



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Seniors and Community Supports

Wednesday, April 13, 2011
8:30 a.m.

Transcript No. 27-4-6

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL), Chair
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC), Deputy Chair

Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (W)
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL)
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
Groeneveld, George, Highwood (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Also in Attendance

Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL)

Department of Seniors and Community Supports Participants

David Arsenault	Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Support Programs and Strategic Planning
Robert Bhatia	Deputy Minister
Carol Ann Kushlyk	Senior Financial Officer
Chi Loo	Assistant Deputy Minister, Seniors Services
Donna Ludvigsen	Assistant Deputy Minister, Disability Supports
Jim Menzies	Director, Monitoring, Finance and Information Management, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Office of the Auditor General Participants

Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Doug Wylie	Assistant Auditor General

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications and Broadcast Services
Melanie Friesacher	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Philip Massolin	Committee Research Co-ordinator
Stephanie LeBlanc	Legal Research Officer
Diana Staley	Research Officer
Rachel Stein	Research Officer
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

8:30 a.m.

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to please call this Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order and welcome on behalf of the members everyone in attendance this morning.

Please note that the meeting is recorded by *Hansard*, and the audio is streamed live on the Internet.

We will now quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves. Perhaps we'll start with the hon. vice-chair.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, hon. Chair. From the south-west tip of Calgary, Calgary-Lougheed, Dave Rodney. Welcome, everyone.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. I'm Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Dallas: Good morning, everyone. Cal Dallas, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Kang: Good morning, everyone. Darshan Kang, Calgary-McCall. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Good morning. Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity, the constituency in which Vecova, formerly known as the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, has been serving both disabled and able Calgarians for 41 years.

Ms Pastoor: Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Loo: Chi Loo, ADM for seniors services division.

Ms Kushlyk: Carol Ann Kushlyk, SFO for Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Bhatia: Robert Bhatia, deputy minister.

Mr. Arsenaault: David Arsenaault, ADM of community support programs.

Mr. Menzies: Good morning. I'm Jim Menzies with the PDD program.

Mr. Wylie: Doug Wylie, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Allred: Ken Allred, St. Albert.

Mr. Elniski: Doug Elniski, Edmonton-Calder. Good morning, everybody.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Now, could I have approval of the agenda that was circulated to the members previously, please?

Mr. Allred: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Allred. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Allred that the agenda for the April 13, 2011, meeting be approved as circulated. All in favour? Thank you.

Approval of the minutes of the March 23 meeting that were circulated. Moved by Mr. Allred that the minutes of the March 23, 2011, Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? Thank you very much.

Of course, this comes to our meeting with the officials from Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. Before we get to the opening remarks from the deputy minister, I would like to welcome Mr. Fawcett this morning . . .

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you.

The Chair: . . . and remind members that only members of this committee can vote, but any Member of the Legislative Assembly can certainly participate in the proceedings this morning.

We will be dealing this morning with the Auditor General's reports from April and October of 2010, the annual report of the government of Alberta, the Measuring Up progress report on the government of Alberta business plan, and of course the annual report from 2009-10 for Seniors and Community Supports.

We have had briefing materials submitted to us, and we would like to formally thank Dr. Massolin and his team for providing that. We appreciate it.

Now, Mr. Bhatia, if you would like to proceed.

Mr. Bhatia: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here on behalf of the Hon. Mary Anne Jablonski to discuss the 2009-10 annual report for the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. The ministry's 2009-10 budget was almost \$2 billion. This included direct income support for about 143,000 seniors through the Alberta seniors' benefit program and programs and services for 9,300 adults with developmental disabilities and more than 40,000 severely handicapped Albertans.

In terms of our programs a \$50 million investment through the affordable supportive living initiative helped to create 618 new affordable supportive living and lodge spaces and to upgrade another 86 spaces.

Seniors and Community Supports also worked to strengthen support to Albertans with disabilities. The monthly financial benefit under the AISH program was increased by \$100 on April 1, 2009, and we developed and began work to implement priority actions to improve the PDD program. These priority actions will help to make the PDD program more responsive to individuals, including those with complex needs, and will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program.

On the seniors front several improvements were made in 2009-10, including effective April 1, 2009, increasing the maximum Alberta seniors' benefit by \$40 for singles and \$60 for couples and increasing the qualifying income thresholds to assist low-income seniors with daily living expenses, simplifying the process for seniors by introducing one application form that allows seniors to apply for all five financial assistance programs administered by Seniors and Community Supports, and working with the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network to support the annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. This included developing and distributing a service provider screening guide to help front-line caregivers and service providers identify possible cases of elder abuse and respond to potential situations where elder abuse may be occurring.

Work also continued in 2009-10 on the social-based assistance review, now known as Alberta Supports. This work, that took place in 2009-10, included development preparation for and development of a web portal and contact centre to provide one-stop access to information to 34 social-based assistance programs and more than 120 services. Staff from the five partnering ministries

also worked on the design of several pilot projects to test approaches to improving in-person service delivery.

During the year Alberta aids to daily living provided 77,000 Albertans with equipment and supplies to help them maintain their independence.

We also completed or updated important legislation that provides additional protection for vulnerable Albertans. The Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act replaced the Dependent Adults Act. The AGTA creates options for people who need help making decisions and provides them with safeguards. The act also lays out a range of decision-making mechanisms, from less intrusive options like supported decision-making or co decision-making to full guardianship and trusteeship orders when and if they are required. As well, a new review officer role was created under the AGTA. The officer screens potential co decision-makers, guardians, and trustees to make sure they are suitable substitute decision-makers.

In 2009-10 the new Protection for Persons in Care Act was working its way through the legislative process. The PPCA helps prevent the abuse of adults who are receiving publicly funded care or support services. The updated act includes a timeline for reporting abuse, provides a new definition of abuse, and lays out duties for service providers and individuals.

We also created a single toll-free information and reporting line to make it easier for Albertans to report any concerns they might have about abuse, accommodation standards, or the actions of a co decision-maker, guardian, or trustee.

Also in 2009-10 our ministry was focusing on preparation activities for the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. The act was proclaimed in April 2010. This legislation allows government to carry out the full range of activities associated with licensing supportive living facilities.

Looking now at the financials for 2009-10, the ministry's actual budget was approximately \$1.9 billion. This breaks down as follows: more than \$408 million for seniors' services and supports. This includes income supplements through the Alberta seniors' benefit program as well as supports through the seniors' dental and optical programs, special-needs assistance for seniors, and school property tax assistance for senior homeowners. About \$1.4 billion in supports for Albertans with disabilities was provided primarily through the assured income for the severely handicapped and persons with developmental disabilities programs; \$716 million was spent to provide income supports and health-related supports through the AISH program. Over \$592 million was provided to the PDD program to enable PDD community boards to provide community supports for Albertans with developmental disabilities; \$109 million was spent on the Alberta aids to daily living program, helping some 77,000 Albertans.

8:40

AADL provides financial assistance to Albertans with a long-term disability or chronic or terminal illness to help them obtain medical equipment and supplies that help them to maintain their independence. As I mentioned earlier, \$50 million was spent under the affordable supportive living initiative to build and modernize over 600 affordable supportive living spaces throughout the province.

