



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Human Services

Wednesday, March 13, 2013
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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* substitution for Kent Hehr

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Merwan Saher Auditor General

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Ministry of Human Services

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Mark Hattori, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Family Services

Carol Ann Kushlyk, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Corporate Services

Donna Ludvigsen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Financial Supports

Steve MacDonald, Deputy Minister

Andrew Sharman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Safe, Fair and Healthy Workplaces

Susan Taylor, Assistant Deputy Minister, Family Violence Prevention and Homeless Supports

8:32 a.m.

Wednesday, March 13, 2013

[Mr. Anderson in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. My name is Rob Anderson. I'm the committee chair and MLA for Airdrie. I would like to welcome everyone here in attendance. It's a full room today. We will go around the table to introduce ourselves, and we'll start on my right with the deputy chair. Please indicate if you are sitting on the committee as a substitute for another member.

Mr. Dorward: My name is David Dorward. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Jeneroux: Matt Jeneroux, MLA, Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Goudreau: Hector Goudreau, MLA, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Dr. Swann: Good morning, everyone. David Swann from Calgary-Mountain View. I'm substituting for Kent Hehr.

Mr. Stier: Pat Stier, MLA, Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Hale: Jason Hale, MLA, Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Allen: Good morning. Mike Allen, MLA, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Ms Kushlyk: Good morning. Carol Ann Kushlyk, Human Services.

Mr. MacDonald: Good morning. Steve MacDonald, deputy minister, Human Services.

Ms Ludvigsen: Good morning. Donna Ludvigsen, Human Services.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Mr. Anglin: Joe Anglin, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Wilson: Jeff Wilson, Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Donovan: Ian Donovan, MLA, Little Bow.

Mrs. Sarich: Good morning. Janice Sarich, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bilous: Good morning. Deron Bilous, MLA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, manager of research services.

Mr. Tyrell: Good morning. I'm Chris Tyrell, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

The microphones are of course operated by *Hansard* staff, and audio of the committee proceedings is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Leg. Assembly website should you want them. If everyone could make sure to please speak directly into the mikes when they're asking questions or giving answers, that would be fantastic. And just a reminder – and I always have to remind myself – cellphones on vibrate, please, if you could.

We've had the agenda circulated. Do we have someone to move that the agenda for March 13, 2013, Standing Committee on

Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Mr. Quadri. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

All right. We have two sets of minutes that have been circulated that we need to approve, catching up a little bit here. The first is minutes regarding February 27, 2013. Do we have a mover that the minutes for the February 27, 2013, Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting be approved as distributed? Mr. Stier. Those in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

Finally, regarding the minutes for March 6, 2013, our last meeting, do we have a mover that the minutes for the March 6, 2013, Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting be approved as distributed? Mrs. Sarich. Those in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

The reports to be reviewed today are primarily the following documents: the 2011-12 annual report from Human Services; reports of the Auditor General of Alberta, July and October 2012 as well as February 2013, which contain several recommendations regarding the Department of Human Services, the Ministry of Human Services; the 2011-12 annual report of the government of Alberta's consolidated financial statements; as well as the Measuring Up progress report on the government of Alberta's strategic plan, again for 2011-12.

Of course, all plans, financial statements, and so forth of previous years are all fair game, but those are the ones we're hopefully focusing on today. Members should all have a copy of the briefing document prepared by committee research services – thanks very much for that, Dr. Massolin – as well as a briefing document that we received from the Auditor General. Thank you for that.

Joining us today, of course, are representatives from Alberta Human Services. We had requested somebody from the office of the Public Trustee to be in attendance as well. My understanding is that we have a Ms Brenda Lee Doyle. If she's in the room today, she can introduce herself as well. That would be good because that is going to be a focus of this meeting.

With that, we'll give the department a brief opening statement of up to 10 minutes maximum and go from there.

Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a real privilege to be here today to discuss with the committee the results Human Services helped achieve for Albertans in 2011-12. The ministry is very large with a very broad scope, and this complexity has been heightened by some of the restructuring that occurred in 2011-12. The size of my briefing binder and the number of staff supporting today's discussion is a testament to that complexity.

I'd just like to take a couple of minutes to introduce some of the team that's here today to support the conversation. We have Mr. Mark Asbell, the chair of the Alberta Labour Relations Board; Mr. Douglass Tadman, chief appeals commissioner, Appeals Commission for Alberta workers' compensation; Mr. Mark Hattori, assistant deputy minister, child and family services; Ms Brenda Lee Doyle, the assistant deputy minister for disability services, also here to help us with questions on the OPT; to my right, Ms Donna Ludvigsen, assistant deputy minister, employment and financial supports; Carol Ann, who has introduced herself also; Ms Susan Taylor, assistant deputy minister, family violence prevention and homelessness; Andrew Sharman, assistant deputy minister, safe, fair and healthy workplaces; Karen Ferguson, ADM, early childhood and community supports. Also joining us is Maryann Everett, assistant deputy minister, workforce strategies division, currently with Enterprise and Advanced Education.

The ministry's broad scope makes sense given we are created to partner with communities to help address the complex challenges

the province is facing. These challenges impact the well-being of our economy, our communities, our families, friends, and neighbours. They strain our health, education, and justice systems. Previously, separate ministries developed individual programs to address specific issues, often in isolation from one another.

Albertans said that a siloed approach was not achieving results that were important to them, especially as the province grows and changes. They asked for stronger partnerships between government and communities and for easier access to the supports they need in one stop, when possible. They asked us to focus on the whole person and their needs, not on their individual issues. They asked us to be more effective and efficient through increased collaboration and co-ordination at the government and community levels. Most importantly, they asked that we achieve better outcomes for Albertans. It was in response to the call for these changes that Human Services was created.

8:40

We have 7,600 dedicated staff across the province doing amazing work every day. We work with communities, agencies, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and other orders of government. We help keep children and families safe and strong. We find permanent and stable homes for homeless Albertans and link them with the supports that enable self-reliance. We assist families so their children get a solid start. We strive to ensure individuals are safe and healthy at work. We support opportunities for people to gain the skills they need to get better jobs. We help persons and families with disabilities so they can live fulfilling lives. We empower communities to identify their own unique needs, and we partner with communities to develop solutions.

Our goal is to help create a province that allows every Albertan to live in dignity and respect, with the opportunity to reach their full potential. When all Albertans can participate fully in our economy and communities, everyone benefits. Our neighbourhoods are more safe and welcoming, and businesses can attract the skilled employees they need to compete and be successful.

You know, some people had concerns about combining such a wide range of distinct programs in one department. Despite some growing pains and challenges I believe Human Services is making tremendous progress to better co-ordinate our supports, that create the safety, jobs, and opportunities that help children, families, individuals, and communities thrive. I'd like to point out that collaboration with communities has been key to our success.

I'd like to share an example that illustrates what I feel is the value Human Services now brings to Albertans. In October about 2,000 workers were laid off from the Lakeside Packers plant in Brooks. Alberta Works, AISH, and temporary foreign worker advisory offices from Brooks, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Calgary came together to help these workers. Staff at the Brooks Alberta Works centre assisted 687 Lakeside Packers workers, including those needing income support, child care subsidies, and a range of employment services. They helped more people in a week than they usually see in months.

The staff worked closely with community agencies, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, and Alberta Culture to ensure the needs of the workers were met. The child and family services authority provided child care subsidies for parents so they would not lose child care spaces. We helped all workers fill out federal employment insurance claims. With thousands of people in a vulnerable situation Human Services staff, partner agencies, communities, and other GOA departments pulled together to ensure the well-being of these workers and their families through this difficult time. To me, this is just one example of the results we are

achieving together for Albertans every day thanks to our increased teamwork, information sharing, and partnerships.

