing any income testing to any of the FSCD-funded supports? That would include respite, child care, specialized services, medical transportation, and really any other support. So will there be any income testing introduced there at all? It would be most helpful to get that.

I'd also like to know: how many families requested FSCD supports in the last fiscal year or whichever reporting period the government is using now? And of that total amount, how many of those requests were approved for services? Then, if at all possible to break down those services, if we could break them down between, like, specialized services and respite. Whatever the large categories are that you're using, if you could provide Albertans that breakdown, that would be most helpful.

I'd also like to know: how many current workload grievances in FSCD? Has any aspect of the FSCD eligibility for programming changed?

I would also like to know, and this actually isn't a question that I – I don't know if your department has this information, but if there is a number of how many students who receive PUF funding in Edmonton public also receive FSCD supports. If it's possible to get that information, that would be helpful.

Now I'm going to switch topics a little bit because I'm going to be running out of time. You mentioned an increase to the RAMP grants, the residential adaptation and modification program I think it stands for. I'm wondering if there are any changes to eligibility in terms of, like, income testing to this particular benefit. If so, if you could let us know what those are, that would be great.

Could you tell me how much time I have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: One minute and six seconds.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

I'm going to switch topics altogether, and I'm going to go back to the Premier's Charities Council for a little bit. I can introduce the topic. I'm sure I'm going to get beeped out right away, and then we'll come back to it. In the last estimates, before it was created – it sounds like you've done some work and you've appointed some people. I don't know if you have the terms of reference yet, but you've done some work. I'm wondering. I asked about whether or not the APAGA legislation would come into play with this particular body, whatever it is. That would be the legislation that provides oversight to agencies, boards, and commissions. I heard your DM say yes, so that's great. That's awesome. I'm happy to get that. Is there a timeline at all as to when we can expect a business plan with targets as well as who has been appointed to this and, really, what metrics are in place for people to evaluate the work of this particular group?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Renaud.

Now on to the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you. I noted all the questions and will endeavour to answer them all.

In terms of the complex designation process, we have refreshed the work that's been done on this, and the shift has been now to make this accreditation mandatory.

In terms of direct operations and have people been moved to long-term care, the answer is no.

In regard to lawsuits, the answer is no, but I'm going to clarify that because I'm not a hundred per cent sure. So I can get back to you on that.

Now, the FSCD program is also another program that I'm still reviewing. I think that when I say that, there should be some appreciation of the fact that I'm taking a lot of time and care in reviewing all of these programs to make sure that, first of all, the stakeholder engagement is done to the degree that it should be done, to the degree that I feel comfortable with, and I will speak to that a little bit. Secondly – and I've said this before, earlier today – we have to integrate data analysis as well before undertaking any kind of policy change. So based on those two comments, everything is still under review and nothing has been decided.

I do want to talk a little bit about some of the stakeholder engagement that I've done with families and with service providers. At the Darrell Cook FMS Resource Centre I was able to meet two sets of families on two different occasions. One set of families: all of them had children who had Down Syndrome. They brought up some questions around program eligibility. They felt that there was significant caseload pressure on the program due to children who had mental health disorders, and their perspective was that maybe this program should be more focused on those who have developmental disabilities or congenital disabilities. So that was an interesting takeaway.

When I spoke to front-line workers, there was some concern that maybe there are certain families who are very high income earners and that maybe they can pay for their own mileage and their own hospital stays.

You know, all of these comments: I've made note of all of them, and we'll go back and look at the data to see what that reveals as well. I'm very ginger and delicate with this program because I believe that prevention and early intervention are so, so important. Building resiliency and capacity within families who have children with disabilities: we must invest there.

You had a question about the categories. I apologize; I didn't quite get the question. So if you wouldn't mind maybe asking it again as a supplemental. It was something about wanting more

information about the categories in the program. If you could just confirm that.

Ms Renaud: I just wanted to know the number of contracts in each of the FSCD areas.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I don't have that information readily available, but we can talk about that later.

The other question was the number of students who receive PUF funding and are also in the FSCD program. I also want to know what that overlap is, so I'm looking into that.

In regard to workload grievances, Shannon is going to talk about that.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. I can talk about that briefly. Within the collective agreement there is a potential for workload appeals for two particular roles within the department, the AISH generalists and the disability services caseworkers. The disability services caseworkers work in both the FSCD and the PDD programs, and there have been 14 workload appeals over time. There is one that has just wrapped up. One has just concluded, and I'm not certain what is currently active and at which stage, but there have been appeals.

Mrs. Sawhney: I think that the final question was around the RAMP program. We had 761 clients in 2018-19 access this program. Three and a half million dollars was budgeted to it. It's a great program. We've heard a lot of accolades around this program and how it's made life easier for those who have disabilities. There is no change in eligibility for this program. I just wanted to be clear on that.

I think I actually reached all of your questions. Oh, no. The Premier's Charities Council: we'll get to that.

The Chair: Fantastic. Next up we have the government side, and we have Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister for being here and the diligence that you've put into this and the thoughtfulness that you've put into your remarks. I appreciated something that you said earlier. Forgive me if I get it wrong, but I'll paraphrase. You talked about limited resources in government. I think that the reality is that even when we're booming, government will never have the amount of resources that we need to meet the level of needs in our community, nor do they have the appropriate resources to meet those types of needs.

5:20

I think I'll quote Mother Teresa: "The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes" and, I'd argue, in our communities "to remedy this kind of poverty." Government just can't meet that. They can't meet that need alone. Community and family involvement is absolutely essential. You know, of course, government has a role, and it has a role to get behind initiatives like that that are doing that type of amazing work within our community. So when you talk about civil society and when we talk about it in the platform, really that's kind of the vision that I see, that involvement in building a deeper sense of community. I had a few questions on it, but I think that you've covered that topic deeply, so thank you for your effort towards that.