Turning to the Auditor General's reports for 2010, the October 2010 report followed up on the 2005 report on seniors' care and programs. My ministry has addressed the Auditor General's recommendations for the Alberta seniors' benefit program, including that the ministry improve the measures used to assess whether ASB is meeting its objectives and obtain further information to make income threshold, cash benefit, and supplementary accommodation benefit decisions. To address these recommendations, a

research project was commissioned with the University of Calgary. They found that ASB thresholds and benefit levels are at an adequate level to enable seniors who may be financially vulnerable to receive adequate support, thereby achieving the program mandate.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks for today. I'd like to thank our staff for all of their hard work in 2009-10 and the excellent results they have achieved.

Thank you for allowing me the time to make these opening remarks. I would welcome your questions.

The Chair: You're very welcome, sir.

Mr. Saher, do you have anything to add to the meeting at this time?

Mr. Saher: Mr. Wylie will make our comments. Thank you.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I won't go over the ground already covered by the deputy, but I'll just highlight that in addition to what the deputy has indicated, we completed the audits of the ministry and the departmental financial statements as well as the six persons with developmental disabilities boards, and we were able to issue unqualified audit opinions on all of those measures.

We also undertook a review of selected performance measures in the ministry's annual report, and again, based on our work, we issued an unqualified review engagement report.

I would just highlight, Mr. Chair, for the benefit of the committee pages 224 through 225 of our October report. The remaining outstanding recommendations directed at the ministry are included there. Consistent with our practice, we'll follow up on all outstanding recommendations and publicly report those in future reports.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now start with questions. We will start with Ms Pastoor, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that very comprehensive outline on what you've done over the last year or so. A couple of questions come to mind. On page 22 of the ministry's annual report you indicated that the protection for persons in care responded to 468 reports of abuse in 2009-10. Could you please as a written follow-up, if necessary, through the clerk, provide a breakdown as to how many of the reports originated in hospitals, nursing homes, seniors' lodges, or in group homes? Then, further to that, can you give a breakdown in terms of categories: was it physical abuse, mental abuse, or financial abuse? You probably may have to give that in writing, which would be acceptable.

Mr. Bhatia: Yeah. We don't have that information ready at hand, so we'll provide all or as much as we can in writing.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. That's great. Just further to that, of those 468 reports how many were actually substantiated? It can all come in the written part. Thank you.

Mr. Bhatia: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm looking at page 56 in the annual report. There's an expense summary there with a line

item entitled Disability Supports. I'm looking at the budget number, the actual spend, and the 2009 spend. There's an increase of about \$90 million, a significant percentage increase over the prior budget year, and I'm wondering if you can speak to why there was such a significant increase and where those funds went to.

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, the increased expenditure over the previous year was due to several factors. I mentioned that the financial benefits for AISH were increased early in the fiscal year, so that was a major factor as well as caseload growth and increased average cost per case both in AISH and AADL. Of the \$90 million the bulk of it was for the AISH program, accounting for about \$87 million, and most of the rest for the AADL program.

The AISH caseload growth in 2009-10 was about 6.2 per cent, and as I mentioned, the maximum financial benefit increased from \$1,088 a month to \$1,188 on April 1 of the year. Another factor was the cost of providing health-related benefits as that also increased, so this would be things like prescription drugs, dental services, and other health benefits. The number of people served by the AADL program also grew by about 4.1 per cent during the year. Those were the key factors.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks. Six point one per cent strikes me as a significant growth in case volume. I wonder if you can speak to how many people are actually receiving those benefits. Also, with respect to the aids to daily living program is that a different and much larger number?

Mr. Bhatia: The AISH program, as you'll probably recall, serves those Albertans that have a severe handicap. The caseload is around 40,000 people in the AISH program. The aids to daily living program serves those people who need medical support equipment to enable them to stay in their own homes or in some cases in types of facilities other than long-term care. That serves a potentially much wider range of Albertans, with about 77,000 people served in this fiscal year that we're talking about.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Allred.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My first set of questions has to do with the effectiveness of the seniors' lodge program. In 2005 the Auditor General recommended that the department "improve the measures it uses to assess the effectiveness of the Seniors Lodge Program." The AG also recommended that sufficient information be obtained periodically to set the minimum disposable income upon which seniors' lodge rent charges are based. According to the Auditor General's latest report, October 2010 – and I look forward to the one that's coming out tomorrow – neither of these recommendations has been implemented. That's on page 224. My first question: please explain why as of last October neither of these recommendations has been implemented and what measures you have used to assess the effectiveness of the seniors' lodge program.

Mr. Bhatia: I'll ask Dave Arsenault to respond to that question.

Mr. Arsenault: I think, basically, that where we focused our attention was on the licensing aspect that also came out of the Auditor General's report. We are currently engaging with the lodge operators to identify some of the issues that we need to be looking at. Our goal is to be able to come forward by the end of the current budget year and address those issues.

In the past we have used a satisfaction measure in terms of the people who live in lodges and the services that are provided. Our goal is to move much more to using the licensing as a way of looking at the quality of the services that are provided in lodges.

8:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you, keeping in mind that this recommendation has been outstanding now for six years.

My second question: how do you determine the minimum disposable income that is used as a basis for seniors' lodge rents?

Mr. Arsenault: Well, at this point in time we look at the types of expenditures that the seniors have. Also, as I said, we are engaging with the lodge operators, and that will be one of the questions that we'd look at.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Allred, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm referring to page 34 of the ministry report. It shows that in 2009-10 you were \$28 million under budget, which is certainly good news. As a result of that, was there any impact on your client benefits?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, the ministry was, as the member indicates, approximately \$28 million below budgeted expenditure during 2009-10. This was in response to the government's overall fiscal objective of achieving value review savings during the year. We were able to achieve those savings without impact on our clients.

The key areas in which we were able to find savings were first of all in financial assistance to seniors and, in particular, the seniors benefit. There was a savings of over \$15 million, and that was because the caseload grew more slowly than we expected. As well, the number of designated assisted living units that came on stream was fewer than we expected, and we provide a supplementary accommodation benefit in those types of accommodation units. As a result, we had lower expenditure for that supplementary accommodation assistance.

In addition, there had been planned a significant increase in spending on the persons with developmental disabilities program. We held back some of that increase, which enabled us to save a further \$11 million. The other factor was assistance for the seniors' lodge program, which was lower than we expected. All in all we were able to achieve the savings that we were asked to without any significant impact on clients at all.

Mr. Allred: Okay. Thank you.

A supplemental. I believe in your earlier presentation you mentioned that there was a \$100-a-month increase in the AISH benefits, and I note that there's \$7 million over budget on the AISH line. Is that the reason for it, that increase in the benefits?

Mr. Bhatia: The increase probably was more directly attributable to the caseload growth. As I mentioned, it grew by over 6 per cent, so that was not fully anticipated in our budget estimate.

Mr. Allred: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In 2005 the Auditor General recommended the development of a long-term plan to meet future

needs for services in long-term care facilities. It was also recommended that progress made toward the goals in the plan be publicly reported. Management has identified that these recommendations have been implemented: annual report October 2010, page 220, under health. My first question, sir, is: please detail the department's long-term plan to meet the needs for services in Alberta's 170 long-term care facilities.