Our staff and partners achieved many important results in 2011-12. We provided 22,500 child care subsidies to low-income families, giving thousands of Alberta parents the opportunity to join and stay in the workforce to support their families and contribute to the economy. We also reached our goal to create more than 20,000 new quality child care spaces between 2008 and 2011. We helped find permanent, loving homes for 531 children in government care through adoption and private guardianship. More than 13,000 Albertans who received funding for skills and training programs from the ministry became employed or went on to further education.

On April 1, 2012, we increased the maximum AISH benefit by \$400 per month, which had a tremendous impact on the quality of life for some of Alberta's most vulnerable people. In all, 45,000 Albertans with a severe and permanent disability received financial assistance and health benefits. The success of Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness continued as well. Between 2008 and April 2012 more than 5,900 people received housing, and approximately 80 per cent of these people were still living successfully in their homes.

We also took a number of steps to help ensure safety and fairness for Albertans in their workplace. For example, we hired additional occupational health and safety workers and employment standards officers, conducted inspections after normal business hours and on weekends, established a unit dedicated to enforcing compliance in the mining sector, and increased Alberta's minimum wage.

The ministry also identified duplication and inefficiencies within our organizations. We consolidated four deputy ministers' offices into one. We also reduced the number of assistant deputy ministers. We began a major transformation to ensure that we have the best structures, processes, competencies, and culture in place to help our staff and partners do what they do best.

But we know there are a number of areas where we need to work with communities to achieve even better results for Albertans. Of the ministry's 54 performance measures 42 were met or exceeded. In pursuit of excellence for Albertans, we set a very high standard for ourselves. The reality is that there's no finish line for Human Services. We constantly strive for improvement in everything we do for Albertans in partnership with communities.

We have taken concrete actions to address each one of our unmet targets. I'm pleased to respond to questions about these today.

Of critical ongoing concern to our ministry and the communities is the high number of aboriginal children in government care. Sixty-eight per cent of children in care are aboriginal. We know we must find better ways to support these children and their families so they can stay together. Our aboriginal policy initiatives division is making great progress to strengthen important partnerships with communities, government, and the private sector to address the complex challenges that cause children to come into care, including family violence. I'm pleased to say there are indications that our efforts are delivering the results we expect. I would be happy to talk more about that.

Another immediate issue we're tackling is longer timelines for AISH applicants. There was a significant increase in the number of AISH applicants and the benefit rate increases, actually, in 2012, but we have taken immediate actions to address these issues, and we are speeding up processing times. This includes increasing the number of staff reviewing these applications.

As the chairman mentioned, I'd also like to take a minute to address the Auditor General's critical report of operations and controls at the office of the Public Trustee following criminal activity involving a trust officer. Our ministry takes its responsibility for safeguarding money for vulnerable Albertans very seriously. That is why we asked the Auditor General to come into our organization and complete what is, arguably, one of the most in-depth and comprehensive reviews ever done by his office. The ministry has accepted and has moved forward with all of the recommendations made by the Auditor General.

The OPT is implementing transformational change. We're focused on improving accountability, service delivery, risk management, and staff training. Our commitment to transparency in this area continues as we'll be posting quarterly updates of these activities and our progress on the Human Services website. We are committed to restoring the public's confidence that we are worthy stewards of their assets.

This ministry is proud of its close and collaborative relationship with the office of the Auditor General. Accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement are fundamental values that drive our approach to service delivery. We take all of the Auditor General's recommendations very seriously. I'm, again, very happy to answer questions today about our actions to respond to the Auditor General's recommendations from 2011-12.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. MacDonald. That's 10 minutes.

If we could go to the Auditor General.

Mr. Saher: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My comments are on material that we included in our July and October 2012 reports as well as our recent, February 2013, public report. Starting on page 33 of our February report, we included the results of our systems audit of the office of the Public Trustee. We made five recommendations to improve internal controls.

On page 84 of our July 2012 report, in a follow-up audit of occupational health and safety systems, we repeated our recommendation that the department enforce compliance with the law by high-risk employers and employees.

There are several outstanding recommendations to draw to your attention, starting on page 176 of our October 2012 report. Recommendations relating to our audit processes to manage child intervention services have been outstanding since 2007.

Finally, we completed financial audits of the following for the year ended March 31, 2012: the ministry and department financial statements as well as the financial statements of 10 CFSAs, six PDDs, and the office of the Public Trustee. We issued unqualified audit opinions on each of these financial statements. We also issued an unqualified review engagement report on certain performance measures included in the ministry annual report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Saher.

Just to briefly remind everyone how the time allocation works in our committee, we split the time between the government and the opposition 50-50, and then within the opposition half the time of that half an hour, so 15 minutes or so, goes to the Wildrose caucus, 7 and a half minutes to the Liberals, and 7 and a half to the NDP caucus. So that's how we do it.

We'll start with the government today. When the government does their questions, we have Mr. Dorward referee that, so I'll pass it on to him for the first 10 to 15 minutes.

8:50

Mr. Dorward: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Office of the Public Trustee, thank you for acknowledging the Auditor General's report and your comments, Mr. MacDonald, relative to the commitments that you made there.

I would like to have you, if you could, comment on recommendation 4. I would refer you to recommendation 4 on page 45 of the February report of the Auditor General of Alberta. I just want to dive into that a little bit deeper. The heading of recommendation 4 is Improve and Follow Policies. The Auditor General felt that the office of the Public Trustee should

- review and assess whether its policies are appropriate, and procedures are adequate to mitigate the risk that client assets could be misappropriated or otherwise mismanaged
- improve its processes for ensuring compliance with policies and [processes].

This is fairly key to diving into a situation like this. I realize that the report just came out and recognize the fact that you said that you would come along with the recommendations and get at them. Can you give us a sense of the time frame of your review of those policies, whether they are appropriate, and whether the procedures are adequate? Then the next step, of course, is the compliance with those. Could you just comment on that particular area for me?

Mr. MacDonald: Sure. I'd be happy to. We are in the process of developing a new policy framework around that. We do recognize, as the Auditor General pointed out, that we do need a greater level of discipline around policy development, application, and compliance. Right now we are in the process of reviewing those policies. They're being revised and updated to ensure appropriate risk mitigation.

We've identified other challenges, including segregation of duties and improved compliance, that we need to be focused on, and we've taken some measures there. We've implemented some monthly review processes and training sessions. Once we identify where there are gaps, we're taking actions to ensure that front-line staff have the understanding of what needs to change and why. We've enhanced our internal review function to verify compliance with these policies and to ensure that the appropriate internal controls are in place.

Does that provide you with what you need?

Mr. Dorward: Yes. Thank you.

On the system side of things would you consider your system to be fairly paper intensive, or would you consider it to be electronic? Are there some things that are going to be done in that regard as you go through this process?

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely. No, it is very much a paper-driven process. There was a recognition that improved document management through electronic means would be of value. We're in the process of sort of assessing needs and documenting how to move forward. The Auditor General actually noted that in his review, the BOSS system as it's described.

With the Auditor General's report coming out, it's clear that you don't want to automate poor processes and procedures. We're actually at this very moment reviewing the definition of processes, looking at how we have to change and pausing and reflecting on the type of system we need to make the differences we require. There was some expectation that a new system would address some of the problems that existed before. I think that's still true, but I do think we need to pause and reflect about: what are those new processes we need, what are those new procedures we need,

what are the new compliance requirements we need? Then we can start to redefine the type of system we need.