I also think this dedication to working with the thousands of amazing Albertans who have chosen to dedicate themselves to serving is going to help lead to that transformational change, not only within government but within the community as a whole, so I commend you on your continued efforts to do that.

As you know, my background is homelessness. I managed shelters or worked in shelters for 15 years. Just looking at the ministry's budget on that, I see that we've maintained that budget, which I think is a good thing. Also, the ministry's estimates show a 1.1 per cent reduction in homeless support and outreach services compared to the 2019-2020 numbers. I'm just wondering: how does this government plan to support Albertans experiencing or at risk of homelessness? I'm wondering if the community-based organizations in Alberta's seven major cities that support local homeless priorities and housing initiatives expect to see a decrease in their allocation. What has been the impact of funding to community-based organizations and, you know, housing programs within our community helping individuals who are experiencing homelessness?

I'm curious a bit about metrics because I didn't see a lot on this topic within the report. If you can kind of shed some light on what our current homeless count is. Are we seeing a trend in either direction? Is it a positive trend? In that regard, are we going to be able to meet the needs within this budget? What are our goals in regard to homelessness? You know, I remember years ago that we had our 10-year plan to end homelessness, and obviously we work towards ending homelessness in the lives of individuals on a daily basis within our community. Have we put thought into that, into our goals to help reduce homelessness and people experiencing it in our communities?

Again, questions about performance metrics. In the business plan around homelessness, obviously we see some numbers around women and children in shelter. We've heard as well that there's, you know, often a lot of men in shelter or families in shelter. I'm wondering again if it's just about – we used to talk about counting plates versus life change. Have we put some thought into our metrics and how we're going to move forward with this file?

The other big question I had. Obviously, we've maintained a relatively flat budget here. We know that mental health and addiction is often connected to homelessness, whether it's a result of homelessness or something that's caused somebody to end up in that situation. I'm just curious how the investment in other ministries like mental health and addiction and drug courts has impacted this budget and some of the decisions that you've made around this budget and our ability to aid people experiencing homelessness going forward.

The other thing that I was going to just throw out there, again, with my experience: if you're looking for any advice or somebody to help you with this file, I'm always available and would love to be able to help, you know, shed some light on things.

Overall, I just want to commend you. Despite very difficult fiscal times, what I see in this budget is a budget that continues to defend supports and services for vulnerable people in our community. I admire you and want to encourage you to continue to fight. I appreciate it.

I think that's five minutes, but I can talk . . .

The Chair: Three seconds.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: There you go. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you so much for your comments. I know that you have a rich background in service and helping in the homelessness sector, and of course I would come to you for advice and guidance. Absolutely. That might happen sooner rather than later.

I was also very privileged to have the opportunity to meet former Premier Stelmach just last week on budget day. He, as you know, was the architect of the original 10-year plan to end homelessness.

I think that at that time the idea was to try to get to a functional zero. It was very aspirational, and I think that there's been tremendous progress made despite the fact that it's still an issue in society. We still have to do whatever we can, but we've come a long way. I mean, things could have been so much worse if that strategy wasn't in place. It's inspiring to me.

I know that I'm trying to put together a provincial strategy right now to address the issues with homelessness in our rural communities. To that end I have engaged with our community-based organizations, the 7 Cities. They've done tremendous work in each of their constituencies, and I've asked them to help me put this strategy together because they gather data, they have best practices, and they know what works. They've been in this space for a long time. Again, that work is also under way.

I'm going to go back to your original question about the ministry's estimates that show a 1.1 per cent reduction to homeless support. This reduction is going to be achieved mainly through finding efficiencies inside the ministry. They're internal ministry savings. The grants to the CBOs are not going to be impacted in any way. I just want to be very clear that that funding is intact, and the reduction only relates to what we find within the ministry and department for efficiencies.

Another question that was asked was around the CBOs, the 7 Cities. I think I answered that question. The funding is going to be maintained. The impact of the CBOs and their work in terms of the approach for housing first has been quite significant. Housing first follows the principle that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. Of course, there is a continuum of care that has to be involved with that, which includes recovery as well.

Since 2009 more than 19,000 Albertans have been provided with access to supports in housing. Last year alone almost 1,400 people were placed in housing through the housing first programming, which has contributed to decreasing shelter usage rates. Since 2015 there has been an 11 per cent decrease in overall shelter occupancy rates. I'm just sharing this as metrics to provide more information. Individuals who participate in housing first programming self-report that they rely less on emergency public services and have increased income. Overall, shelter use has declined, and homelessness has decreased.

The other question, again talking about the metrics, a performance measure used in prior business plans is a percentage of housing first clients who have maintained housing for six or 12 consecutive months. We have taken this element out of the business plan, but the last valid values for these measures from the 2017-18 fiscal year indicate 75 per cent and 53 per cent for the six and 12-month measures respectively. That might sound a little bit confusing, so I'm just going to repeat that. The percentage of housing first clients who have maintained housing for six or 12 consecutive months translates to 75 per cent and 53 per cent for the six and 12-month measures respectively.

You had a question about: how do we determine success in our efforts to end homelessness in the lives of individuals and families in our communities? There are many different ways to measure this, I would argue, but one measure is determined by the number of people who are housed. In 2018-19 1,829 Albertans were housed through our programs. In the first quarter of 2019-20 451 new Albertans were enrolled for housing supports.

Another really important question that you've asked – and many people have also raised the same question – is: how has the investment in other ministries like mental health and addiction, drug courts, et cetera, impacted our ability to aid people? I can address that later on.

5:30

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Back to Ms Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Before I begin, I just want to clarify something. I'm sorry; I was out of the room when the member asked the question. I just want to correct the record. The fatality that the member was describing was actually not a government caseworker. It was a community support worker working for a community organization. I just wanted to be clear about that.