Mr. Bhatia: One of the key measures that we've implemented is the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. That legislation provides comprehensive standards for a wide range of accommodation services in long-term care as well as designated assisted living and other facilities and enables us to ensure, through the imposition of standards and monitoring and potential enforcement of those standards, that seniors are well served in those kinds of facilities. This would include everything from cleanliness to food services and the like.

I'll ask Mr. Arsenault if he has anything he'd like to supplement.

Mr. Arsenault: I think the other thing is that in July '09 we also started to publicly report both in supportive living and in long-term care in terms of the standards. There is a site on our website that you can visit, and you would find out how each of the facilities in the province is standing up against the standards and what plans they have, if they're not meeting standards, to meet standards.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir. That answered my second question, too.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the annual report one of the core businesses and one of the goals is to provide seniors that are in need with financial assistance so that they have access to that in the support for independence. You mentioned in your opening remarks that about \$408 million was provided to the five seniors' programs and that you went to one financial form to apply for all five of these programs. What I would like to know is: how much money was saved in going to one form instead of having, I guess, five separate forms?

Mr. Bhatia: I'll ask Chi Loo to provide any additional comments, but the primary benefit of going to one form was a matter of ease of use for seniors and just simply avoiding having them reproduce the same information a number of times. I'll ask Mr. Loo to supplement on any financial savings.

Mr. Loo: The financial savings will just be the number of forms. I don't have that offhand, but I estimate maybe, you know, \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 on the form itself and perhaps the postage associated with that. As the deputy has indicated, the primary reason for that initiative was to help the seniors so they don't have to keep filling in the same information over and over again. Also, it allows them to plan ahead because they become more aware of their eligibility at the front end, so they can plan ahead in terms of the expenditure for their needs.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay. So there was no administrative saving in processing where before, you know, if a senior was applying to two or three of those benefits, that two or three forms would then have to be processed as opposed to just one? There were no savings in that particular area outside of printing fewer forms?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, there likely was some efficiency gained by doing that, but it's not savings that we particularly tried to quantify.

The Chair: Do you have anything else?

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah, I do have one, but I'll wait. I have those two.

The Chair: No. Go ahead.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay.

The question is that sometimes I feel that we like to make things a lot more complex, so we have five different programs to serve one goal. Do you think there would be value in looking at it from a financial aspect or that there are additional expenses to having more different types of supports instead of maybe having a more simplistic approach to helping seniors with financial need?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, that is fundamentally a policy question as to how the government chooses to provide its financial benefits. Clearly, there would be administrative implications for any change, but the reason for making a change would primarily be driven by policy.

The Chair: Interesting response, sir, to the member's question.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Calahasen.

9:00

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The subject of my second set of questions concerns the persons with developmental disabilities boards' contract monitoring and evaluation. In 2004 the Auditor General recommended that the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board work with the six community boards to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of service providers by requiring adequate financial reporting from service providers, evaluating the financial status of critical service providers, implementing a sustainable, risk-based internal audit plan, having standard procedures for contact between staff and service providers, and, lastly, systematically evaluating the performance of service providers.

According to the Auditor General's most recent report this recommendation remains outstanding. That's located on page 225 of his October 2010 report. My first question: have these recommendations been accepted? If not, why not? If yes, why has it taken more than six years to implement them?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, a number of changes have been made to the contract process with PDD service providers, and in fact a number of improvements have been implemented. For example, the community boards are now using common criteria and consistent approaches for monitoring service provider financial reporting and for assessing service provider financial health. We expect that the office of the Auditor General will review these changes during their 2010-11 audit work.

Also, the PDD community boards have developed a common risk-reporting approach, which will see submission of semi-annual risk reports to the department. The reporting will be used to evaluate ongoing monitoring needs and will lead to a common approach of developing sustainable, risk-based service provider audit plans among the boards.

With the implementation of the PDD program's new contract policy with a template for contracts and new contracting processes in April 2009, monthly monitoring tools were provided to assist the PDD community boards to monitor services and to invoice activity. The use of all of these tools will be evaluated by the

office of the Auditor General during their 2010-11 audit, as we understand it.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to that evaluation and possibly give you an opportunity to expand further because you've covered some of my concerns in my second question. My second question: how do the persons with developmental disabilities boards monitor and evaluate the performance of service providers? You mentioned a commonality in the evaluation form. You also mentioned a monthly, I would suggest, checklist. Would you like to expand further on how that monitoring and evaluation has improved?

Mr. Bhatia: I'll ask Dave Arsenault or Jim Menzies to expand on that.

Mr. Menzies: Thank you. There is a wide range of monitoring activity that takes place from daily interaction with clients and service providers, normal daily interaction all the way through to standard annual kinds of activities. They may include at the beginning of a contracting process ensuring that the service provider is in fact qualified to do the work, financially stable and sound and well-managed through to reviewing individual service plans as they're prepared or changed during the year for individuals. Monthly invoicing processes have been introduced, so every month there is a review to ensure that services in the contract are in fact being provided and that rates being billed are according to contract processes. There are quarterly interactions with contractors.

So there's a wide range of monitoring activities that have been introduced, many of which are standard across the community boards, but many of them are unique to the particular situations of the individual or the service provider.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming, and I look forward to the answers, hopefully, that I will receive. First of all, though, I would like to say thank you to the ministry. You have done some really great things in my constituency, especially for seniors and people with disabilities. Thank you very much for all of the work that you have done in the past.

I have a question. On page 24 of your annual report, right at the top it talks about the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, that it came into force on October 30, 2009. It's actually a strategy to implement a new continuum of decision-making options that encourages adults with mental capacity limitations to participate in decisions and maintain their autonomy. I have quite a few people who have been watching this and have been involved in this. Can you tell me what the impact has been of the new decision-making options on Albertans as well as their guardians?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act was a major step forward in terms of providing a range of flexible alternatives to anyone who needs support in making decisions. The principles on which the legislation was built were that the adult is presumed to have capacity and be able to make decisions until the contrary is determined; secondly, that how the adult communicates is not a determination of capacity, so any means of the adult communicating that enables them to be understood should be accepted; thirdly, that it's important to preserve the autonomy of the individual with the least intrusive and restrictive approach possible; and fourthly, that decision-making mechanisms

should be focused on the best interests of the adult and how the adult would have made the decision if they were capable.

We've taken a number of measures in implementing the act to provide capacity in the community. For example, to assess an individual's capacity to make decisions, some 137 health professionals completed training in order to qualify to do those kinds of assessments. The office of the public guardian has screened over 1,300 private applicants to be guardians as well as 450 public applications since the act was implemented. The new act enables less intrusive decision-making mechanisms to be used: for example, co decision-making orders where the individual in question can have someone make decisions along with them, supportive decision-making as well, and all the way through to full guardianship and trusteeship.

So the impact of the legislation has been to provide that range of options to Albertans but also to take a number of steps to make those options practically available to Albertans.

Ms Calahasen: That's an incredible amount of people that have been impacted.