The challenge with that is that it'll take a bit longer to implement a new system than originally planned, but I think to ensure, you know, a good return for the significant investment that's going to be required, you had better make sure you have the right systems and processes in place rather than risk automating things that aren't working well.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you.

Is it a fair question to ask you what the number of cases is and how you've seen a growth in those case files? Does the Public Trustee office work on a cost-recovery basis?

Mr. MacDonald: There are about 20,000 case files, and the growth has been about 2 per cent a year, roughly. When you say on a cost-recovery basis, we recover some of the costs through – what's the fund called? Jump on in.

Ms Doyle: Good morning. We recover some of the costs through fees in terms that it is charged and it goes into the common fund. That is part of the cost recovery. But the largest portion of support for the Public Trustee comes from government funds, which is about \$18 million a year.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you.

Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Deputy Chair. I know that we're compressed on time, so I'm just going to try my very best to frame the questions really quickly here. You said that 68 per cent of the children in care are aboriginal. Could you provide the committee the per cent and the actual number of aboriginal children in care for the past five years?

My next question. In the last 18 months there has been an amalgamation of other departments and areas of the government into Human Services. I was wondering if you could comment on the actual cost savings of this merger and the efficiencies that you've been able to identify thus far, over the past 18 months, that have been of benefit to the department.

Also, in the 2006 annual report of the Auditor General it was my understanding that there were four approved accrediting bodies, known as child intervention service providers; very quickly here: the Canadian Accreditation Council, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, Accreditation Canada, and the Council on Accreditation. It's my understanding that the ministry – and maybe something has changed here – does not require a service provider to apply for accreditation from a specific accrediting body. How does the department ensure that when a service provider is looking to get accredited, they are in fact complying and getting the correct accrediting agency, with the correct metrics for accreditation, for the services that they're going to be providing for children in care? Has anything changed there to improve this? It was identified by the Auditor General as problematic, and perhaps there's been a policy shift.

I'll stop there. Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: Great. Thank you for the question on aboriginal kids in care. I'll give you the numbers for the last five years. I don't have the percentages, but I'll give you the numbers that allow the percentages to be calculated. In 2006-2007 the total number of kids in care was 8,705. Of that, 5,067 were aboriginal. In '07-08 there were 8,887 in care; 5,255 were aboriginal. In 2008-09 there were 8,961 in care; 5,371 were aboriginal. In 2009-10 there were 8,600 in care; 5,433 were aboriginal. In 2010-11

there were 8,652 in care, with 5,657 aboriginal. The most recent numbers are 8,721 in care, with 5,853 aboriginal.

This is a number that's often quoted, and I think it's important to understand that it's just one indicator. The reality, as you can see from the numbers that I quoted, is that we saw a slight decline in the number of kids in care. The fact is that the number of nonaboriginal kids in care is going down slightly. The aboriginal kids in care have gone up a bit. Again, we need to understand the numbers behind that and what that numbers tell us.

We've done a lot of activities over the past little while to address that issue, a lot of focus around that one. We've created a new division that's actually gone out and started these community conversations, and we've met with about a thousand individuals to talk about: what do we do about the systemic issues that are resulting in this tragic number?

We've worked on some new service delivery models with aboriginals, outcomes-based service delivery, where aboriginal organizations are involved on the front end in determining a situation and then the best approach, a more culturally respectful approach.

We've also done a lot of work with a role called a band designate. That role is essentially for every band to create a bridge. This person is connected to the community and can help the caseworker connect with family, extended family. They work in partnership with our workers to ensure that we can find an appropriate placement rather than taking a kid into care.

Now, you may ask: so what? You know, I'm hopeful that this is working. Our most recent numbers, in December of 2012, show for the first time in a long time a significant reduction in the number of aboriginal kids in care. We've actually dropped 3 per cent. We're down to 5,682, and even more importantly the overall number of kids in care has dropped by 3.6 per cent to 8,400. So I think these things are working.

9:00

We've got a long way to go. There have been lots of conversations with chiefs and councils and with the community itself to say: what can we do differently? A huge part of the challenge with the aboriginal community is neglect. It's not that physical abuse sort of situation, but it's neglect. It's the ability and the capacity to parent, and those are addiction issues, mental health issues. It's the fallout of residential schools, that lack of parenting skills. To me, what we're trying to change is that that shouldn't be an apprehension issue. It should be: how do we build stronger families in those communities? Again, given these most recent results I'm optimistic that we're moving in the right direction.

In terms of the actual savings from the merger of the ministries I don't have precise numbers for you. At a personnel level there are three fewer deputy ministers, so that's a significant saving. We've reduced about six ADM positions, so at the highest executive level that number would easily add to over a million dollars. We're looking at a lot of our processes in terms of what we're seeing, paperwork, simplifying contracting. The true savings are in terms of our service level. We're no longer required to say: I can't give you a bus ticket because that's not my job. We can now say: yes, we can give you a bus ticket and prevent you from going into more of a crisis situation like losing your job. That's where the real efficiencies and savings are coming, in terms of client delivery.

Mrs. Sarich: If I could interject here – and thank you very much for that high-level information – I think the committee would be very interested in, to the best of your ability, a breakdown and what the cost savings have been on this amalgamation. You're

allocated a budget, and Albertans would like to know the improvements. It gives you the ability to comment on many things that you would like to point out to the committee, and it would be of value. I know that we're really pressed for time, so I did ask my question. If there is no time left, then maybe we would just ask that you would provide written answers to the questions.

Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mrs. Sarich.

Mr. Quadri has a question.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you. Page 44 of the 2011-2012 Human Services annual report indicates that the transition from child disability programs to adult pilot in central Alberta has been expanded to include more families and further indicates that "this initiative looked at new ways to help vulnerable Albertans navigate the available services and try out a new model for transition planning to adult independence." Can you tell us about the pilot and the model, please?

Mr. MacDonald: Certainly. One of the challenges we've heard about and, again, another of the successes of bringing the ministries together is our supports for children with disabilities, the parents and individuals that are funded through that program. There are often some challenges as they move into adulthood into the persons with developmental disabilities program. The level of support changes. The access to services can change.

A lot of the challenge was that we worked in a silo. There wasn't any communication going on. What the new pilot does is that the caseworkers on the PDD side work with the family and the supports for children with disabilities caseworkers to actually develop a transition plan. A good example is a child with autism: lots of community supports. Our goal is to engage the family to strengthen those community supports. Some children with autism won't qualify for PDD because they won't meet some of the qualifying thresholds.

We start talking about employment opportunities. This ministry includes employment counselling services: what sort of aspirations do you have for your child in terms of connection to the workforce? It's basically a case conference that happens when the child is 14 or 16 years old. We don't wait till they've transitioned out and are struggling to find supports. There's actually a plan that works through, and it's been very successful in terms of the satisfaction of the parents and in terms of the information sharing and the kind of outcomes we're seeing for the individuals. We've seen some significant improvement there.

Mr. Quadri: So that means the pilot program was successful?

Mr. MacDonald: Very successful.

Mr. Quadri: What are your plans for it?

Mr. MacDonald: Now, with the creation of this ministry, we're looking at ramping that across the process. We're going to take that to scale. The pilot has proved the concept, and now we're ensuring that that communication, that information sharing, happens everywhere in the province so that there's a plan for all these kids.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you.
Back to the chair.

