



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Public Accounts

Community and Social Services

Tuesday, May 18, 2021  
8 a.m.

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

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP), Chair  
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC), Deputy Chair

Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)  
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)

**Office of the Auditor General Participants**

W. Doug Wylie	Auditor General
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**Support Staff**

Shannon Dean, QC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Michael Kulicki	Clerk of Committees and Research Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Melanie Niemi-Bohun	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Janet Laurie	Supervisor of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Michael Nguyen	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Clay Buchanan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Disability Services

Jason Chance, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Financial Services

Cynthia Farmer, Deputy Minister

Maryna Korchagina, Assistant Deputy Minister, Preventive Community Services

Tracy Wyrstiuk, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Services



8 a.m.

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

**The Chair:** All right. Good morning, everyone. I have 8 a.m. Welcome to this meeting of the committee of the public accounts.

My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West. I'm the chair of this committee. Ordinarily, we would go around the committee table for everyone to introduce themselves, but we have people joining through various methods of communications, so in the interests of time I'll just point out that from the LAO staff we have Aaron Roth and Michael Kulicki. From the Auditor General's office, joining us by videoconference, we have Doug Wylie and Rob Driesen. And while we have Member Guthrie and Member Rowswell in attendance on the government side, on video we have Member Neudorf, Member Lovely, members Turton, Walker, Singh, and Armstrong-Homeniuk. In the room we have on the Official Opposition side members Renaud, Pancholi, and I'm not sure if Member Schmidt has joined us yet.

For the benefit of the Ministry of Community and Social Services what I will ask in the interests of time, because there are so many of you, is: simply say your name and your title when you begin speaking, and after that just say your name so that *Hansard* can know who is speaking, answering questions, because we have many different methods of communication.

We are of course acting in accordance with the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health at today's meeting. In addition, as indicated in a February memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper, I will remind everyone of committee room protocols in line with health guidelines requiring members to wear masks in committee rooms and while seated except while speaking, at which time they may choose to do so.

I would ask members participating via videoconference or teleconference to ensure that your microphones are muted unless you are recognized to speak. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Our audio- and videostreams, transcripts, everything can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website.

I'd also like to note for the record this morning that we have with us American sign language interpreters at today's meeting, meaning that if we can speak perhaps a little slower than we might and potentially avoid things like acronyms or jargon, that does make it easier for our interpreters to keep up when they don't have to spell out long words or acronyms. We just need to be aware of that as well. I welcome them, and I think it's fantastic that we have made this meeting of the Community and Social Services ministry as accessible as possible this morning.

We'll now move on to the approval of the agenda. Hon. members, I will look to the room. Are there any changes or additions to this morning's agenda? All right. I will ask that a member move that the agenda from the May 18 Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed.

**Ms Lovely:** So moved.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member Lovely.

Any discussion on this motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Are there any opposed? Seeing none, that motion is carried. Please mute your microphones now, friends. Thank you.

We'll now move on to the approval of our minutes from the May 4, 2021, meeting. Do members have any errors or omissions to note? Hearing none, I'll ask for a motion that the minutes of the May 11, 2021, meeting of the standing committee be approved as distributed.

**Mr. Turton:** So moved, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member Turton.

Is there any discussion on Member Turton's motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Are there any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

We'll now move on to a couple of items of business, hon. members, before we get to our meeting proceedings. First, we have a recommendation on extending videoconferencing. We had passed a motion at our April 27, 2020, meeting that allows for members to participate in committee via videoconference as we are doing today. That motion passed on that day, specifically indicating that it was only for the Second Session of the 30th Legislature, so if we are wishing to continue using videoconference technology, which I believe has served us very well, for meeting participation beyond the prorogation of the Second Session, a motion would need to be passed by unanimous consent. I would like to open the floor at this time to any comments or motions related to this matter.

Seeing none, then I will suggest that there's a possible motion that could be put to the floor by committee members that with the commencement of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature until the Legislature's dissolution the Standing Committee on Public Accounts permit Members of the Legislative Assembly and invited guests to participate in committee meetings via videoconference, subject to the proviso that the committee may require members' personal attendance at a particular meeting upon passage of a motion to that effect.

**Ms Pancholi:** I'll move that motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much. I believe that was Member Pancholi.

**Ms Pancholi:** Yes, it is.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Is there any discussion on this motion?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Sorry. This is a unanimous consent motion, so are there any members opposed to this motion? I'll just ask one question.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Can I ask a question for clarification, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Mr. Schmidt:** It's my understanding that if we approve this motion, then videoconferencing will be allowed until the next election is called. Is that correct? Okay. Thank you for that clarification.