Can you tell me, then, if there was any cost related to this transfer from the Dependent Adults Act to this new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act? What kind of an impact did it have on the costs?

Mr. Bhatia: There were some costs for training in particular. For example, to train the capacity assessors, that cost about \$75,000. There were also sessions delivered at the community level to provide information. There were 38 public information sessions that cost about \$20,000 as well as specialized sessions, 15 of them for health professionals, that cost another \$12,000.

So there were direct costs relating to providing the information in the range of a hundred thousand dollars. In addition, there's also a registry that was developed for \$50,000.

9:10

Ms Calahasen: Further to that, then, could you tell me where these workshops were held? Were they all across Alberta or just specifically big cities?

Mr. Bhatia: The sessions: I don't have the specific locations, but we did make an effort to ensure that information was made available particularly in rural and remote areas as well as the larger centres.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we proceed, the chair would like to welcome Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The special-needs assistance for seniors, SNA, program provides lump-sum cash payments to eligible low-income seniors towards the purchase of allowable one-time or extraordinary expenses. My first question is: please explain why the assessment time for the SNA application in 2009-10 was 18 working days, up from 13 the previous year and twice your target of nine working days? Annual report, page 12.

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, there was a fairly heavy volume of applications in 2009-10. In fact, the applications increased by about 3,500, and the number of seniors approved for the program

increased by 1,500. So that was a significant factor, and that may have been partly attributable to the economic climate.

Since that time we have taken some steps to improve processing time, including allowing the staff to specialize more on this program, and we've taken out one or two other things from the administration of this program. For example, hearing aid benefits used to be partially provided under this program, and now they're no longer provided here. They're provided in a different place, which has enabled the staff to focus on the special-needs clients.

Mr. Kang: My supplementary question is: how well does your ministry's performance in this regard compare to other similar entities? What is the factual evidence to support this view?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, it's not really possible to compare our performance on this program to others in that this program is essentially unique across Canada, so there's no direct comparison that can be made. The program is designed, as its name suggests, to provide for special needs and, therefore, requires a degree of judgment and a fair amount of detail in terms of approving applications. We aim to have a quick turnaround because of the vulnerability of the client group that we're dealing with and the importance to them of meeting needs that sometimes are emergent, but in terms of a comparison there's not really anything I can provide.

Mr. Kang: How well is the program working now? Is there still a long wait for the SNAs, or is it working pretty efficiently?

Mr. Bhatia: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, we've reduced the response time, obviously well after the end of the fiscal year that we're talking about. But over the last few months the response time is down around eight days, so it's working efficiently now.

Mr. Kang: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Elniski, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Robert. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. A couple of really quick questions this morning with regard to page 17 of your annual report, goal 3, which talks about, of course, seniors and persons with disabilities having appropriate supportive living options. When I get down into your second bullet point there, it talks about your percentage of success with regard to meeting the target for supportive living accommodations, and it's 88 per cent of group homes, 98 per cent of lodges, and 95 per cent of assisted living facilities. Two questions for you, which might segue to a little bit more than that. Are we getting better with these results, Robert? Are we improving our ability to match these numbers? Where are we at?

Mr. Bhatia: There has been an improvement in compliance. I'll ask Dave Arsenault to respond in a little more detail.

Mr. Elniski: Okay. Thanks.

Mr. Arsenault: I think that where we see the biggest increase, based on the year that we're looking at – we only started to review accommodation standards in long-term care in the year that we're looking at, and that has now increased from around the 80 per cent range that was in there to closer to 90 per cent. Group homes: we spent some time working in there, and that's also improved.

I think the other thing to say is that our approach is much more of working with agencies to meet the standards. When there is not

compliance, there is a plan that has been developed that sets out a timeline of when the agency will be there. The other thing, very clearly, is that if it's a health and safety issue, we would take a lot stronger action on those and a lot quicker.

Mr. Elniski: Good. Thank you.

Just as a bit of an editorial comment, the organizations in my constituency that fall into this category – and I'm quite well tapped into them – have very, very good things to say about the program. We have a couple of noncompliant organizations and facilities that are working very hard to make the changes. Largely it has to do with the age of the structures and some stuff like that. Things just don't come around overnight. So first of all, I guess, thank you very much for the transparency on the issue and recognition, of course, that you can't immediately make all these things turn around.

With saying that, I still have one other question, and it has to do with seniors' lodges. Because of the nature of the lodge program – and typically, of course, this is a public entity or a quasi-public entity, I guess, is what we would call them now, all managed through foundations – is the 98 per cent recognition of one particular foundation that's not in compliance, or is it again the same kind of thing, some of the old DPW lodges that just aren't up to scratch anymore? What is it? Why are the lodges noncompliant?

Mr. Bhatia: Well, I think that at 98 per cent that's pretty close.

Mr. Elniski: Well, yeah. It's very close. Yeah.

Mr. Bhatia: I think it's working with groups, and as you identified, there are lodges that are much older and ones that are newer. I think in a lot of cases it's also to ensure that the food handling is done correctly, the water temperature is monitored. So there are a number of things that we need to go in and check to make sure that the processes are there.

Mr. Elniski: Good. Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Goal 5: "Seniors and persons with disabilities have access to supports and services that enable them to participate in community life." Earlier in this spring session in a member's statement I celebrated the tremendous accomplishments of ARBI, the Alberta brain rehabilitation institute located in Spruce Cliff in south Calgary. While the institute receives many referrals from Alberta Health Services, it does not receive equivalent funding support.

On page 20 of your ministry's annual report you indicate that 80 per cent of families and caregivers of people with brain injuries and other disabilities report feeling supported by the Alberta brain injury initiatives and program development for persons with disabilities. This number falls short of your target of 86 per cent and has fallen regularly since 2007-08. My first question: how do you account for the declining satisfaction of families and caregivers with these initiatives?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, I'll ask Donna Ludvigsen to respond to that question.

Ms Ludvigsen: Good morning. The performance measure that we have is a very specific one, and it goes to a fairly small population of individuals. When we go back and ask those questions year over year, we're asking the same people the same question. We've really been struggling to have a fresh selection of individuals to be

asking that question of. So as a satisfaction measure it's much like getting that survey that you get from your car company. After a while you don't want to be reporting back on the same thing that you've experienced in the past.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Of course, I do not have any shares in ARBI, but I am extremely impressed with the services that they provide and deliver, and I think that they could be part of the increased satisfaction component.

My second question: what is the ministry doing to deliver improved value for the resources it allocates to such programs and to raise the satisfaction level among families and caregivers of people with brain injuries and other disabilities?

Mr. Bhatia: Again, I'll ask Donna Ludvigsen to respond.

Ms Ludvigsen: The Alberta brain injury initiative was established several years ago, and it has created a network of services and supports for individuals. The amount of resources that we have available in that program has remained constant. One of the things that we're doing is working with the organizations to try and identify creative and innovative ways to reach out and to go further into the communities. I think that caregiver supports is a really important element of supporting individuals in the community, and that's an issue that we're looking at across the ministry.

9:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move on now, please, to Mr. Dallas, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm back on page 71 of the annual report and down towards the bottom of the page, item 2.2.1, Alberta seniors' benefit. The expenditure was about 15 and a half million dollars less than budgeted for the Alberta seniors' benefit program. I guess I would presume that we can fairly accurately predict the number of new clients that would come onboard in the program. I suppose the fiscal circumstances that occurred beginning in 2008 would have had a rather dramatic impact on the number of Albertans that would be eligible for that program and that they would have been impacted negatively and we would have had pressure on the expenditure, but in fact we've underexpended relative to the budget. Maybe that's an issue around timing of the financial information that we're using. I don't know. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, about 143,000 seniors benefited from the Alberta seniors' benefit program in 2009-10. As the member indicated, certainly we do put some effort into forecasting the number of seniors that will be eligible for the program. First of all, of course, that's affected by the total number of seniors in the province. That's relatively straightforward to predict. But as the member also indicated, their income levels and things that affect their income levels also impact the take-up on the program and the cost of the program.

As the member indicated, the economic downturn and, in particular, the significant fall in the stock market did have an impact on the Alberta seniors' benefit program but not until the subsequent year. So in 2009-10, in fact, the growth in seniors eligible for the program was a bit lower than we expected. As I alluded to earlier, in addition we provide the supplementary accommodation benefit, for example, in designated assisted living and long-term care facilities, and the number of DAL spaces coming on stream

was lower than we expected. So that was the other factor that led to a lower expenditure.

Mr. Dallas: Okay. Thank you. Seniors I talk to that are eligible and receiving benefits through this program are pleased with it. But it's also an over \$300 million annual expenditure. How do we stack up against other Canadian jurisdictions in terms of what we're doing in this area? How do we get a sense that we're getting value for the taxpayer for that expenditure and also that our seniors are appropriately being taken care of with this program?

Mr. Bhatia: In general Alberta has one of the most comprehensive suites of programs and supports available for seniors. The maximum monthly assistance levels for the Alberta seniors' benefit and the qualifying income thresholds are the highest of any province's income supplement programs. But we do also review things like Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off measure to assess whether the seniors' benefit thresholds are at a level that provides financially vulnerable seniors with a reasonable level of support. In fact, when we compare to the low-income cut-off measure, they do provide adequate support.

In terms of value for the taxpayers' dollars the way that is achieved and assured is that we target the assistance to those most in need. We obtain income data from the Canada Revenue Agency, so we can be pretty confident that the data is right and the assistance is targeted to those with lower incomes and phases out as their incomes increase, thereby ensuring that there's good value for the taxpayers' money.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Allred.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I'm curious about the relationship between long-term care beds and other forms of continuing care. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that the long-term care actually comes under the Department of Health and Wellness, but you're responsible for monitoring all types of continuing care. Is that correct?

Mr. Bhatia: Yes. Each ministry plays different roles, but the primary responsibility for long-term care is with the ministry of health. We in our ministry do monitor the accommodation standards that we were talking about earlier.

Mr. Mason: Do you in conjunction with the other departments have strategic plans or long-term goals that relate to the proportion of long-term care beds to other forms of continuing care beds, and if so, what are they?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, we work closely with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services, and an example of that was the continuing care strategy that was published a couple of years ago.

I think that going into targets and so on for those levels is probably beyond the scope of the 2009-10 report.

Mr. Mason: So you're not going to answer the question. Is that right?

Mr. Bhatia: I'm not going to give you any targets for numbers.

Mr. Mason: Why not?

Mr. Bhatia: I don't have specific targets for those beds.

Mr. Mason: Maybe he could provide that in writing to the committee later, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Yes. I would agree with you.

Mr. Bhatia: We can provide whatever we can after.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Allred, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A lot of seniors are very independent, and it is sometimes to their detriment. I've talked to a number of seniors that don't apply for any assistance until their RRSP is completely gone, and then they're caught in a catch-22 in that they apply and their income evaluation is based on their income tax returns, which are always a year or two out of date. Do you give any special consideration to those types of situations?

Mr. Bhatia: I'll ask Chi Loo to respond to that question as to how we deal with situations where there are significant fluctuations in a senior's income.

Mr. Loo: Mr. Chair, we recognize those. Even though they are rare, they do occur, as described by the member there. When those situations arise, the seniors or the caregiver can notify the program and provide information on the rationale for that spike.

We are definitely conscious of that. For new seniors, for example, when someone turns 65, you know, you base their eligibility on the income in the year that they were still working. That's not a valid estimation, so in those examples we do accept an estimate of what the income is when they retire. Once they get into retirement, normally there will be a little bit of spike again when they turn 69, assuming I won't have to correct myself on that because that's changed a couple of times, the requirement to convert RRSPs into RRIFs, okay? Again, those are part of your normal planning. But if there are individuals who because of unusual circumstances have to withdraw more from their RRSP, they can notify the program, and we will work with the individual.

9:30

Mr. Allred: Yeah. Just a supplemental to that. I'm really speaking of people that are well beyond 65 when they deplete their RRSP or their RRIF, and then all of a sudden they have no income, but they apply, and it's based on their last year's income. I think your answer addresses that although you seem to talk more about the 65-year-old. I'm talking about somebody that's totally depleted their RRSP income. Do the same exceptions apply, or will you consider their specific circumstances?

Mr. Loo: Yes. In the situation you describe, most of these individuals would have been withdrawing their RRSP under a RRIF plan as an annuity, so there would not be a normal drop, but obviously the year that they totally complete that, there will be a drop. That would be more in line with the normal fluctuation of their income if the interest goes up or down or some of the other stuff goes down. The benefit would be adjusted, so for the year when that happens, the following year the benefit will indeed go up.

Mr. Allred: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In 2005 the Auditor General recommended that the department improve its processes for iden-

tifying the increasing care needs of lodge residents. The department was to consider this information in its plans for the seniors lodge program according to the AG's latest report, October 2010. This recommendation remains outstanding, page 224. Could you please explain why the department had not as of last October improved these processes for identifying the care needs of Alberta seniors lodge residents? What processes have been used to identify these needs?

Mr. Bhatia: The effectiveness of the lodge program is very important to the ministry, and we have among other things used tools like satisfaction surveys of residents to assess the feelings of lodge residents and, in fact, have found the satisfaction to be very high. In addition, we are in ongoing discussions with the lodge operators to identify the key issues that they're experiencing in terms of increased care needs as well as other issues that they may be facing.

I'll just ask Dave Arsenault if there's anything he'd like to supplement on that.

Mr. Arsenault: I think that's basically our approach right now.

Mr. Kang: So what is the department's most recent plan? You know, can you give me the details of the most recent plan?

Mr. Bhatia: We've initiated some specific discussions with the organizations that represent management bodies that operate lodges, and we will also be engaging in discussion with Alberta Health Services as well about the health supports provided in lodges. There's a very wide range of lodges in Alberta, ranging from very old lodges to brand new ones, and they vary widely in terms of their physical facilities as well as widely in terms of the health supports they provide. We're trying to understand those issues better.

Mr. Kang: Is that kind of open-ended, or have you got some deadline you have set, you know, to meet those targets?

Mr. Bhatia: It's active right now.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to try to follow up on my original question and ask the question in a slightly different way. I guess I'm curious. Out of the \$408 million that goes to the five different seniors' programs or supports programs, how much of that money is actually delivered to seniors to support them as opposed to how much of that money is used for the administration of the program? And I mean programs not program.