The Chair: All right. We will go to the Wildrose critic for Human Services. Mr. Jeff Wilson, you will have 15 minutes.

Mr. Wilson: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for your presentation, Mr. MacDonald. I appreciate it very much. I really wanted to focus in on some of the issues around the PDD system, specifically, you know, looking at the AG report and outstanding recommendations. In the October 2004 report there were key recommendations regarding the board, specifically contract monitoring, evaluation. Now in the October 2012 report we see that some of these recommendations have been implemented to the point where you may be actually ready for a follow-up audit, which is good. I'm curious if you could comment on what the status of this is, why it took so long to implement these recommendations, and if part of that delay was whether or not you actually agreed with the AG report in the first place.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I'll start with the last question. Yeah, we did see an opportunity for improvement there in terms of the delay. Part of the delay is the state of readiness. We asked the Auditor General to come back when we got it totally completed. There's not sort of a test as we're moving along the pathway – and Merwan may want to comment on that – so that's part of the delay.

For a lot of these recommendations that are still outstanding, there's been significant progress, but it's not to the point where it's done. That's part of the challenge there. I don't know if Brenda Lee wants to add anything in terms of the improvements we're going to see.

We are about to actually roll out a very detailed change in the contract in terms of multiyear and following up the recommendations from the Auditor General. We've got some very detailed operational policy to support the work, and we are using some pieces around ensuring that there is a common registry around these and everything like that.

Brenda Lee, do you want to add a little bit?

Ms Doyle: Sure. I'd be happy to. This recommendation on contracting was focusing on the monitoring of our service providers. PDD has roughly about 190 to 200 service providers across the province, who provide a range of services from residential supports to community access to employment to specialized services. Part of the recommendation from the Auditor General was going in to look at the financial viability of these organizations as well as in terms of the performance. We've implemented all of the OAG's report, so we're looking forward to the Auditor General coming back to look at the work.

Mr. Wilson: Great.

Are you now requesting financial statements from these community partners as well? Are there going to be actual audits on how they're spending money in addition to how the board is spending money?

Ms Doyle: The PDD board's financial statements are always audited by the Auditor General, so they're part of our annual report. What we will be receiving from each of our service providers are their financial statements.

Mr. Wilson: Great.

Moving on. Mrs. Sarich had touched on some elements of efficiencies in your department with the amalgamation of the four ministries. What specific measures are you putting in place to actually determine success outside of just having reduced some staffing positions?

Mr. MacDonald: A lot of the measures are the performance measures that are in the outcomes that we've described in our annual report. We hope to see some improvements there.

The other piece of performance measures we're looking at is staff surveys if this is really about empowering staff to use judgment, make better decisions, and make sure they have the flexibility to actually respond to a client's needs and not be just compliance based, rules based. The staff survey is part of that. In a lot of our program areas we also look at the surveys of our clients, what sort of outcomes they are experiencing in terms of satisfaction, the response there.

Results-based budgeting, that we're undertaking right now, is a huge part of that performance assessment. We're being asked to be clear on what outcomes we're achieving and if they are being achieved efficiently and effectively. All our programs are going through that process. In fact, that process has been accelerated. So there's a whole range of actions happening there.

To me, the key thing will be in terms of the outcomes we're getting at the front counter, and what clients and Albertans are experiencing will be key. But, again, results-based budgeting is causing us to pause and reflect on everything we do.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Thank you.

Again, Mrs. Sarich kind of pummeled you with a few questions, and I was quite looking forward to getting some responses on the accreditation process within child and family services. I'm wondering if you can comment on what has been done to improve the consistency and accountability of these accrediting bodies.

9:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, another recommendation from the Auditor General. Our old model was very much about: here are four bodies; choose the one that best meets your needs. We didn't as a ministry sort of get in between that relationship. The other thing I'd add in terms of context: this is just one piece of our accountability and assurance role with these agencies. It's just an added piece.

You know, as the Auditor General appropriately pointed out, there wasn't enough ownership of that process within the department, and we agreed with that. Over the last little while we've been working hard to ensure that the accreditation service is actually meeting metrics. We've developed more of a partnership role, so now, rather than just the agency and then accreditation, we've been involved. Just recently we've gone out with an RFP with very clear metrics and requirements. The responses are just coming in. We've really changed that world. Again, that's one that took a bit of time. We started off with the highest risk sort of areas, dealt with those things, and now we're at the point where we've basically restructured that model to be more of a partnership model. It is a stronger model now.

Mr. Wilson: Do you anticipate specific safeguards being increased or implemented as a result of that?

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. I'm not certain that there was a risk that things weren't happening. This is the assurance that, in fact, they are happening. That clarity, I think, will add value, so there will be some improvement because of that.

Mr. Wilson: Right.

If I could shift into some OH and S stuff, the issue around certificates of recognition and the reality that the AG reports had found that there weren't specific policies in place to identify high-risk employers and that many of them were still eligible for certificates of recognition. If you could just comment on how that

recommendation to you has been impacted or what you've done about it at this point.

Mr. MacDonald: There has been a bunch of work that we've done in that area. A total of 797 employer reviews were initiated by the partnership between July 1 and February 17. There were 94 compulsory reviews of I'll call them COR holders who had poor safety performance over a four-year period. There were 703 reviews that resulted from the occurrence of employer-review triggered events: 383 reviews indicated there were no systemic deficiencies in the employer's health and safety management system, including invalid triggers, nonoccupational fatalities, or medical conditions; about 198 reviews are still under investigation; and about 131 of those reviews indicate that the employer may have systemic deficiencies.

So what do we do about it? To date a total of 119 action plans have been completed for employer review, 35 action plans for compulsory employer reviews, and 84 action plans as a result of trigger events. A preliminary analysis of completed action plans indicates that the three areas of most weakness that were identified with COR holders' health and safety management systems are, one, management leadership and commitment – this has got to be a commitment model, not a compliance model, or we'll never be successful – hazard assessment, that preventative aspect, and training.

No CORs have been taken away as a result of these employer-review action plans because that's punitive. That doesn't drive change that we want to see. To date only one employer has decided to let their COR lapse rather than participate in the employer-review process. That, to me, is a positive outcome, that they see the value and they're prepared to work to make it better.

Mr. Wilson: Great.

What are some of the criteria that your department is considering to identify high-risk workers and employers?

Mr. MacDonald: Andrew, can you help me out on that one? Thank you.

Mr. Sharman: Thank you for the question. We have instigated a number of focused inspection campaigns looking at some of the higher risk industry sectors. We have had the employer illness and injury prevention program, that has been in existence for a number of years, but we're currently taking a basket of measures using a scorecard approach that the Auditor General's team reviewed in our partnerships area, our certificate of recognition.

We'll be taking measures over a four-year period on things such as fatalities, stop-work and stop-use orders, and open compliance orders as well as the individual measures such as disabling injury rate, lost-time claim rate, and the duration, so the severity, of the injury. We'll be weighting them, based on a scorecard approach, to allow us to truly focus in on those employers that we are seeing as high risk, and we'll be able to spend more time and follow them for a longer period and focus our specialist resources to truly move them to compliance and reduce the high risk.

Mr. Wilson: Okay.

Mr. MacDonald: We're also working very closely with the WCB. They have a wealth of information and knowledge. They do a lot of assessment, too, so we're using their knowledge and wisdom to also focus our efforts.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Now, you had mentioned that forced compliance isn't something that you're anticipating will see positive

results. What enforcement measures are you looking to implement to see the results you're looking for?