My other question is going back to the mandatory complex needs accreditation. I actually, you know, worked in an organization. We had to go through this process. It's lengthy. You always learn a lot. It's actually a very good process to go through, but it requires a lot of time for organizations that are already stretched pretty thin. I'm wondering: will there be any additional funding for organizations if it is now mandatory that another level of accreditation be in place? Are there additional funds for that? I'm not saying that this is creating red tape. I actually think this oversight is important to public safety. I'm asking if there are other funds available.

I'm going to move quickly on to AISH wait times. Again, a lot of this information that I'm going to use sort of as a baseline measure comes from the Auditor General's report about AISH. I think that was in 2016. I'm not sure. The time for an application to commencement on AISH was 28.9 weeks. I'm wondering how long now, whatever measure that you'd like to use, whether it's the last fiscal year or whatever reporting period that you're using, between the time that the AISH application is received, the information is input into the system, and financial eligibility is determined.

I would also like to know, in the AISH department, not how many FTEs are they losing but how many FTEs are in each area? I don't know what your titles are for your jobs – I think it was a generalist or something at some point – or if they're involved in adjudication or whatever that is. If we could get, I guess, the position, job descriptions of each role and what they do and, if possible, how many FTEs are included there. What is the average time between when the medical information is received, then sorted, and when it's reviewed? These are very specific.

Again, looking back at the Auditor General's report, they sound sort of like arbitrary steps, but they're not really. They're actually kind of enshrined in this AISH program, it sounds like, according to the Auditor General. Could we get the average time between when the medical information is received, then sorted, and when it's reviewed? What is the average time between the medical review and the commencement on to AISH? If you could get us those timelines, that would be great.

I would also like to, on one of the recommendations that I thought was really good back in 2016, hear the report about progress on the adjudication training for AISH staff. I think that it's really important that everybody be on the same page. They're interpreting really complex information, whether it's medical information, whether it's different assessments, whatever information is being requested from people. It is quite complex. Of course, it is very important that everybody is using the same, I guess, measurements when they're going through these applications. That would be quite helpful.

I would also like to know if there are any targets for reductions or changes to caseload growth in AISH. You know, we're not kidding anyone. Yes, AISH got increased, but it's not meeting the demand, right? Simple. Yes, it got increased, but for the number of people that are applying for AISH or that are meeting the eligibility right now, it's not keeping pace. Obviously, something has got to

happen. I'd like to actually know what's happening. Are there changes to eligibility going on? Other than internally is there going to be a consultation process? What is it that is going to drive this change in the numbers in this particular area?

This is just sort of a leftover question. It doesn't really tie into the AISH application times. Can you give us a timeline for when we can expect the disability advocate report? I'm also wondering, just on a personal level, why it is that, you know, an elected Member of the Legislature – is it possible for us to meet with the disability advocate without someone from your office there? Just a question.

Sorry. Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: Four seconds.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I'll stop there.

The Chair: To the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you. I think the first question was around complex needs accreditation. There's no additional funding available for that, but this accreditation is very important, and it's only going to apply to those individuals who are serving complex case clients.

In terms of the question around AISH, the average time from submitting an AISH application to the start of benefits ranged from 27 to 32 weeks, and for comparison the 2018-19 Q4 average was 32.1 weeks. The 2019-20 Q3 average was 31.4 weeks. As you're aware, application processing times vary, and that's due to many factors, including the number of applications the AISH program receives, how quickly the individual provides all the personal, financial, and medical information needed to complete the application, and how quickly a commencement meeting can be scheduled. So it's not just a matter of the generalists or the adjudicators coming together and following a defined process that is in place, but there are things that are really outside of their control like how quickly the individual can provide all of their medical information.

I think Shannon is going to talk a little bit more about the AISH application time.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. Thank you, Minister. In terms of the question, the average time from receipt of the application to initial review and sort of the data entry to confirm that it is a complete application generally is about two weeks. It fluctuates a little bit, but it is generally about two weeks. From that point in time until there is a complete application that is actually fully complete and ready for adjudication, it takes about sort of 10 to 12 weeks. It takes some time back and forth with the applicant to get the information. From the time of a completion to an eligibility decision is about five weeks. That happens, and then from the eligibility decision to commencement is about 14 or 15 weeks, which then gets you, when you put all of those together, to the 27- to 32-week timeline that the minister outlined. Those are the dimensions that cumulatively create that time frame.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you, Shannon.

The question was around AISH eligibility, and are we changing it? There are no changes planned for this time. I do, however, want to state that I've spent a lot of time trying to understand this program inside out. I have engaged with AISH clients. I have engaged with other stakeholders, with members in the PDD community to try to understand what is working and what isn't. This morning I had talked about the basic income exemption rates, and I would argue that those rates have definitely created unintended consequences. I don't think that was the anticipated

purpose of this program, to have situations where we have these exemption rates that result in some families – and there are a few of them – that could be potentially having benefits and income that are more than some of our front-line workers. That is an observation that came directly from front-line workers that I've met with. So that's one example.

I think the other one was the medical cards. I think there are better ways to do that. There's a lot of red tape associated with that, and I think we can leverage technology as well in terms of perhaps centralizing some functions and finding better ways to communicate and connect. Just to get back to the question, there are no changes in eligibility right now, but I am reviewing this program, and I have been reviewing it for a while. Again, that should really indicate how seriously I am taking this whole review process. We will be spending some more time looking at various aspects of the disability programs, and I've mentioned this before as well. We've talked about stakeholder engagement, but again we also have to look at what the data is telling us. We have rich data around our disability programs, and we will be spending some time doing some analytics to determine what's working well and what isn't.