Mr. Bhatia: Right. We will have that information, I think, for you. It will just take a moment.

Do you have that information, Chi?

Mr. Loo: Sure.

Mr. Bhatia: I'll ask Chi Loo to respond.

Mr. Loo: I'll refer you, Member, to the annual report page 71. Of the \$408 million probably just roughly around \$13 million or \$14 million of that is associated with the delivery. The rest of it is all either a direct cash benefit to seniors on a monthly basis like the Alberta seniors' benefit program, which is close to \$300 million of

that, or in direct assistance in terms of cash. But the seniors get it in their pockets right away.

For example, the dental program, where almost \$54 million goes to that assistance. When a senior gets a service done at the dentist's office, if they are low income and the fees being charged are within the schedule, if the bill is \$200, they don't have to pay anything. If they are a little bit of a higher income individual and if the copay of that bill is \$25, you know, then \$175 of that will be directly paid. So the seniors don't have to provide that cash up front.

The majority of the \$408 million is direct assistance to our seniors.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you for pointing me in the right direction. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Chase, followed by Ms Calahasen, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. General computer controls. In 2007 the Auditor General recommended that the ministry improve general computer controls by identifying and protecting data based on its sensitivity, following change management procedures, reviewing database logs, and reviewing user access to applications. According to the Auditor General's most recent report, October 2010, these improvements have not yet been implemented. That was noted on page 224 of his report. Have these recommendations finally been accepted and acted upon, and if not, why not?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, the recommendations certainly have been accepted. In fact, we're quite far along in implementing them; 3 of the 4 are implemented. The Auditor General has completed a follow-up audit and confirmed implementation on the identification and protection of data based on its sensitivity as well as on user access to applications.

The follow-up audit for the implementation of change management procedures will be done as part of the 2010-11 audit, as we understand it.

With regard to reviewing database logs, the ministry has installed the monitoring tool provided by Service Alberta. We're currently assessing how the tool will be configured and used. The target for operationalizing the tool is July of this year.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for that update. I'll look forward to the AG's evaluation of your compliance.

What methods do you use to ensure that the privacy of seniors' personal information is protected in an electronic environment? Protection of information in various ministries has been a concern of the Auditor General. How are you addressing the privacy issue?

Mr. Bhatia: I'll ask Chi Loo to supplement in a moment, but we use very sophisticated, large systems with controls as opposed to any kind of ad hoc systems and the like to store data and operate our seniors' programs. As we indicated, these recommendations that were made by the Auditor previously will strengthen our controls around that information.

I'll ask Mr. Loo to supplement in terms of more specific measures that we take.

9:40

Mr. Loo: The majority, actually, almost all of the data is secured within our environment through the government standards in terms of firewalls, et cetera. Where there are some interconnections outside of the ministry or the government, we do again

follow government standards in establishing the right DMZ zones for access. To access information within the ministry, in addition to your general ID logon there are additional logon passwords to get into systems, and then within the system, within the database, we also lock down access to specific keys. For example, for individuals that are just answering information in terms of services – they are just providing general information – even when they look up a client to confirm that individual, they would not be able to look at their income information, et cetera.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much. I have a lot of special-needs people in my constituency, and I know that you really do a great job in your seniors' services division when it comes to special needs. I see that, actually, page 8 identifies the services, and on page 12 it talks about the core businesses and the performance measures. In 1(b) it talks about the assessment time in working days for special-needs seniors, and from 2005-06 to 2008-09 it has ranged from 10 to 15 days. My understanding is that now you're looking at 18 days for what the average is. Is that your target? Or is that the actual time on average, that you have 18 working days to be able to identify special needs so that they can get the money?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, the special-needs program, as I indicated earlier, is a program where we endeavour to keep the turnaround times to a minimum. During 2009-10 the times did extend up to the 18-day range. Subsequently, with some changes to the details of how we allocate staff to the program – and we've taken some measures to focus the staff on this program, in particular – the time has come down. So it's now in the range of eight working days.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

On that same area, can you tell me what kind of numbers or how many people of aboriginal descent or First Nations are accessing this special-needs assistance for seniors?

Mr. Bhatia: I don't have that information offhand, and I don't know if we would have that information available.

I'll first ask Mr. Loo if he knows whether the information is available or not.

Mr. Loo: No, we don't. When aboriginals are living in the city, they have the full access of any other Albertans. Based on their privacy we do not ask that question of what their origin is.

Ms Calahasen: How about those, then, that live on reserves? Do you have any applications that come through?

Mr. Loo: Yes, we do.

Ms Calahasen: Do they receive the money, especially if they're special needs?

Mr. Loo: For aboriginals living on reserves, yes. For those ones we do have information.

Ms Calahasen: Can we get that information, please?

Mr. Loo: Sure.

Ms Calahasen: I'd appreciate that. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is for the Auditor General. Some time ago a document came into our possession, which we have since made public, outlining an interdepartmental strategy to set the ratio of long-term care beds with the number of other continuing care beds. The document indicated that the strategy was to reduce the number of long-term care beds as a proportion of the total by about 50 per cent; in other words, cut it in half. Now, some of that was to be made up by an increase in assisted living beds and other types, but clearly the numbers that we have show that there has been a reduction in the number of beds and facilities for long-term care. My question to the Auditor General since the government will not acknowledge this strategy is whether or not it is possible for his department to have a look at the appropriate ratio to make sure that those people who require the additional care of a long-term care bed can receive that.

Mr. Saher: Thank you for that question. We are engaged in a follow-up audit on seniors' care, and I think that the issue that you're pointing to – I'm personally not aware of the strategy document, but I'm sure that in . . .

Mr. Mason: I will table it today.

Mr. Saher: Okay. Thank you. I believe that if a strategy document is setting out a goal of the government, then it is very relevant to our work in looking at the systems that the government has in place to meet its goals. As to whether or not we would make a judgment on whether or not the specific goal is a good goal, that's something that would come out during the audit. Certainly, the system is in place to achieve that the goals that are set out in a strategy paper are well within the office's mandate, and we would look at it as part of the seniors' follow-up audit.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. My supplementary: is it possible and within the realm of the Auditor General's office to look at whether or not the government on a cross-ministry basis can effectively track the number of individuals who require certain levels of care and whether or not plans are in place to meet those goals?

Mr. Saher: Yes. I think any person who sets out a goal should develop a method by which he or she or they, the organization, can assess whether or not the goal is being achieved. So we would be interested in looking for the systems, which include performance measures systems, indicators of success in achieving those goals.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Mason, you're going to table that document here or in the Assembly this afternoon?

Mr. Mason: If they get it copied in time – it's a long document – they'll bring it down.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Elniski, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much. I have a sort of a follow-up question with regard to goal 3. It has to do with your continuing care system and the three streams that you're currently using, of course, which are home living, supported living, and facility living. My question is really very, very simple. Of the three of them,

very clearly, the home living as an option provides the greatest level of independence and the greatest level of choice for the person accessing the system. They're free to come and go and to do as they will. What is the position of the department or what has been the position of the department with respect to technological improvements – and I'm thinking of things like air beds and those types of assets that you can acquire, walk-in bathtubs and stuff like that – in order to keep people viable in that home-living environment, particularly when they do not have complex needs? Are we funding any of that stuff right now, Robert?