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. Under consideration right now are administrative penalties, and we're also considering ticketing as another model to move to, and there'll be further work in those areas. Both those models allow us to sort of tweak the range of enforcement rather than a huge club or nothing at all. They give us a broader continuum of actions, so we're looking forward to implementing that in the near future. I think it will allow for some more immediate feedback to both employers and employees and a range of responses that reflect sort of the violations we see.

Mr. Wilson: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hale had a question.

Mr. Hale: Thank you. In your opening remarks you mentioned Brooks and the incident we had down there. As the MLA for that area I spent quite a bit of time during that operation, and I want to commend you guys on the great work that was done in Brooks and the way it was handled with your office and all of the associations and groups in Brooks. It was really nice to see that something that unfortunate was handled with great care.

On that point, did you learn anything from that experience that you will be implementing in the future in case this happens again?

Mr. MacDonald: That's a great question. Yeah. We learn something from all these events. From Slave Lake we learned lots in terms of, one, empowering the staff. We made sure that we were looking after the needs of the people rather than: what are the rules? We learned that a streamlining process is okay, that you get good results. You need the accountability in the end.

The other thing is that we always learn about communications challenges. We had some communications issues with the sort of state of readiness of the federal government. I'd like to think we took some credit to make sure that they were geared up and ready to respond in some way.

To be very candid, the other thing that we learned is that Human Services works. You know, I had to make one phone call to a regional fellow, and he was able to mobilize the employment people, the child care people, the child intervention workers. There wasn't this sort of massive need to figure out who's doing what. They all came together because they recognized they're one government and one ministry focused on the people.

The other thing I think we learned is that our partnerships and relationships are very important. We got a bit of a heads-up, because we also are responsible for labour relations, that things were going in a challenging way given some of the conditions they were putting on the plant. So our relationships with the community allowed us to sort of anticipate this may go badly and to be ready and to throw enough resources at it.

That was the other thing. Expect the worse; hope for the best. That's what we did. Again, Slave Lake was another example that really taught us that if you allow people to respond in a meaningful way, they'll use good judgment and make good decisions and deal with the issues.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Any more questions?

Mr. Wilson: Actually, I have one more.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. ISIS: I'm wondering if you can make some comments on how the implementation of this has streamlined your process.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. ISIS is the information system used by our child intervention system. It was many years in the making, and we're now rolling it out. ISIS is really designed to have a stronger front end, and that's what our whole casework practice model is about. It's really about doing a good assessment up front so you make good decisions as you move through. The rollout has been going fairly successfully. We've done it in a phased approach. There have been some growing pains with it. It's a change process.

9:20

The other thing we're learning is that we probably engineered in too much information, and caseworkers have challenges. They feel they're doing too much paperwork rather than face-to-face relationship stuff, and ISIS has allowed us to identify that. We've actually streamlined a bunch of data input and forms, things like that, so they can spend more time with individuals.

As an information system it will allow us to have better information about clients in a more usable way. While it's still in its early stage, the early indications are that it's going to have a real value, and it will give us an opportunity to streamline some things.

Mr. Wilson: Any indications as to what specifically will be streamlined?

The Chair: Good question, but that will have to wait. That's 15 minutes. Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

Let's go to the Liberals. Dr. Swann.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much. Thanks for being here. I want to start back at the office of the Public Trustee and just ensure that I understand more about what's been done to make the changes and provide the oversight. You may have touched on it, but it's an area that I need more clarity on myself. When you talk about the oversight the minister provides for the office of the Public Trustee, when does the ministry expect the changes to be fully implemented, and how will the Public Trustee ensure the safety of client funds until the changes are implemented?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, thank you for that question. The majority of the procedural changes we expect will be completed by the end of this year. A lot of the work has already started, and some of the key identifying where the threats are has been done, and now we need to implement. A few caveats around that. The new information system will take a few more years to put in place given where we need to pause and reflect. That was the primary of your question: when will things be implemented? The majority of the work will be done by December 31 of this year. That's when it's anticipated.

In terms of the specifics I can go into a little more detail if you like.

Dr. Swann: No, no. I just want to be clear on what the oversight is and how you will protect people in the interim.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. The oversight is that we've taken out the internal audit function and moved it into the ministry, out of the organization itself, so that segregation of duties in there. There will be enhanced audits because of that, and there will be a more corporate perspective. We've assigned an assistant deputy minister, Brenda Lee, to lead the work. We've created a

transition/transformational team in there that has expertise from the Human Services area, financial. We're bringing in an external consulting firm to help us as a check and balance to make sure that the progress is there and we're identifying the right issues.

The other thing I'd say is that, you know, it's an organization of about 140 people that are very dedicated and want to get better, so we need to focus on them. There's a cultural change required. They need to know that they're supported. They need to know they can come forward and say that things aren't working well because there was some of that issue there. At a personal level that's the biggest change we need. How do we engage the staff and the people to know that if something has gone wrong, we'll learn from it, and we'll move forward? That's happening today and now.

When will that complete culture change happen? I think it'll be based on our actions and our proof that we will support them. But even as we speak today, there's acknowledgment that change had to happen, and it began well before Merwan released his report because they were sharing the information. As early as November we were already implementing changes to strengthen things. So we didn't wait for the report to come out. As issues were identified, we were making changes going through. That's why we're able to say that by the end of this year most of the recommendations will be implemented.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much.

Moving to child intervention services, I need to know more about the accreditation process and what's been done to improve the consistency and accountability of the accrediting bodies.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Maybe I'll get Mark Hattori to walk through it in a little more detail. We did do a comprehensive review of the accreditation and its effectiveness. This is why we've come out with this RFP, to basically ask the system to change and develop more of a partnership approach.

Mark, maybe you want to talk a bit more about what's in the RFP and how we've changed that.

Mr. Hattori: Yeah. Thank you for the question. The RFP articulates both building upon the standards that the professional accrediting bodies nationally and internationally have and what we're looking for in terms of the kinds of outcomes for child intervention service delivery. So it is a blend of saying that we need to match our standards in terms of the kinds of things we're looking for at a minimum for achievement and compliance measures with those things that are both of an administrative and program nature and come out together and work with the contracted agencies and the accrediting bodies and our service delivery system to say that these are the things we're mutually working towards together. Those are the things that the contracted agencies will be measured by. That RFP did articulate those standards that we have in our system and matched them with the accrediting bodies' standards to say that there is some consistency in the way that we're looking at things as a collective.

Dr. Swann: Would you comment further, then, on the whole compliance monitoring process and the risk assessment, how that is managed and how you draw a line in the sand and make a different decision on the basis of your risk assessment?

Mr. Hattori: Just for clarity's sake, are you talking about the Auditor General's reference to risk-based auditing?

Dr. Swann: That's part of it. How this accreditation process would look at interventions: is that going to change as a result of the monitoring process?

Mr. Hattori: Absolutely. The expectation would be that the accrediting bodies would verify and give us information back that would confirm that they, in fact, have met the accrediting standards that we've collectively agreed upon. From that perspective if they don't meet accreditation, then our child and family services authorities wouldn't be able to enter into a contracted relationship with them. They do require accrediting status in order for us to contract with them. So that's one piece.

The risk-based auditing process. What we do with our standards monitoring is that as we look at whether or not the child and family services authorities are meeting the standards, areas that are identified for further review are deemed the risk portion of what the Auditor General was referencing. Consequently, we would go out and do further auditing in more detail around those areas of concern or opportunity. That's really the additional and supplementary risk-based auditing process that we've added.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Swann. Seven and a half minutes go by fast.