**The Chair:** Yeah. Sorry for the misunderstanding.

I'm just looking to the room for unanimous consent on this motion. Are there any members opposed? Seeing none, unanimous consent has been granted.

Thank you, friends.

We'll now move on to another item of business, the proposed update to the committee meeting schedule for this spring. Our subcommittee on committee business met on Friday to discuss a possible update to our schedule. An updated proposed schedule was provided to members on Friday. The schedule would reissue an invitation to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to come to our committee on June 8 and invite the Ministry of Energy for June 15 and the Ministry of Environment and Parks for June 22. Are there any comments, questions, or motions from members on this matter?

**Ms Pancholi:** Madam Chair, I'd just like to thank the subcommittee members, which, of course, represents both opposition members and

government members, for working together to bring forward collaboratively this schedule that was put forward. I think it looks like a very reasonable schedule, and I'd like to thank the government members as well for this co-operation. I think it's in the spirit of what we've been talking about in this committee, moving forward with co-operation, so I'm very happy to see this collaboration.

We believe, I believe, given the proposed schedule, that it looks like the ministry should have enough time to prepare. We want to make sure, of course, that they have that. I believe that this schedule is in line with that, and I think it demonstrates to Albertans that we continue as members of this committee to work through into June, as many Albertans are doing, of course, around the clock these days. I think this is in service of them, and it represents good co-operation by the members of this committee.

Given that this is a recommendation of both the government and opposition members, I simply want to express that as a member of the Official Opposition I will be supporting what's been brought forward today. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member Pancholi. I'm going to assume, then, that you are amenable to moving the motion.

**Ms Pancholi:** Sorry, Madam Chair. Yes, I will move that motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. The possible motion reads that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the draft revised schedule of the committee meetings proposed by the subcommittee on committee business for the 2021 spring session as circulated.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

I'm seeing none, so I will call the question, then. All in favour? Are there any opposed? Thank you.

That motion is carried.

Now we'll move on to welcoming our guests from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, who are here to address the office of the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations and the ministry's annual report from 2019-20. We are with our normal meeting schedule, hon. members, and I'll invite officials from the ministry to provide their opening remarks, not exceeding 10 minutes, at this time.

**Ms Farmer:** Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to today's meeting. I am Cynthia Farmer. I'm the Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services. With me today are the assistant deputy ministers of Community and Social Services – Clay Buchanan, assistant deputy minister of disability services; Jason Chance, assistant deputy minister of employment and financial support; Maryna Korchagina, ADM of preventative community services; Tracy Wyrstkiuk, ADM of strategic services – along with Olin Lovely, Community and Social Services' senior financial officer; and Sharon Blackwell, executive director of homeless supports and housing stability.

**8:10**

I would like to start this meeting by taking a moment to acknowledge the immense challenges faced by communities and the ministry over the past year and to thank the social services community for the professionalism and determination that they have shown in continuing to care for vulnerable Albertans during this really difficult time. These groups and organizations all showed tremendous agility, innovation, and leadership in adapting to the challenges and barriers of the COVID-19 pandemic. Albertans have surely benefited from the selfless work of these partners.

The role of this ministry, as you know, is to support Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, including people experiencing

homelessness, those looking for employment, people with disabilities, and women and families fleeing abuse and violence. We take our responsibilities to these Albertans very seriously, and I am proud to say that over 90 per cent of our ministry budget goes directly to support programs that support vulnerable people. Some of our biggest successes in '19-20 involved improving access to these supports; also, streamlining processes, cutting red tape, and making sure that those who truly need supports can get them.

The work paved the way for our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We all faced significant challenges as we took extraordinary steps to prevent the spread of the infection. Individuals facing homelessness, job loss, or who were already in unsafe situations faced even more serious challenges. This department moved quickly to adjust supports at the onset of the pandemic thanks to productive relationships with stakeholders, community groups, and civil society. These relationships allowed us to expand shelter capacity and supports, adjust our services so people with disabilities and their families could stay home as recommended, accept more forms and documentation online to reduce the need for in-person interactions, and offer Alberta Supports services by phone and virtually to enable staff to deliver services quickly, efficiently, and consistently to all Albertans. When the pandemic started, Alberta Supports centres were closed as part of our efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, Albertans can still access more than 30 programs and 120 community services remotely through online and telephone channels.