Mr. Bhatia: Mr. Chairman, I may ask others to supplement, but at least two of our programs provide benefits that may be relevant to your question. The special-needs program is fairly flexible in terms of the nature of supports that it will fund. For example, the program will fund the types of monitoring devices that are now available enabling a senior to access emergency response or family response with the press of a button. That would be an example of a relatively new technology that's funded through our programs, and there's the potential for other things to be funded.

On the more medical side the aids to daily living program funds a wide range of health-related supports, some of which would be fairly advanced devices such as speech generating devices, for example.

9:50

Mr. Elniski: Okay. That's good. The reason I ask the question – and, of course, I always have a specific for instance when I do these kinds of things. I've had in recent times in my constituency two constituents that have come to me with devices that they're hoping – and at this point in time we don't know. There's no answer with respect to what's going on.

One of them had to do with a medicine cabinet that dispenses medication. The pharmacist comes in and provides the appropriate amount of medication in the appropriate slot in the cabinet, and all the senior has to do is go by the cabinet – in this case it's actually not a senior – and the cabinet dispenses right into their hand when they're standing there. The pharmacy comes in and maintains it at an appropriate level where it's supposed to be. If you consider the amount of money we're spending on people that are under- or overmedicating, it's a heck of a good tool. The second one has to do with a thing called an air bed, which is a remarkable achievement with respect to the elimination of bedsores.

They're both very, very inexpensive. I realize this is not necessarily the appropriate place to lobby, but I'm going to anyway. You know, they make an awful lot of difference to these people, and if our programs are flexible enough to accommodate them, I think that would be a really very positive thing to do.

Mr. Bhatia: Perhaps I could ask Donna Ludvigsen or Chi Loo if they have any supplementary comments on those.

Ms Ludvigsen: Certainly. I know that Alberta Health Services is in a partnership with Advanced Education and Technology to try out some of these new devices. That might be one of the ways in which you're becoming aware of the technology for the medication dispensing. At this point they're looking to see whether or not those are effective, and then we'll be looking at how those get funded.

With respect to different devices and technology like an air bed the AADL program does provide seating systems and beds and those kinds of things. On an annual basis they take a look at what's available and make decisions as to whether or not there's an improved technology or more cost-effective technology that

should be added to the benefit list and what other thing should be removed from that.

I would also like to mention that we have the residential home modification program called RAMP. In the fiscal year that we're here for, about 350 households received grants of up to \$5,000 to make modifications to their homes so that they could remain in their homes, and that includes renovations to bathrooms as well as in and out of the home.

Mr. Elniski: Wonderful. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're almost out of time, and we still have, unfortunately, members with questions. We're going to have to have our questions read into the record, and if the department could respond – I won't say answer – through the clerk, we would appreciate it.

We'll start with Ms Pastoor, please.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be very brief because it's, I think, a follow-up to what Mr. Mason has had to say. I know that there was a template that came out of Chinook that in my understanding is being used across the province in terms of the designation of beds in terms of percentages. It was going to be 20, 20, 60, which may well have changed by this point. The fact that we've got so many seniors in acute beds at the moment waiting for long-term care: I think that those numbers are out of whack. My question would be: is that template still being used in terms of how they try to put people into these designations? It was 20 long-term care, 20 designated assisted living, and I think 60 per cent for assisted living.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang, please.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Goal 2, Albertans with severe and permanent disability have access to financial assistance that enables them to become as independent as possible. On page 17 of your annual report you indicate that Seniors and Community Supports continued to lead the collaborative social-based assistance review initiative with Housing and Urban Affairs, Children and Youth Services, Employment and Immigration, and Service Alberta. My first question is: in your ministry's review of social-based policies and services what inconsistencies, overlaps, and gaps have you identified and what opportunities to better integrate and align programs? The second question is: what impact have cross-ministry initiatives such as this had on your program and the sources of allocations?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is again for the Auditor General. There were recommendations in a previous Auditor General's report, I believe from 2005, with respect to long-term care that included recommendations in terms of the inspection of nursing homes and other facilities of a similar nature to be done by professional people without notice to the facilities. There were a number of other recommendations. I'd like to know the status of those recommendations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Any others? Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My questions have to do with compliance with basic service standards. In 2005 the Auditor General recommended improvement in systems for monitoring the compliance of

long-term care facilities with basic service standards. Management has identified this recommendation as implemented in their annual report October 2010, page 220. At pages 18 and 19 of your ministry's annual report improvements in this regard are described. Given that 21 per cent of long-term care facilities in Alberta failed to meet all provincial accommodation standards last year, how effective have these improvements been? Lastly, what performance measures have you used to determine the effectiveness of these improvements?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Any other members with questions?

Seeing none, Mr. Deputy Minister, thank you for your time and your staff's time this morning. We have other matters to deal with on our agenda. You're free to go, and good luck with your endeavours in this fiscal year, sir.

Mr. Bhatia: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Saher, thank you very much for your time this morning.

Now, under other business this year the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors conference will be hosted in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the anticipated conference dates are August 28 through 30, 2011, of course. Are there any questions regarding this conference from members?

Ms Calahasen: Who went last year? Who went on our behalf?

Mr. Elniski: I was one of them.

Ms Calahasen: So we had two.

Mr. Elniski: Then Manmeet was there.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. There was also the other half of the conference, not only Manmeet but Len Mitzel on the Legislative Offices side.

Ms Calahasen: My suggestion is that we send two others from this group that have not gone before.

The Chair: Yes. Traditionally the chair, the deputy chair, the committee clerks, and researchers attend this conference, and I will not be attending this year.

Ms Calahasen: Then, Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion that we send others who would be interested in going to attend on your behalf.

The Chair: Certainly.

Ms Calahasen: I think it would be really good to have others go to experience the situation.

Mr. Elniski: We did it by lottery last year. It was kind of a random draw.

The Chair: Yes. I would urge the deputy chair to attend, and if any other member wants to go in my place, we can have a draw. We've had a draw. For instance, we could wait a week, and if anyone is interested, they can notify the clerk. We can put the names in a hat and pull one out, and then we also should have an alternate. One year we needed two alternates, incredibly, because the first alternate for one reason or another could not attend.

Mr. Rodney: May I, Mr. Chair? With great respect I know that you were of great service in Edmonton when we hosted the conference here at that time, and I know that you've sat in the chair and given great service for a long, long time. I had the opportunity to go last year and one other year in a prior life. I found it extremely valuable.

Even though it may be invisible to most people around here or even listening via *Hansard*, we've actually had a number of very positive changes. Only one of them: you might remember way back, when I was the chair of AADAC, we only called ministers. We've made a number of changes, one of them being that agencies, boards, and commissions now come. I was the guinea pig. As the chair of AADAC I was the very first one in. So we've actually made many, many changes. You remember that, don't you, Mr. Chair?