Go ahead, Mr. Bilous.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. My questions today – and I have a number of them – deal with income support. First, I'd love to know – and, hopefully, you have these figures at your fingertips – what is the current number of recipients of income support to people expected to work or working versus income support to people with barriers to full employment.

Mr. MacDonald: Our current caseload on expected to work is – am I reading that right? – 19,974. The barriers to full-time employment is 15,986.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. What is the monthly rate of support provided under income support to people expected to work or working and income support to people with barriers to full employment?

Mr. MacDonald: The average monthly cost per case for the expected to work is \$1,054, and those with barriers to full-time employment is \$1,222.

Mr. Bilous: Can you explain the eligibility criteria for those expecting to work versus income support to barriers to full employment?

9:30

Ms Ludvigsen: Good morning. I would be happy to answer that question. The individuals who are considered to have barriers to full employment are those individuals who have multiple issues that permanently or for a long term take them out of eligibility for the workforce. These are individuals who are not medically eligible for AISH but would have issues such as addictions, low literacy, social isolation, some disability or some medical reasons that limit their ability to be successful in the workplace over the long term whereas those individuals who are expected to work are individuals who need short-term assistance in order to do either skill upgrading, get some work exposure, or have some career development work with them and then move rapidly into reattaching to the workforce.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. One possibility that's been discussed in my caucus is the barriers to full employment, effectively, and I think you're saying that that deals more with mental health issues as opposed to the ones that are expecting to work. Again, I mean, we're just looking at or want to ensure that there's not any kind of discrimination going on between those two different categories of folks.

Can you tell us the percentage of cases in which the AISH eligibility decision of the department was upheld by the Citizens' Appeal Panel? Do you have that statistic?

Ms Ludvigsen: The Citizens' Appeal Panel has the authority to review those decisions where the individual, the applicant, feels that they haven't had the decision of the department effectively reflect their medical eligibility. The appeal panel typically upholds the position of the department about 60 per cent of the time.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Excellent. My statistic is about 65 per cent in the last six years.

The implication is that in 30 to 40 per cent of AISH eligibility cases the department is unfairly denying benefits to people who deserve them. This is only the percentage of people who have the wherewithal, the support from advocates, institutional knowledge to undertake and navigate a lengthy appeals process. We know from our numbers that there are about 500 appeals waiting to be heard at the moment. The question is: why is the department systematically, as a matter of regular practice, denying these benefits to people who should rightly be receiving them?

Mr. MacDonald: I disagree that there is some systematic denial. That's not occurring.

The appeal process is to allow that second opinion, additional information to be considered. I think that's appropriate. Not all cases that are denied go to appeal, so I think that's important to understand, too. I think the premise of the question is wrong. What happens at the appeal process is that the panel gets to exercise some discretion that doesn't necessarily happen at the front counter, and I think that's appropriate. We do an incredibly high volume of applications. As you are well aware, there's actually been a backlog there.

I think it's important to understand that the decision to put someone on AISH is a million-dollar decision. Someone at the age of 19 that will be on AISH till they're 65 at about \$22,000 a year: it's a million-dollar decision. So there has to be due diligence at that front end, and the check and balance and the safeguard in there are on the appeal process. I think staff do an excellent job of assessing based on the information they have, and the safeguard is built in to allow that discretion to occur at an appropriate place.

Mr. Bilous: I can appreciate that, but the challenge or the frustration that I'm hearing from constituents and Albertans is that in order to go to that appeal process, not all folks who should be receiving AISH have the capacity or the knowledge or support from advocates to be able to get to that process. If you have such a high percentage of cases, 65 per cent, where the panel is saying: yes, they should be on income support . . .

Mr. MacDonald: It's the other way around.

Mr. Bilous: Sorry. So it's 40 per cent.

Mr. MacDonald: Correct.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Pardon me. But that's still, I mean, 4 out of 10 that should be receiving the benefits that aren't, that have to go through this lengthy process in order to get the benefits that they rightly deserve. To me, that sounds like they're being discriminated against.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. The reality is that the majority of AISH clients are on income support. I want to make that clear. It's not people that are not receiving government assistance; it's whether

they meet the thresholds for AISH. That's an important fact that I think we need to keep in mind.

I go back to my answer, though. You know, in terms of the volume of activity going through and the decision-making, it is appropriate. You do need that second opportunity to review these things. I do think it's an appropriate process. With the backlog we're actually looking at how we can restructure our appeal processes to manage a bigger volume. The key thing is that these people continue to get government support through income support.

The other reality is that where a decision is reversed, their benefits are backdated to when all of their paperwork is in, so they're not penalized financially in any way. So I think there are the checks and balances in there. Can we do better on those systems? I'll never debate that we can do better, but I do think that it's an appropriate sort of process in terms of allowing that initial decision to be made with that check and balance built in.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll read questions in at the end if you have others.

We'll go back to the government for their final 15 minutes.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm referring to the 2012 annual report for Human Services on page 66, which is schedule 5, an accountant's playground. This is a generalized question, but I do want to reference a number of dollar implications. There's always a story behind the dollars, and that's the story I want to pull out a bit. I reviewed the amount that was authorized for 2012 versus the actual expense in line items 15.4 and 15.8. Have you had a chance to get there yet?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Okay.

Mr. Dorward: Further down are the areas of people expected to work or working, 15.17, and people with barriers to full employment, 15.18. I guess I would say that we're in the millions of dollars here. On career development services there's \$4 million unexpended, and while that's approximately 8 to 10 or 12 per cent of the amount that was expended, things like training for work and, down below, income supports for learners, people expected to work, people with barriers to full employment: all of those are surpluses. I really appreciate surpluses in a sense, but to the extent that those were budgeted funds and plans had been made to carry out those kinds of programs, are there any comments you have relative to that?

It seems to me that in the province we're looking for people to work. Career development is really important. Getting people trained to go to work is really important. Income supports for those that we want to get into the workforce are important. I'm getting very detailed here. If a written response is more appropriate, then please just let me know, and we can move on to the next question.

Mr. MacDonald: There really is a pretty simple answer. As the economy improves, there's less need for our services. The unexpended funds there are primarily driven by the improved economy, that people don't need as much time on income support and don't need as much training to actually secure meaningful employment.

On the training for work, for example, part of the decrease was the result of more people taking part-time learning, that they're able to attach to the workforce on a part-time basis and get some upgrading and that they don't need to go on full-time income support. For example, a lot have gone over to the apprenticeship side, that is typically funded for two months, whereas some of the

longer termed programming takes up to eight months, so even in terms of the choices made. That's it, in a nutshell.

Our budget in this area is really an indication of the economy. With a strong economy our demand and caseload go down. With a weaker economy more people require retraining and move onto income support. So for all those areas you mentioned, primarily the answer is around the reality of the economy's ability to absorb sort of these lower end positions.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you.

I did want to comment just briefly – and then I'll pass it on to Ms Pastoor – that the work that you're doing in terms of, I guess you would say, moving people, if you will, from the system at age 18 is really critical work. I have numerous constituents, and not from just this last year but working with people in my former life, before being elected, that would bring these kinds of issues. It is really a difficult time for people, so the more work you can do in that kind of area is very helpful.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

9:40

Mr. Dorward: Ms Pastoor.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much. Just a really quick follow-up question on the accreditation side, and then I'll just make a comment. How often are the companies evaluated in terms of: are they using up-to-date research-based criteria when they go in and accredit?