5:40

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back to the government, and I believe Mr. Rutherford is up.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, as we're getting close to the sixth hour, I appreciate your fulsome answers to these questions and explaining what your ministry has been doing and is going to do. I also wanted just to comment again that I think the government has recognized the importance of your ministry and the people that it supports, as we are in a time of fiscal restraint to maintain these budgets, and I can see that the work you're doing, of course, is trying to reach as many people as possible in order to make sure that they're taken care of, which is extremely important.

I have just a couple of questions left, and they're basically around domestic violence and sexual violence as well. As a former police officer in Edmonton I can attest that domestic violence calls come in all day every day. I'm sure it's the same across the entire province. But it was something that – working in patrol as a constable, it was all hours of the day. It didn't matter. It was a constant steady flow of family disputes and domestic violence calls. I investigated a large number of them. I arrested the offenders when I could. And we all know that there are barriers to reporting. Often it's a neighbour or a friend reaching out. There are barriers to reporting, like I mentioned. They could be cultural or language. Young children can be a barrier, finances can be a barrier, or just trust in the justice system as a whole.

We have to look at shelters, of course, as being a positive option for people to go to and to reach out to if they're fleeing domestic violence. We need a variety of options, in my opinion. I've driven women to shelters. But I've also had some women say: "Why should I go to a shelter? I'm the victim." They have a different response to that. Of course, when you offer safety planning to victims of domestic violence, you go over these options. Some people utilize the shelter and some people say: "Well, why should I uproot my life and move? I'm the victim here." I'm not discounting that shelters are a very important part of a broader solution. It's a multifaceted approach, I think, to encouraging more people to come forward and report but also for the justice system to be able to take them more seriously. A lot of women do know that after the arrest, it's very likely that the only thing that's going to be protecting them is a piece of paper after they're released, you know, 12 or 24 hours later, and now they've got to hope that those conditions are followed.

To get into some of the questions, though, funding for women's shelters is being maintained for the second year in a row. Specifically, how will the government make sure that Albertans fleeing domestic violence have access to services and supports? If you can cover off that for me as well. Then maybe if you have the data with you, how are those supports spread out across the province, maybe urban versus rural? The other question is about implementing Alberta's version of Clare's law. Of course, it was a platform commitment, and the legislation, we dealt with recently. I would like to know what the status is of that commitment, I guess, on the regulatory side in enacting that legislation. When can we expect it to come into effect?

I also noted that money for sexual assault services – I believe it's gone up \$1.2 million to \$11.5 million. I was wondering if you could just touch on some of the services that that money is allocated to and what you hope to see from those funds.

Just with the last minute remaining, I'll turn it over to MLA Nixon, who just wanted to follow up on one additional question if he could.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: For sure. Yeah. I'm obviously hoping that you could finish your comments on the conversation about other ministries and mental health. Also wondering if you can share a little bit about your vision for the homeless foundation and how it fits in with the mental health and addictions strategy overall and the role of the spectrum of housing from emergency shelter to full market. We used to call it from the street to home. So if you could talk a little bit about your vision for all of that and what that continuum could look like. Again, I appreciate all your hard work. It's been a very, very long day.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: Ten seconds.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Perfect.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, gentlemen, for your questions. Before I get into the first question, I just want to go back to AISH for a second. I was talking about program review and eligibility, and I think that for all of those individuals who may be watching and who may have a sense of fear that we're going to be making some vast changes, I just want to say to them that this government is committed to supporting Albertans with permanent disabilities to meet their basic needs. That financial stability is there, and it will be there. I just wanted to make sure that that was clear because sometimes when you're talking about numbers and data, et cetera, it can come across as very cold. So I just wanted to make sure that I gave that message.

In regard to the question around how Budget 2020 supports Albertans experiencing or at risk of domestic violence or sexual violence, I do have a lot to say about this, actually. Again, I'm going to read some of what I've put down here because I want the message to be very clear, and I don't want anything to be lost.

Domestic violence can affect anyone. It can hurt people of any age, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, and you know that, Member Rutherford, through your work. You mentioned that you've driven many women to shelters, so you know that no one is immune. Alberta ranks third-highest amongst the provinces for Canadians who self-report spousal violence and third-highest in police-reported intimate partner violence by province.

We are committed to protecting Albertans who may be at risk or affected by domestic or sexual violence. We're working with community partners to help make sure people fleeing domestic violence have access to services and supports to help them rebuild their lives. In Budget 2020 our ministry is providing \$51.3 million

to women's emergency shelters. This was a platform commitment, and this will be maintained. This will fund 721 beds in 30 shelters, 175 units in 13 second-stage shelters, five fee-for-service on-reserve shelters, and two seniors' shelters.

We are also investing in preventative measures. We recently passed Alberta's version of Clare's law to give people at risk the option to obtain information about an intimate partner's history of domestic violence or other related acts. We also offer a 24-hour family violence information line at 310.1818, where people in need can call for information on supports and services. The info line is available in more than 170 languages, and over 30,000 calls have been made since its inception in 2006. We will continue to work with other ministries such as Justice and Solicitor General and Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to form a government response to domestic violence.

The other question was: how will government make sure Albertans fleeing domestic violence have access to service and supports? What I can tell you is that we are working with our shelter partners to make sure people fleeing domestic violence have access to services and supports to help them rebuild their lives. In 2018-19 funded women's shelters helped more than 5,800 women and 4,500 children. Nearly as many people were supported through outreach services. Budget 2020 maintains the \$51.3 million provided to women's emergency shelters so women and children fleeing domestic violence will have a safe place to go and access to services and supports.

We're also helping women and children affected by domestic violence in other ways. For example, our ministry provides support for domestic violence victims through programs such as safer spaces, which allows victims of domestic violence to end their tenancy early without financial penalty if at risk of experiencing domestic violence at home.