This work was a priority for this year, but we took significant steps to address recommendations from the Auditor General to improve our supports. In fact, the Auditor General made several recommendations regarding the AISH program in 2016, and we have worked to address each of them. I am pleased to report on our progress in terms of streamlining and simplifying our processes for the AISH program in 2019-20. Our plain-language guide for AISH clients and simplified application form are helping Albertans understand the application process to access benefits for which they are eligible. We also report on program efficiency, including program delivery timelines, eligibility determinations, and commencement of benefits. This work is ongoing as we improve our standards and internal processes to serve Albertans more consistently and effectively and efficiently.

One of the steps we took to improve consistency for clients was shifting the payment date for AISH and income support to the first of each month. Clients now know exactly when they will receive their benefits and can plan their monthly expenses using this date. Prior to this the gap between payments would fluctuate more significantly, particularly between the payments issued in December and January. This increased consistency is one way that we are working towards our first key outcome, providing stability for Albertans. We will continue providing benefits on this schedule to provide more consistency for Albertans who rely on these supports.

We continue to look at other ways to better serve Albertans through our programs. In 2019 the office of the Auditor General made recommendations regarding the income support program to improve processes regarding eligibility, access to needs and employability, and monitoring compliance with service plans for clients. I am pleased to say that we have completed our review of the program policies, training, and supervision practices. Caseworkers now complete, through needs identification and employability assessments for clients – this means staff can tailor supports to a client to help them find and maintain employment in their communities. Throughout this process we are more closely

following client service plans to improve case management monitoring.

The office of the Auditor General also recommended that the department improve its processes to measure and report on the income support program's performance. In response, we have developed key performance measures for the program as well as documented processes for ongoing monitoring and continuous program improvements. These steps will help us to ensure that the income support program is helping clients meet their basic needs and find employment.

Another important area the OAG made recommendations for improvement in the department is user access control. This means controlling the number and type of staff who can access client information. In a follow-up review in 2020 the Auditor General found that the ministry still needed to develop appropriate controls to periodically review users' access to systems, applications and remove all terminated employee users' access promptly after termination. The ministry continues to implement corrective actions for these recommendations, including tightly controlling approvals for employee access to ministry systems through designated information controllers and custodians and enhancing training for those information controllers and custodians through Service Alberta late last year. This is in addition to more in-house training. It is vital that we protect Albertans' information by controlling who can have access to our systems.

We will continue to take all steps necessary to respond to all of the Auditor General's recommendations, and we will keep working to make sure our programs are serving Albertans effectively. Most recently, in November 2020, the Auditor General found that the province's reporting of the 11 months of assured income for the severely handicapped, AISH, and income support benefit costs for '19-20 was not in accordance with public-sector accounting standards and understated any AISH and income support program expenses. We have since moved the expenses to the previous year, as recommended by the Auditor General, and we will continue issuing benefits using a consistent first-of-the-month schedule. We will keep working with Treasury Board and Finance to make sure our accounting practices are in line with current policy.

As you know, this ministry plays a critical role in ensuring that vulnerable Albertans have the supports that they need. One of the cornerstones of these supports is helping people move quickly into appropriate housing and making sure that they have the supports that they need to stay housed. We will continue to work with our partners in community organizations and other levels of government through the pandemic and beyond to make sure that homeless shelters have the resources that they need and individuals have the support to move into appropriate housing.

In addition, we are working with our community partners to support critical needs. For instance, in 2019-20 grant funding for CSS to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary subsidized over 700,000 low-income transit passes to eligible Albertans in those cities. Access to these passes is available to anyone who can demonstrate financial eligibility, including individuals accessing AISH or income support.

We are also pleased as far as our work that we have done in terms of the RAMP program and assisting Albertans with disabilities to receive grants in the residential access modification program, or RAMP. This helps individuals to install ramps, stairlifts, widen doors, modify bathroom facilities, or undertake other projects to improve accessibility in their homes. Over 800 Albertans received a grant in '19-20.

In conclusion, I want to say that we've made great strides in '19-20 to improve our programs and to support Albertans and Alberta's most vulnerable people. We made our programs more accessible

and efficient. We supported people with disabilities and those with lower incomes.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Deputy.

Now we will turn to the Auditor General for his opening remarks for us, not exceeding five minutes, please.

**Mr. Wylie:** Thank you, Chair. I'd like to thank the deputy for referring to and addressing the recommendations made by my office. I'm going to focus on outstanding recommendations related to two performance audits that we conducted at the ministry. The deputy has referred to these, but I'm just going to provide a little context for the committee if I could.