Mr. Hattori: They have their own international standards, so we don't actually evaluate the accrediting bodies. What we do is look at their credentials in terms of where their connections are in terms of their international and national affiliations. All of these bodies are recognized in the programmatic area for both disability services and child and family intervention services.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Thank you.

My comment is that I'm very pleased to hear that professionals are being allowed the responsibility and the authority to use their professional judgment and that they're actually accountable for that. In my career as a nurse in long-term care, because of the nursing home that I was working in, I was allowed that. I know, personally, that I think you work differently. I think the work is different. When you walk out at the end of the day, there's that little bit of altruistic reward that you get when you've helped someone.

Then just one other comment. Because of my nine years of worrying about PDD, I'm thrilled with where this is going, so thank you very much.

Mr. Dorward: If I could, just quickly, I did want to recognize that Ms Fenske and Mr. Amery were able to join us late to the meeting and Mr. Quadri and Mr. Quest as well. Thanks, everybody, for being here.

Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you. Thank you, Steve and everybody, for showing up today. My question, hopefully, has a quick answer. We recently just changed the Secretariat for Action on Homelessness to the interagency council. In terms of your opening comments is this a way to help streamline efficiencies? A follow-up to that is: does this have an impact on the 10-year plan to end homelessness? Are we still on track for that?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. The interagency council is really the evolution of the 10-year plan. The secretariat was designed to be more operationally focused: how do we implement these plans and co-ordinate the community-based delivery? The council is about taking it to that next level, and part of that's done by ensuring that there's a broader representation around that, more partnership and at a more senior level so we can ensure that there's more strategic advice, that there's an ability to actually make decisions to move forward.

We've got representatives from the three orders of government, and those are all key partners at the municipal, federal, and provincial levels given that we all play in that area. We've got a whole range of ministries sitting around that. The short answer is that, yes, the council will take it to that next level and add a more strategic focus about: how do you deal without the more complex clients' information and learn from what we've experienced over the last three years? So that's part of that one.

In terms of the plan itself I think we are on track. There have been incredible successes there. The experience is that we're actually being more efficient in terms of the wraparound services than we originally planned, so the savings to all those systems are greater. The early indications were that we're very much on track.

Mr. Dorward: You okay, Matt?

Mr. Jeneroux: Yeah.

Mr. Dorward: We'll go to Mike Allen.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'm going to start by just saying, you know, that all too often we hear a lot of complaints that are related to Human Services and whatnot based on individual situations, and I don't think we celebrate your successes enough, so I want to commend you for the great work that you guys do. I'm particularly encouraged by your opening comments when you say that you're constantly striving for improvement. I think we can always do better.

I just have a couple of quick questions on efficiencies. I'm going to expand a little bit more on what Mr. Jeneroux just asked on homelessness. We know we have some efficiencies going on there, that in year 3 5,900 people have been housed. We've had some particular success in my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I know that there's a cross-ministerial effect, though, as well so it's not just Human Services and your agencies themselves, but Solicitor General and probably about six other departments are impacted. Do we have any way of measuring what kind of savings we are getting socially, as a society, by implementing this plan?

Mr. MacDonald: Maybe I'll get Susan to add a little bit. We are tracking the impact in terms of the contact with the police, the emergency rooms. Susan can share some additional details.

Ms Taylor: Thank you. Susan Taylor with family violence prevention and homeless supports. Mr. Allen, one of the key aspects of how we look at tracking our progress on the 10-year plan is exactly that, the use of public systems in other areas. We are seeing by individuals who have been housed through housing first a decrease in the use of justice, police services, and the health care system as well. What we are embarking on is actually a project within those crossministry partners that you've just identified to take a look at what those actual cost savings are. We're just starting that project this year.

Mr. Allen: Great. Thanks very much. Just a comment on that, I know even just the action to end homelessness – I was part of a task force in 2000-something.

Ms Taylor: I remember you well.

Mr. Allen: Yeah. I had a comment given to me that it would be unrealistic for us to expect that we'll actually ever end homelessness. But for every person that we put into permanent housing, we've ended homelessness for that person, so it is a successful program. Thank you.

The last question. My understanding is that the impetus for merging the four different ministries into one, Human Services, part of that was to streamline the management of these programs under one ministerial umbrella. Have there been savings realized? Can you identify that there have been economies of scale put in place because of that?

Mr. MacDonald: In terms of the executive level there are fewer deputy ministers. We've consolidated a number of divisions together, and that's reduced the number of assistant deputy ministers also. We talk about this version, this organizational structure of Human Services being Human Services 2.1 because this is the second major reorganization. We do see that evolving further at a regional basis, more consolidations. We have 10 CFSA boards and six PDD and associated administrative operations underneath that. What the field is telling us, what the boards are telling us is that that's hard-wired in some inefficiencies and barriers, so what can we look at in terms of realigning things? There will be additional streamlining and efficiencies developed because of that. That's still a work-in-progress. We're learning. We want to do it right rather than rush into it. So there will be additional things.

Mr. Allen: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald, and the team from Human Services. I very much appreciate your time and consideration today. My question is actually a supplemental question to the question asked by Mr. Quadri. This is my observation from my constituency and with some credit to Human Services. There's a feeling that in terms of meeting your goal on page 33 about supporting the vulnerable and supporting families, you do quite an exceptional job, particularly with young folks transitioning through the elementary school system, and then again you do a very good job helping support young adults 18 and over as they transition. But within my constituency there appears to be a gap, the junior high to high school age, the 12- to 17-year-old age.

9:50

Mr. Quadri's question initially was about the transition for youth and the pilot that had positive effects for 23 families here in Alberta. I have a number of constituents who are struggling sort of between that gap with children who have severe ADD and other issues such as that. They find themselves as a last resort putting their children in programs of support, some camps that are available in places like British Columbia or some of the northwest states, and having success, but their frustration is that these programs aren't available to that extent in Alberta. Does your pilot program speak to covering that gap, and if not, are there some plans in place that speak to covering that gap?

Mr. Dorward: You have a choice, a written answer or 30 seconds.

Mr. MacDonald: I'll try 30 seconds. The pilot is helping us with that. Where there are gaps, I guess I'd encourage you to reach out

to us on those specific cases. We do look at even moving some kids out of province when there are very specialized needs, so there are opportunities there. I think that's the answer.

Mr. Khan: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

Before we go to our regular business, let's read a couple of questions that I know people had into the record very, very quickly so that we can move on. Mr. Bilous, you had one?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you could outline the difference between community access supports and community living supports for persons with developmental disabilities.

Dr. Swann: With respect to child and family services it was recommended by the Auditor that the department evaluate the cost-effectiveness of accreditation systems and evaluate the assurances they provide. Has the ministry accepted the recommendation, has it taken steps to address it, what are those steps, and what is the timeline for delivering those for a follow-up audit?

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. We'll move on to other business.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. MacDonald, and your department for coming here today. We very much appreciate it.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the committee.

The Chair: Well, there were some standing orders passed in the House the other day. One of those standing orders, 59.01(11), states that

during the period that main estimates stand referred to the Legislative Policy Committees, such period commencing the first day that estimates are scheduled for consideration and ending when the final vote in Committee of Supply occurs, these Committees shall not meet to consider any other matter nor shall any other committee of the Assembly meet during this period, unless otherwise ordered by the Assembly.