In regard to our commitment to Alberta's version of Clare's law the question was: when can we expect new legislation to come into effect? Half of all young women and girls who are victims of domestic violence homicide in Canada were murdered by someone with a prior conviction. We passed the Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence (Clare's Law) Act in October 2019 to help stop this from happening. Clare's law will help to make sure individuals at risk have the information they need to make informed decisions about potentially harmful relationships. We know there are many people, predominantly women, out there whose lives could be very different today if they had access to this type of information. I know, Member Rutherford, you can attest to that as well.

5:50

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Next, on to Ms Sigurdson.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few questions regarding your ministry, the Ministry of Community and Social Services. I want to start with, I guess, a few comments about just my perspective. We know that the cost of living is 1.6 per cent, and we know that the population is growing by 2 per cent, so that's 3.6 per cent. We know that when budgets stay flat, that's actually a decrease. That's just something I want to say out loud.

We also know that jobs aren't a panacea. I know this government likes to express that, you know, they have – or they're saying that they have – a robust jobs plan although we have lost about 50,000 jobs since they were elected. But for some populations a job isn't the answer. Certainly, in the ministry that I'm the critic for, Seniors and Housing, a lot of times people need supports because they can't

work, and I think that that is definitely true of your ministry also. I just also wanted to make that point. Strong public programs are certainly vital to the well-being of any healthy society.

We also know that government has choices. Government has choices. They're not forced to do anything. Every government has a choice. They have values, and those values are what guide their decisions. Sometimes I hear also from the government: "There's no choice. We have no choice." You do have a choice, absolutely. I just wanted to also say that out loud.

Another thing is that, especially in the area of social services, there are many preventative supports that can be put in place that can actually defer costs. You know, sometimes they call it the cost of poverty. If people are well housed, for example, it can cost society much less. We know that Vibrant Communities Calgary developed a report, and they say that up to \$9.5 billion could be saved if people had the supports in place. Instead, we pay for higher level supports like emergency rooms or justice costs, which are very – people's dignity is taken away oftentimes, and they're not supportive of people living well in our province. Preventative services, supports that way are certainly, I think, very important for any government to have in place.

I'm going to refer you to page 52 of the general estimates, 5.4, supports for outreach services. That has gone down. You know, you had talked earlier about maintaining things in your budget, but that, unfortunately, has gone down. That is kind of the wraparound services that people who may have previously been homeless often need. They may have mental health or addiction issues, and with the housing first program that we have here in Alberta, those wraparound supports are essential – essential – to keeping people well housed. So I'm a bit concerned that that has gone down because I know that here in Edmonton we need over a thousand more spaces of permanent supportive housing. Certainly, all of us can see in our own communities that people don't have the housing that they need and are vulnerable. Certainly, the mayor in Edmonton has spoken extensively about that; Mayor Nenshi in Calgary, the same.

That category there, 5.4, going down is a concern to me, and I think that indeed it will cost your ministry and the government in general more in the end. There has been some research done about how much it does cost our society when a person is homeless, because we're paying anyway. You know, we could pay up front with preventative services, or we pay later. We might as well do it in a healthier, better way. Certainly, it's been estimated that it's about \$40,000 for someone to live on the streets, be homeless. That's how much our society has to pay for that. If we can do these kinds of wraparound support services, pay up front, it doesn't only make a human rights argument, but it's also an economic argument. It makes sense, and I know that the UCP cares very much about that.

I'd also like to – and there's no line item, really, for this. Perhaps if I... [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired] Okay. Next time.

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Sigurdson. I certainly appreciate your perspective. You've made a number of comments, and I hear what you're saying. You made a comment about jobs not being the panacea or the end-all and be-all, and I do want to say something about that. I think we were elected on jobs and the economy and pipelines. This is what I heard at the doors continuously. This is what I see even now. We know that the unemployment rates have been historically high. I said it this morning, that people are at their wit's end because they're worried

about what kind of opportunities they're going to have, and students are worried about what kind of opportunities they're going to have when they graduate. So I think jobs are top of mind for a number of people.

I also want to state about our revenues, government revenues: we get almost \$12.6 billion in revenues from personal income taxes. That comes when people have jobs. These revenues are also what fund our vital social services. I just don't understand this perspective of not understanding how important it is to revitalize our economy and get people back to work. Getting people back to work is not just about giving them dignity and opportunities and to feel like they have meaning and also to be able to earn a living and to afford a living, but it also helps the government because we have increased government revenues, that will, in turn, fund the social services that are so desperately required for those vulnerable individuals. I just wanted to make sure that I was very clear on that, that there is an economic argument for getting people back to work so that we have more government revenues as well.

You know, one of the questions was in regard to line 5.4, about the \$1 million reduction in this line. I had mentioned this before, and perhaps you weren't in the room. There's no reduction in the grants that go out to the CBOs. This \$1 million reduction is internal efficiencies that we have found related to supply services and contracts. All of the grants that are going to the CBOs are most definitely intact.

I know that there were, you know, a few comments made about cost avoidance and the economic argument. You know, I'm going to have to say that in an ideal world, where resources are not finite, yes, we can spend more on permanent supportive housing, we can build more shelters, and we can do more, but unfortunately that's not the case. We are not living in an ideal world. We are in a very fiscally constrained environment. People are worried about future generations. We're worried about what the economy is going to look like. This government is working really, really hard to bring investment back into the province, and we have to get our spending under control. That's a very difficult thing for me to say as Minister of Community and Social Services because I worry day and night about the vulnerable people that we're serving, but I also understand that there has to be a balance to control spending and also make sure that every dime that I have within this ministry is allocated to exactly where it needs to go, and that's to the vulnerable.

I just do want to talk a little bit more about the budget that we have for homeless support outreach services. As I've mentioned, Budget 2020 maintains current grant funding to community organizations to ensure that homeless Albertans are safe and supported, including housing first programs. We also provide funding to community-based organizations to support permanent housing and wraparound outreach support services using a housing-first approach. So that is not inconsistent with anything that the member has articulated in terms of what's important to her. Assistance is provided to homeless families and single adults to move to permanent accommodation with access to various support services to help them remain housed.