**8:20**

The first audit was conducted back in 2016, and that related to an audit of the systems that are used to manage the assured income for the severely handicapped program. You know, the program at that time was serving 50,000 Albertans by providing almost \$1 billion annually in benefits. It was at the time the second-largest program that the department was delivering, and it was administered by approximately 300 or so staff. What we examined was the department systems and processes for ensuring that the program was easily accessible to eligible Albertans and how it applied the criteria to ensure that the program was in compliance with legislation and policy when making its eligibility decisions. We also examined the department systems to measure, monitor, and report on key activities of the program.

Really, what we found could be grouped into three areas. The first area was accessibility, the second was eligibility, and the third was reporting. These are all areas of the program delivery. In the area of accessibility we found that access to the AISH program through the intake process was complex, and it was also not supported by user-friendly guidance or resources. In the area of eligibility we found that the department did not have standards to regularly monitor its application process times. As well, under the area of eligibility, we found that AISH workers did use considerable judgment in assessing the applications but at that time were receiving inadequate training and guidance. And in the area of reporting we noted that the department had inadequate performance measures and processes to monitor and report on the operating efficiency of the program.

As the deputy indicated, we had made three recommendations for improvement, and action has been taken. We are in the process right now, committee, of doing our follow-up work, and we'll be reporting to the Assembly on the results of that work shortly.

The second performance audit we did was in 2019, and this related to the income support program. The income support program has a significant social and financial impact as it provided at the time of our audit about \$600 million in support payments to vulnerable Albertans. It was the third-largest program at the time of our audit. At the conclusion of our audit we concluded that the department did not have adequate processes to ensure that eligible clients were receiving supports in accordance with its policy. We also concluded that the department did not have adequate processes to measure and report on the performance of the program. And as the deputy indicated, the department is working on this, and we look forward to working with them. We'll do follow-up when they've indicated that they have completely implemented the recommendations.

Chair, I will stop there. That concludes my opening comments. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wylie, and thank you for those opening remarks.

Hon. members, before we go into our questioning rotation, it appears that we may go over the time of 10 a.m. So I will look now to the members and ask one question. Are there any members opposed to going a few minutes over 10 a.m. in order to get through our agenda this morning?

**Mr. Rowswell:** I would be opposed.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Opposed.

**Mr. Rowswell:** I have a meeting.

**The Chair:** Okay. So we will finish right at 10 a.m. even if our business is not done for Public Accounts, even though we potentially need a little bit more time to accommodate a number of the extra business items that we have to do today.

With that, I will turn things over to the Official Opposition for the first round of questions, please.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the ministry for appearing today for the first time, I think, in about four years. It's unfortunate that government members won't allow us to go past 10.

In any event, my first question, actually, is for the Auditor General if that's okay. And I wanted to give a little bit of context for the committee, Madam Chair. It's important to note that during the period covered by this annual report, AISH and income support benefits had already been deindexed, so that means that they would not receive the cost-of-living increase going forward. Now, we know that the benefit amounts are already below the poverty line, the established poverty line, and it impacted, I think, about 70,000 people on AISH, about 60,000 people on income support, and tens of thousands of children that are also supported by those individuals, so a big decision impacting a lot of people.

During the time that this change was made, we heard a bunch of different reasons why it was made. We heard from the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Finance minister. To the Auditor General: this is what we heard from the Finance minister on March 3.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has actually made a recommendation that program payments be made as close as possible to the time when those amounts will be expended. That's why the Minister of Community and Social Services made that adjustment, so it would best serve the recipients of those payments. Again, in the Q3 projections of Budget 2020 we're projecting a \$1.2 billion better . . .

My question to the Auditor General is that I looked through the outstanding recommendations for both of these ministries and could not find it. I'm wondering if you could clarify for us which recommendation the Finance minister is referring to.

**Mr. Wylie:** Okay. Well, you know, you may wish to ask the Finance minister himself. I believe, though – and I don't have that information with me this morning, unfortunately. I believe it may be relating to some work we did on the cash management system. We had made some recommendations for improvement in the cash management system within the province, but, again, I'm going on memory, Member, so I can't really – you'd have to ask the minister what specific recommendation that was referring to. I apologize.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. During the fiscal period AISH and income supports were deindexed at a time, I'm sure, that ministry officials recognized that this change would add to the poverty-related stresses on different CSS programs. They're all interrelated. We see

it now. What steps were taken by the ministry to evaluate the cost and the benefit of this massive program change with, really, about one-month notice to about – what was it? – 130,000 recipients?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm sorry. I know that you were asking questions to the Auditor. Was that a question to me as the deputy?