It may have happened before, but certainly this is the first time in my five years that this has occurred, that our Public Accounts Committee has been told that it cannot meet during session. I want it on the record that I fought vigorously to try to keep our committee meeting during that time. I think the work we do here is essential, and I think that it's very convenient for everybody involved on this committee to meet as much as possible on Wednesdays during session because we're all here. I think it's more effective.

Our opposition parties asked that mornings not be taken up by estimates. That was not agreed to. I asked: if you're going to do morning estimates, please don't do them on Wednesday. Your House leader decided that instead of doing them on Monday morning, Tuesday morning, or Thursday morning, he would specifically pick Wednesday morning out of those four days. I have no idea why. Very, very disappointing. Frankly, it's rude because we have to now contact several guests that we had invited and reschedule and so forth.

Anyway, I think that it really is rude and obnoxious, what occurred there, and all because for 10 days he wants to get the estimates done. The House leader wants to get the estimates done in 10 days, by April 25. That's the date by which he says that no matter what, the budget needs to be passed, so we had to squeeze all the estimates into 10 days. That's why our committee is not meeting for the next four weeks. Anyway, I just think that that's not a very good thing.

Now, he did suggest that we make up those committee meetings after session, so I guess we'll discuss that as a group at a later date. It's very easy for him to make that suggestion when he doesn't have to come to the meetings.

Because our previous motions calling ministries and groups before this committee provided specific dates during the 2012-13 main estimates consideration period, I would suggest that we move – we can discuss it if we like – a motion which outlines the expected order of our invitees without setting dates and which allows the chair, myself, in consultation with the deputy chair the ability to reschedule these already agreed-upon invites that we've already passed previously. I thought I'd open that up to a quick discussion, and then we can move a motion.

Mr. Dorward: Well, I'm not going to be calling the actions of people that aren't here to defend themselves rude and obnoxious. I don't think that's appropriate for this committee to do that. Nobody here, I think, was involved in the detailed discussions and negotiations that went on between all the House leaders relative to the timing of that. I don't know if any of the other caucuses want to comment on this, the NDP caucus or the Liberal caucus. It may have been the perfect time for them to do this on Wednesday rather than the others.

You commented, Mr. Chair, that you can't remember in five years this happening. Well, actually, it happened in the fall, when the House was sitting all night. We didn't meet, and we had to cancel our meeting, so it does happen.

A question for you, Mr. Chair. Is it four or three that we are going to have to shuffle? Can we check that?

The Chair: It's Alberta Health Services, Alberta Energy – which ones have been invited? I have here five.

Mr. Dorward: I thought there were three weeks.

The Chair: Well, it's four weeks.

Mr. Tyrell: There are five that were rescheduled.

The Chair: There are five. Actually, let me clarify. There are Alberta Health Services, Alberta Energy, Alberta Ag, Alberta Enterprise as well as four postsecondary institutions: Northern Lakes College, NorQuest College, Olds College, and Alberta College of Art and Design. All need to be rescheduled.

Mr. Dorward: All right. Well, I just think that we have to get on with it. I mean, it's something that we've been tasked with by the Assembly and the changing of the way the standing order reads and the agreement that's been made between the House leaders.

The Chair: Awesome. So we'll move on to the motion.

Mr. Bilous: I just want to comment to the deputy chair to say that the New Democrat caucus was completely opposed to having morning meetings for a variety of reasons, the fact that it would interrupt Public Accounts, the work that we do here, which is extremely important, but also because for caucuses, especially smaller caucuses, we need the mornings to prepare for question period, Orders of the Day. To demand three different budget estimates happening daily and up to six per day because they can happen concurrently, is completely absurd for having a full democratic discussion with all of the parties.

The Chair: Just to be clear, too, the Liberals made that very clear as well. Also, to be clear, the House leaders did not agree to this schedule in any way, shape, or form. This was completely the

Government House Leader, just to make that clear to everyone here because – you're right – you weren't there for the discussions. I wouldn't expect you to know that.

Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Chair. I just have a question for clarification. Forgive me; I don't have a copy of the standing order. But from what you read into the record, the Legislative Assembly, if my understanding is correct, would have to make a recommendation that Public Accounts be allowed to have a meeting. So I'm wondering if – and this is just a question; I don't know the level of interest or if there was any discussion anywhere about it – when you look at the schedule for the estimates, there was any vacancy of time that could be agreeable to all those that participate on this Public Accounts Committee, and there would be a recommendation or something come forward if there was something of importance.

10:00

I understand that stakeholder groups will have to be contacted and asked to shift to a different type of schedule, and there are a couple of them that have to do that. Certainly, the standing order, if I'm understanding it correctly, allows for some flexibility, but it has to be done through the Legislative Assembly and an agreement. I don't know where that sits. Maybe it's a question to explore. I don't even know if it's worth exploring given the intensity of the estimates schedule. I don't even know if that's a possibility.

The Chair: Mrs. Sarich, it's a very good question. I did specifically contact the House leader and ask for that exception because I read it the same way that you did, that there was some flexibility there. Even though it says that no committees will meet during estimates, I said, "Could we as Public Accounts please get an exception to that and continue to meet Wednesday mornings or even Tuesday mornings?" He said, "Absolutely not." I also asked the Government House Leader if we could please move the Wednesday estimates meetings to Tuesday or Monday or Thursday, and he said: "No. They have to be on Wednesdays throughout the entire four weeks." So as you can see, clearly, they don't want our Public Accounts meeting to occur.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you for that information. I appreciate that the schedule for estimates is very intensive for everyone. Perhaps when you scan that and take another secondary look at that, you can appreciate what that intensity is. Adding another layer of meetings on top of that and the intensity of all the committee work in particular or specific to this particular committee – and Public Accounts is very intense, to say the least, so maybe it is not prudent, you know, generally to even bother with the Legislative Assembly giving consideration for this particular committee. That time to have the appropriate focus on estimates by all of the parties would beg moving forward as has been suggested, to reschedule the commitments that we have with this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Stier: I just have one brief comment. It was mentioned in your response earlier, something to do with perhaps these meetings being rescheduled when not in session. I would just like to point out that that means an added expense for every committee member and to the general public. It's expensive, especially for those that come from out of town. There's accommodation. There's travel. There are all kinds of things. It's unnecessary.

The Chair: Yup. Well, I would agree, but we'll move on.

Ms Pastoor: Just very quickly, I understand what Mr. Stier is saying, but if you wanted to do it outside of the regular time, you actually could do three Public Accounts in the same day to make it worthwhile coming up, not just one at a time.

The Chair: We can certainly examine that. I know we did two in one day a couple of times, so that's certainly something we can do. Absolutely.

Any other comments? We're good?

Could we move:

The following ministries be called before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in the order listed subject to scheduling availability: the postsecondary institutions of Northern Lakes College, NorQuest College, Olds College, and Alberta College of Art and Design; Alberta Health Services; Alberta Energy; Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development; and Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education;

And that any scheduling changes to this list be made at the discretion of the chair in consultation with the deputy chair.

Mr. Dorward: I would prefer to go with your second recommendation there. The working group does the plan, and I think the working group should continue to do the plan.

The Chair: Okay. I'll consider that a friendly amendment, that any scheduling changes to this list be made at the discretion of the working group.

Do we have a mover for that motion? All right. Mr. Hale. Those in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

The date of the next meeting: our committee clerk will contact committee members with all the relevant information for our next committee meeting closer to the date.

Would a member like to move adjournment of the meeting? Mr. Stier. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

Thank you very much. Sorry about the late ending.

[The committee adjourned at 10:05 a.m.]