6:00

I also want to say that between April 1, 2019, and December 31, 2019, almost 5,000 Albertans were provided with housing and supports through housing first, including 1,171 Albertans who were newly admitted to housing first programs. Please note that this data doesn't include Q3 data from Calgary.

I think the total cost or the total amount that we have for funding for outreach support services initiatives is \$87.5 million for 2019-20.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Next we're on to the government caucus, and I believe we have Mr. Rowswell.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you. I just wanted to mention that I remember when you came out to Lloydminster and we toured for a couple of days there. We went to Alberta Works and met with the entire staff there. The thing that, well, impressed them: the person that was managing that office said that it's the first time that she's ever seen a minister come to that office.

We spent time with the Rotary and looked at their partners in employment program and how that employs people with disabilities and the success of that. That has been very successful. I think we met with Inclusion at the same time. I just found out this morning that we've had three Canadian presidents of Inclusion from Lloydminster; one, Robin Acton, who you know, is now the Canadian president. It's pretty important.

You know how important organizations and nonprofits across the province and across my riding of Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright profit from funding from your ministry. There are quite a few different ones that profit from that. As a matter of fact, what I'm going to be talking about is the FCSS budget. The mayor said to me one day: you know, I'd rather take a cut on MSI funding than lose my FCSS, right? It's an indication of how important things are. Organizations like Midwest Family Connections in Lloydminster, Kiddie Oasis indoor playground in Vermilion, Marwayne Lil' Critters are all receiving funding from your ministry. My constituents continue to advocate that funding for programs like these be maintained.

Among other ones that have gotten some of that money is the Lloydminster Interval Home. What I found interesting about that: when I was in Wainwright talking to the town council down there, I said, "Do you guys have an interval home?" They said: "No. We just kind of throw them in a cab and send them to Lloyd." Lloyd is kind of a regional place for a lot of things. I find that interesting. You know, programs like these develop nurturing environments that support early childhood development, improve parents' awareness of community and parenting resources, and help parents cope with the everyday stress of isolation that they might feel. These organizations foster a sense of community within our towns and offer so much to many families.

Some of the other ones: the Thorpe Recovery Centre just recently got a whole bunch of, well, funding for the next three years, but they were running on a shoestring for a while, and apparently some money has flowed from your organization to there as well.

I'm glad to see that the Budget 2020 funding for Community and Social Services is being maintained, and I'm interested to hear the minister on, like, what important work the FCSS program supports in Alberta, from your perspective, and what impacts the FCSS program has on Albertans generally, just maybe some favourite stories or things that you've learned. Many Albertans were concerned last fall when the minister announced that changes may be coming to the FCSS program. I understand that these changes were meant to find efficiencies in our budget, to make sure that funding was being fairly and properly allocated in efficient ways across the province.

The other one. Now, FCSS has a \$100 million budget, but the minister's estimates show that in 2019-20 the forecast is \$89 million, which is \$11 million less than what was in the '19-20 budget. I was just wondering if we could get an explanation on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rowswell. I have a couple of timers going off here.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Rowswell. I remember well that day that I came out to Vermilion and met with all of the individuals that evening. Robin was there as well, and we had a great conversation about inclusive employment and what we can do and what our platform commitments are. They talked about the Rotary employment program as well, because that's a program that's in your town as well, right? I was very impressed with the work that they've done, so I can't wait, actually, to come out again and talk more and see how we can actually see some of our platform commitments in the funding that we're planning to put out, to actually see what the impacts of that are going to be in the next little while.

To be quite honest, I didn't know about the FCSS program before I became an elected official, and it came up so many times. Every time I went out to different municipalities or cities, that was one of the key asks from city councillors, mayors, reeves. Since then, obviously, I'm very well educated on this program. I know that it is a program that funds many preventative programs and services across the province, and there isn't any municipality that doesn't benefit somehow from this funding. So we're very pleased and happy that we were able to maintain it.

Just to talk at more of a broader level about what the FCSS program is, it allows us to work with municipalities and Métis settlements to design and deliver local preventative social services, services that enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. By maintaining this funding, we can continue to support communities and civil society organizations working to make life better for vulnerable Albertans. Preventative programming allows us to address social issues before they happen, and the partnerships we have through FCSS programming have led to many positive outcomes for children, adults, seniors, families throughout our province. We value these partnerships, which help communities respond to these local needs.

I know you shared some of the organizations in your community, and I do have a favourite story that I'd like to share. Actually, Member Nixon was at this event as well. It was the Sudanese youth recognition ceremony. It was a great event, but what I realized was that that event was funded partially by a grant provided from FCSS to a group called Action Dignity, which is also funded by my ministry. Just to see the chain reaction of how these different organizations work together to create this beautiful recognition ceremony – that was really very, very beneficial to those vulnerable youth as well. I mean, Member Nixon knows that demographic quite well and how meaningful it was for them to get recognized as the community has been hit hard with gang violence, mental health illnesses, and opioid addiction. That was the value of the FCSS program. If we didn't have that office there and they weren't available to provide funding to this other organization so they could write the grant to get more funding to pay for the award ceremony, I don't know how it would have come together. That's my favourite story around that.

In regard to the \$11 million discrepancy between Budget 2019-20 and our forecast, it's due to the ministry making the FCSS grant payment amount consistent at \$25 million each quarter. Previously the quarterly FCSS grant payments were unequal. The fourth-quarter grant payment, starting in January, was \$35 million, and the payment for the other three quarters was \$21.25 million each. We've moved away from that and have made every quarter consistent at \$25 million. Again, the total FCSS funding for

municipalities and Métis settlements for the 2020 calendar year is not impacted. Funding is indeed maintained at \$100 million.