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, it is.

**Ms Farmer:** Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you for the question. In terms of the steps that we took as a department, the department did develop a change-management plan as far as to communicate the message of the date change. The department did work with Treasury Board and Finance in terms of the accounting practice. The department did work as far as looking at the costing of what this would mean for the budget and therefore, as has already been discussed, how that costing would be treated within our financial records.

**Ms Renaud:** My question is: which stakeholders were consulted? Which bodies within the Ministry of CSS were consulted? There are a number of supportive panels within the agencies, boards, and commissions framework that support the work of CSS. Can you tell me who was consulted before making that change?

**Ms Farmer:** Also, as you may or may not be aware, I was appointed deputy in January of this year, so for the specific stakeholders that were consulted with, I'm going to pass the question to Jason Chance, who is our ADM of this area. Jason?

**Mr. Chance:** Good morning, and thank you for the question. There was limited consultation in advance of the change as it was a financial decision related – I believe your question was in regard to indexation? That's what I've heard.

**Ms Renaud:** Actually, no. If I could clarify, my question is that I understand that it was a decision about finances. I understand that, but what I'm saying is it impacted about 130,000 Albertans. So my question was: who was consulted within the Ministry of Community and Social Services? There are a number of bodies that exist to do that work, to provide advice to the bureaucracy of the ministry.

**8:30**

**Mr. Guthrie:** Point of order. Under 23(b), the member speaks to matters other than those in question. Chair, the question of who created a policy or why a policy was created or the details of the decision-making of the creation of the policy are not within the committee's mandate. Now, if you look to the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation, who provides advice and training to us as well as to other public accounts groups all across Canada, they state and they've stated to us: "The committee's intended focus is the administration of policy. Rather than questioning the merits of a policy, members focus on whether the policy was implemented in the way intended by the legislature." We're not here to analyze the whos or the whys of the creation of a policy, so I'd like us to refocus and shift to those matters of implementation of said policy.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. I will simply ask the hon. member for the Official Opposition to rephrase the question or rephrase the types of question.

Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** Sure. There are a number of pieces of legislation that the Ministry of Community and Social Services works with,



whether it's AISH, whether it's income support legislation. Two that come to mind are the Premier's council for persons with disabilities; there's also the disability advocate act. Two pieces of legislation that talk about consultation around major policy pieces. My question to the ministry is: which of the bodies within the ministry were consulted prior to making these massive program changes?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you, Member, for the question. As I mentioned, I will have to now go back, as far as a conversation with our team, in the consultation process. I can't answer that question fully for you at this point in the meeting, but I will endeavour to get the answer and report it back to the committee.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Well, for clarity, we actually did meet with the disability advocate within the time frame covered by the annual report and asked that specific question, if they were consulted before or after, and the answer was no.

Moving on, CSS is a ministry that sees first-hand the devastating impacts of poverty as well as the enormous costs of poverty, and the steps that I see this ministry taking, as evidenced not just in this report but other documents that are, I think, relevant, are really actually creating more poverty by changing payment dates, forcing people to rearrange budgets, extend amounts when the majority don't have access to things like overdraft protection or bridge funds to ensure that bills are paid. The decisions that this ministry is making don't seem to support this understanding. Can the officials tell the committee how these decisions that were made to move \$152 million I think it was into the next fiscal year – I understand that was corrected, but essentially what it did is it gave 130,000 Albertans about a one-month notice that they were going to have to extend their monthly budget an additional three to five days. My question to the officials is: can you tell this committee how the decisions that your ministry made make life better for Albertans?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you very much for the question. You know, aligning the payment date to the first of the month really does provide a consistent and a more consistent schedule for Albertans. The date change allows clients to receive their payments at the same time each month. When we were looking as far as dates, we saw some real challenges in terms of how we were delivering our cheques and that there were huge, as far as . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Madam Chair, I'm just going to cut in. I understand that. You mentioned that in your opening statement, and I appreciate that, that there was some additional stress around Christmastime. I completely understand that. I also understand that the rationale that you're sharing makes sense from your point of view, but what I am saying is that the decision that was made impacted 130,000 Albertans – one-month notice – and they struggled. Now, it's been months since, so I can't speak to that.