So I think it's an extremely worthwhile thing to go to. Best practices are shared. I've learned a number of things. We've actually incorporated them here. I'd be happy to go on your behalf because certainly someone at the front table, I suppose, should go, but, Mr. Chair, I just wonder if there's any way you'd consider going. Again, it's such a valuable thing. Is this the year that you might go?

The Chair: No. I appreciate that, Mr. Rodney, but I have other plans this summer. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Okay.

The Chair: I cannot attend. I really do appreciate that. I would love to go to the Midtown Tavern and buy you a draft beer and a steak at one of my old haunts, and we could have a game of shuffleboard, but it's not going to happen. I really appreciate that.

I would like to note to the members that we have a motion. We have a draft motion here, and I would like you to consider this, please.

10:00

Ms Calahasen: Then I withdraw my motion because I've already got a motion on there, right?

The Chair: It's the same, that the deputy chair, a committee member selected by lottery, the committee clerk, and the committee research co-ordinator be approved to attend the 2011 Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committee's conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in August or at the date that is finally selected and that two alternates be determined by lottery in the event that any of the approved delegates are unable to attend. Is that your intent?

Ms Calahasen: The intent, yeah. I didn't have the lottery thing because I thought maybe it would be good for us to have others that have not attended go. That was my issue. I think that you can have the same people going all the time, but that doesn't give the experience to the others who might want to go. That was my issue. But I withdraw mine, if that's okay with people here, to be able to go ahead with yours.

The Chair: Okay. Is this motion acceptable to the members?

Mr. Rodney: I'd just like to say one more thing. I completely appreciate where Pearl is coming from on this. I will say, though, that Mr. Saher and I had the opportunity last year to be at the table, and we needed someone from one of these positions to be there. I expect that'll happen again as representatives. I'd be open to seeing it. I do know that I cancelled a trip to Europe because I knew that the expectation was that I'd go because our chair just

feels that it's not something that he's wanting to do. But that would mean that we need at least one other.

Ms Calahasen: Well, that's what I was going to say, that if there's one table officer, that's great. It doesn't matter. I withdraw my motion so that we can carry on with yours.

The Chair: You certainly could, Ms Calahasen, add that only people who have not had the opportunity to attend this conference in the past can put their names in the hat if you would like.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Chair, could I ask: how does this tie in with the Speaker's list? I believe the Speaker has a list of conferences which includes this one, and so many people go from that as well.

Mr. Rodney: That's right. That's part of the reason that I withdrew my name from another trip that other people might think was higher on the list.

Mr. Allred: But are this committee's selections in addition to the Speaker's selections?

Mr. Rodney: This becomes part of his selections.

Mr. Allred: Part of it. Okay.

The Chair: The clerk may be able to advise us on this. I'm not aware of the Speaker's list, the complete list.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: The committee here is responsible for deciding who goes and then submits that list to the Speaker, and it forms part of his own information. That's my understanding.

The Chair: Okay. The motion that I read into the record: if there are no further questions on that, could I please have a vote from members?

Mr. Rodney: Maybe read it one more time, please.

The Chair: Okay. I'll read this. Fair enough, Mr. Fawcett?

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. Fawcett that

the deputy chair, a committee member selected by lottery, the committee clerk, and the committee research co-ordinator be approved to attend the 2011 Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committee's conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in August or at a later date and that two alternates be determined by lottery in the event that any of the approved delegates are unable to attend.

All those in favour of the motion? None opposed. Thank you very much.

Mr. Rodney: That's with the understanding that the representative is someone who has not had the chance to go in the past.

The Chair: That's up to the members to work it out.

Ms Calahasen: That's up to individuals.

Mr. Rodney: It sounds like people are in agreement.

The Chair: Please, if you have interest in this, if you could notify the clerk's office this week, and perhaps we could have the lottery next week or, if not, the following week.

Mr. Rodney: Or on your way out.

The Chair: We have meetings scheduled through to May 11, I believe, with this committee. I have no idea how long the session is going to last, but, members, if you have any wishes for departments that you would like to add to our schedule past May 11, please let us know. If you have any agencies, boards, and commissions that you would like to appear before the committee out of session or if you want any out-of-session meetings held this summer, now is the time to start thinking about that and discussing it at the committee so that we can get that organized. Fair enough?

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Chair, I'll just add that it's been rare that we've been out of the House before Victoria Day weekend, so it looks to me as though we might need at least one more guest that last Wednesday if, indeed, that is the last Wednesday before session expires. So, folks, please think about who you might want for that and possibly the next week because technically we're scheduled till June 3 at the latest.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: In terms of the potential out-of-session groups I'd certainly like to see again the Workers' Compensation Board.

The Chair: Okay. I appreciate that.

Mr. Rodney: Just a question for Mr. Chase. Would you consider that for the Wednesday before Victoria Day rather than waiting until sometime out of session?

Mr. Chase: The sooner we see them, the better.

Mr. Rodney: So, folks, as you can see, there's one suggestion. If you have another for before spring session expires, please inform the chair.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Mason, I have here the draft dated May 28, 2009, Alberta Seniors and Community Supports Long-Term Care Accommodations Variable Fee Structure Advisory Team Session Summary. Do you have any comment on this at this time?

Mr. Mason: I want to table this document for the committee's interest and also for the Auditor General's information. It is a report of a team which contained at least five senior officials from the department we just heard from, and it was prepared for the supportive living and long-term care branch, the community supports and strategic planning division of Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. You've mentioned the date of May 2009.

I'll just draw members' attention to some information contained on page 3 of the executive summary, the target to reduce long-term care beds. It says:

The Continuing Care Strategy targets a significant reduction in long-term care beds . . . Reduction of spaces over the long-term

are intended to produce a utilization ratio of: 20% long-term care, 60% Level 4 Designated Assisted Living and 20% Level 3 Supportive Living.

Mr. Rodney: What page, again?

Mr. Mason: That's at the bottom of page 3 of the executive summary.

An Hon. Member: Is this meeting over, or what are we doing?

The Chair: Just give him a chance. It'll go quickly.

Mr. Mason: I just want to draw this to your attention. I had hoped you'd be interested. The current ratio is approximately 40 per cent long-term care beds, and the strategy target is 20 per cent. That was what I was referring to, and I just want to lay this before the committee.

The Chair: Thank you. Appreciate that.

Mr. Elniski: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. The first sentence there, the actual first sentence of what the hon. member just read, reads: "The Continuing Care Strategy targets a significant reduction in long-term care beds – a reflection of an enhanced focus on home care and 'aging in the right place'." He missed that part of the sentence.

The Chair: Okay. That's a point that the chair appreciates.

Mr. Allred: Well, Mr. Chair, I guess I wonder: is this a public document? I notice it's dated draft May 2009.

The Chair: The gentleman said that it was a public document, and it's a public document now. It's tabled to this committee.

Mr. Mason: We released this document publicly about a year ago.

Mr. Allred: Oh, okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to move on to item 6 on our agenda. The chair appreciates the patience of the members. The date of the next meeting is Wednesday, April 20, 2011, with Alberta Aboriginal Relations from 8:30 to 10 o'clock here.

I would now, please, request a motion to adjourn. Mr. Chase moves that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 10:09 a.m.]