Madam Chair, how much more time do I have?

6:10

The Chair: Twenty-seven seconds.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I think I'm just going to very quickly list some organizations in Wainwright that receive FCSS funding: the Edgerton library board, speakers at Irma school, Battle River Victim Assistance, Leader in Me, Wainwright elementary school summer wave program, Walking Through Grief, TIPS; and in Lloydminster, Big Brothers Big Sisters. So lots and lots of organizations.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Next up we're at the Official Opposition, and it's Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Thank you, Minister. I have four or five questions. Let me begin by saying that you were talking about the importance of staff. I totally agree with you. The only issue is that we have not created any; rather, we have lost 50,000 jobs. And on top, it seems like this government is hell bent on making deep cuts and nothing else, and that's why people are scared.

I had an open house on the 16th of February, and your one ministerial staff was present at that open house. There were people who are receiving AISH, and they were certainly not happy with the change. Now, you have stated clearly here that in '19-20 spending was \$63 million less than budget, reflecting a change to benefit payment dates. That was the accounting trick that was brought to my table as well, because when we were in government, we were also facing debt, deficit, all those issues, and we didn't entertain that. Anyway, that was the wrong decision, and people in my riding are not very pleased with this change.

The second thing. You also have indicated, on page 134 of the fiscal plan, that "the ministry is undertaking a full review of its programs to inform thoughtful and fiscally responsible changes." I think that last time you also mentioned the same thing. A few questions: are any of these reviews informed by the social policy framework from 2013? Some of the stakeholders are interested in knowing that. Also, what's the progress on these reviews? What's the status? Who has been consulted? Are there any consultation plans? Will there be any results or what-we-heard documents that will be shared publicly? These are a few things. If you could look into it.

The third question I have is with respect to the ministry's operating budget. It's \$3.9 billion over three years. It looks like it will stay flat. You also have indicated, on page 133 of the fiscal plan, that from '15 to '19 caseload growth was 17 per cent for assured income for the severely handicapped, 14 per cent for PDD, 30 per cent for FSCD, and like that. We're keeping that flat. How are we going to address all these caseloads? No wonder that there is a PDD wait-list of 2,300 Albertans and only those with critical and urgent needs, it looks like, are getting services and everybody else is put on hold. That's what it seems like. How would you address all these caseloads? I think it's a good discussion to have, why we are seeing more people seeking supports and what can be some reasons for disabilities, but at this point what Albertans need is that when they are qualified, eligible according to the legislated criteria, they get supports right away, and they deserve nothing less.

The fourth question I have is with respect to the additional \$5 million to build on partnerships to create opportunities for Albertans with disabilities, employment opportunities. I do understand that a Canada-Alberta workforce development agreement is in place. I just want to know: what percentage of

funding coming from the federal government is going into this program, and what's the share that Alberta is getting this year?

Another question I have. Last budget, I think, you eliminated family and community support program grants, and now I can see another new \$7 million civil society empowerment fund. The previous program was funding mostly programs and initiatives respecting domestic violence and some preventative programs. The organizations you mentioned, Action Dignity, the Punjabi Community Health Services, Canadian Pakistani Support Group, North of McKnight Communities Society, the Somali community as well: all of them got some funding from that program. Will those organizations be eligible to apply for their existing programs under this new grant? What will be the criteria? Will it be made public? When will the applications be open? Who can they contact to apply for these grants?

These are some of those questions. I still have 13 seconds left.

The Chair: Seven.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you.

The Chair: To the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you for those questions. I know that you had made some commentary prior to posing those questions. I will say that, you know, job losses have been happening not just since we came into government but certainly when the former government was in place as well. I'm just going to leave it at that.

In regard to the review that I'm undertaking right now, there was a question around: are we going to use a social policy framework to undertake this review? As of yet the majority of the review, actually, is coming from looking at the legislation, the existing legislation, at the data, but also stakeholder engagement. I have, like, pages and pages here of organizations that I have spent time with: experts in their fields, self-advocates, people with lived experience, legal opinions, parent advisory committees, front-line staff workers.

Those conversations are really, really vital because that's where you get information about programs and outcomes and gaps and deficiencies and duplication that you will not get out of just primarily reading legislation or hiring a consultant to do that. That requires face-to-face conversations. It requires oftentimes sitting there and letting people vent, letting people tell their truth, letting people talk about their experiences of exclusion, of discrimination. It takes a lot of time and effort, and I would argue that it gives us the most rich data of all. This whole review that I've undertaken has really, really relied heavily on my engagement with people who are impacted by our programs.

I've compiled this information. I've made notes. Now, the next step, as I said before, is looking at the data. We have a tremendous amount of data within Community and Social Services and Children's Services and the other ministries, and it's time that we were transparent about what that data looks like and what observations we can glean and what the patterns are, because any type of robust regulatory policy that is put together has to be based on data-driven decisions combined with all of the stakeholder engagement, those qualitative aspects that you can't find anywhere unless you talk to people.

In terms of, "Will there be a what-we-heard report or any other kind of report that talks about these outcomes?" I can't say definitively how this will be shared. This review is still ongoing. I will leverage other resources – academics, think tanks, department resources as well – to try to come up with some more, I guess, observations and patterns in what we're seeing. There's nothing that I will commit to as of yet in terms of a what-we-heard report.

6:20

You mentioned the percentages in the caseload growth for the various programs: PDD, FSCD, the AISH program. You know, we do have a flat budget. I mean, that's very clear. The problem is that these pressures didn't just happen this year. They've been happening for a number of years, and they have never been addressed. Realistically, it's difficult to address them. Maybe I don't know exactly what the solutions are. But, as I said earlier, we do have to pause, and we have to ask the hard questions, and we have to make some hard decisions to figure out: how are we going to manage these pressures within our budget? That's why I was so particular about sharing data with stakeholders so that they can help me come to some of these answers.

The \$5 million for the platform commitment for more inclusive opportunities for employment: we do have some ideas as to how we want to allocate those funds, but it is going to require some more consultation.

I think you had asked about the CALMDA funding. I'm going to get Shannon to actually elaborate on that a bit more.

Mr. Marchand: Well, I just look at the statement of operations in the business plan, where the labour market development agreement is. We are seeing an increase of funding forecast for '20-21 of about \$9.4 million, which is a combination . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we're on to the government side and Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. I will round out my comments and questions fairly briefly to give you the full opportunity to answer in the last five minutes remaining.

Having said that, Minister, I want to just start by pointing you to page 28 of your business plan and directing you to outcome 1. Key objective 1.1 specifically states that your ministry is reviewing programs,

including legislation, regulation, policy and procedures, to ensure that service delivery is fiscally responsible, focusing [specifically] on reducing red tape and regulatory burden for service providers and Albertans.

Minister, I understand that every department has been tasked with looking at and identifying different ways of reducing red tape or regulatory burdens that are encountered within each portfolio. The question simply is: can the minister please provide this committee with an update on her efforts to reduce these regulatory burdens and, specifically, whether such efforts have resulted in any alleviation of the burdens placed on Albertans who are applying for programs within your ministry or whether it has worked to alleviate some of the pressures internally within your ministry, or both, and what those results have been?

I also wanted to direct the minister's attention to outcome 3.5 in the business plan at page 31, and in there it describes the creation of a Premier's charity council to "advise government on how best to assist the efforts of civil society groups." I know that you've kind of had a little bit of time to touch on this. I wanted to give you a little more time because I think you've been cut off every time. Please elaborate on the role of civil society organizations and what part they play in addressing some of the challenges that are faced within your ministry.

Finally, Minister, I have one last question. This morning we talked a little bit about the benefits of AISH for Albertans – that was primarily a question that I asked you – and I wanted to continue with that. The program appears to be funded quite well in comparison with other provinces, to the tune of about \$400 per

month more than the next province here in the country. On page 133 of the fiscal plan we see that Alberta has the highest monthly core benefit compared to any other province. Minister, with the brief time that you have left, please provide us with how you think that your ministry will continue to sustain these types of levels of funding for people with disabilities in Alberta, as they are significantly higher than those of other provinces.

With that, Madam Chair, I will cede any remaining time I have for the minister to answer.

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Well, thank you for your questions. I think I'm going to start with your question around creating more inclusive communities. That was mentioned on page 31 of the ministry's business plan. I'll start there because I haven't had a chance to talk about this, and then I'll circle back to some of your other questions.

What is the vision for the role of the private sector and civil society in building stronger communities? Our government is committed to supporting the stability, participation, and inclusion of Albertans in their communities by collaborating with civil society organizations, municipalities, indigenous communities, and other governments. As outlined in our budget, we continue to support the important civil society organizations that are working to make life better for vulnerable Albertans.

We believe civil society groups like charities, nonprofits, and volunteer organizations know best what their communities need. That's why we're expanding our partnership with this important sector. We are establishing a Premier's council on charities and civil society to help harness the knowledge and experience civil society has in addressing social issues. We are also investing \$20 million over three years into a civil society empowerment fund to help social service organizations build capacity and further their own creative approaches to helping Albertans. Partnering with civil society is key in our efforts to protect core services for future generations while living within our means.

As we move forward, we will be looking at how nonprofit groups can partner with the private sector to advance social causes. Many civil society organizations are interested in expanding their capacity and sustainability through profit-making social enterprises. Private companies are also becoming increasingly eager to take on greater social responsibility, as are individual entrepreneurs who are interested in new approaches to financing community programs or social services.

I'm just going to pause here. I'm reading this out because I want to make sure I get this answer out in a fulsome way. I've had the opportunity in the last – I don't know – several months to speak to many social entrepreneurs, and they've come to me with all kinds of ideas that will help address some of these pressing social issues that we're facing. These ideas are essentially creating social enterprises within existing not-for-profit organizations and helping these organizations create a new stream of revenue. It's quite creative, it's cutting edge, and it's something that we're seeing in incubation, but I do want to – well, I aspire to – see this actually take on a whole new life before the end of the mandate.

We'll also be exploring ways for how nonprofits can become more entrepreneurial and generate their own revenue streams, as I just mentioned. It'll also be important for our government to build on the relationships we have with the private sector to encourage corporate social responsibility. In case anybody thinks that this is pie in the sky, I can tell you that the YWCA has done

some great work in their social enterprises, and I believe the Centre for Newcomers is also looking at social enterprise. Our government values the efforts of all organizations or groups involved in addressing social challenges and creating positive changes in their communities. By collaborating with both civil society and the private sector, we will continue to build strong, resilient communities.

Now, another question that's come up, both from yourself and from Member Renaud, is: what is the status of the creation of the Premier's charity council? As I previously mentioned, we're in the process of establishing the new Premier's council on charities and civil society. This council will advise government on how best to assist the efforts of civil society groups, which includes Alberta's nonprofit, charitable, voluntary, and social enterprise sectors. The council will launch this spring – I'm very excited about that – and play a key role in advising government on implementation of its civil society agenda and platform commitments. The council's mandate includes engaging civil society leaders to explore how civil society

organizations can be empowered in solving some of Alberta's most pressing social problems and leading consultation with civil society organizations.

This is an amazing stat. It always astounds me: our province has more than 26,000 nonprofit organizations, that employ more than 760,000 Albertans. Partnering with civil society is key in our efforts to protect core services for future generations while living within our means. Establishing this council will strengthen partnerships . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise that the time allotted this afternoon for this item of business has now concluded. I would like to remind all committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow at 3:30 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Thank you, everybody, and the meeting is now adjourned.

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