Anyway, let's move on. This ministry evaluates a \$1 billion program – I'm referring to the AISH program – by using a survey that happens every two years and data collection on caseloads. That's it. Based on the 2019-2020 caseloads the sample size for the survey used in this fiscal reporting year represented .62 per cent of AISH recipients. Can the officials confirm that the ministry is satisfied that the current AISH program performance measurement tools and activities are sufficient?

**Ms Farmer:** Well, thank you very much for the question. I'm going to defer the question to Tracy Wyrstiuik to talk about our performance measures and our frameworks.

**Ms Wyrstiuik:** Thank you very much for the question. Our ministry does have a number of accountability tools to make sure that we are being accountable for the services we deliver, and to your point, performance measures are one of those accountability tools that are very important. Our AISH program is, as you've mentioned, measured by an annual survey that looks at the quality of life index for '19-20. You know, that annual survey is administered randomly to a select number of AISH recipients to just measure their satisfaction with the benefits they're receiving. It did have a . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Sorry. Yes, I understand what the survey that is sent out to that tiny number of AISH recipients looks like. My question, really, was: in addition to the data collection on caseload and in addition to that very limited survey, what other things is the ministry doing to collect information about AISH?

**Ms Wyrstiuik:** Sure. Thank you for the question. In addition to that, as the Auditor General had spoken, we have been looking at additional measures to track how we're doing with our AISH caseloads, whether that be from time of receipt of information to benefits. We're also looking at doing things like standards and what our standards are for our various programs, so we are looking at additional performance measures for our AISH program. We've been looking at developing those to roll out in the coming years. We also publish open data around our AISH program so that there is data that's transparent and available to the public around our AISH program and, I guess, the different measures that we're using to track our program and our delivery. So we do have a number of accountability measures in our ministry, not just the performance measures.

Also, you know, as I said, we look at standards, we look at evaluating our programs, we look at doing continuous improvement on a regular basis, where we're actually looking at our programs from start to finish and identifying where there are opportunities for improvement and then actually making those continuous improvements. So we do have a lot of different accountability frameworks and tools . . .

**Ms Renaud:** I'm sorry to cut you off. We just don't have much time.

One of the statements I noticed in the annual report in the AISH section talked about how generous the AISH benefits were. In fact, they were "the highest among provinces with similar programs." Now, it's an interesting statement to make when we know that poverty is a massive problem here in Alberta, and we also know that AISH benefits, at \$1,688 per month, fall below the established CRA low-income cut-off line, which is \$2,160 per month. I'm wondering if the ministry could explain the rationale for putting a statement that, really, seems – I just don't understand it. When we are all looking at reducing poverty, looking at the effects of poverty, the costs of poverty, which are astronomical in terms of Health and Justice and so many other ministries, I'm wondering if you can explain the rationale between sort of bragging about income levels for AISH recipients when we know that it's underneath the poverty line.

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you very much for your question. In terms of our AISH program the team continues to deliver the program according to the legislative framework that the team is provided by the Legislature. We continue to provide funding to our clients as far as allowed within the legislation. I will say that we have done significant work in terms of the stability of this program in line with the recommendations that the Auditor General has made in terms of timelines, program integrity, and looking at training, ensuring that individuals get benefits within this program that they are

entitled to, and the team continues to work to ensure the integrity of this program. And you are correct. When we compare to other provinces, Alberta's AISH program does deliver, as far as services, at a level that is higher than a number of other provinces, and I think that that's an important statement to be made.

8:40

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm going to go back to one of my earlier questions just talking about the pieces of legislation that the Ministry of CSS, or Community and Social Services, works with. One of those is the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act. Section 3 talks about the activities and powers. One of the primary functions is, of course, to advise government on reviews and development of policies, programs, and initiatives and their implementation with respect to the effect on services to people with disabilities. I'm wondering if you could tell me how many times your ministry has met with this council on policy issues prior to implementation.

**Ms Farmer:** I would not have that information in front of me, but I would endeavour to get you that information.

**Ms Renaud:** Perfect. That would be great. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. members. I'll turn things over to the government side for their first questioning rotation.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Deputy. Again I'd just like to continue on with some of that conversation about AISH. In the report the Auditor General also acknowledged that there were three outstanding recommendations that had been worked on pertaining to the assured income for the severely handicapped program. One of the recommendations was that the ministry improve its processes to measure, monitor, and report on the efficiency of the AISH program. Can the department outline what steps have been taken to improve that program reporting?

**Ms Farmer:** Thanks very much. I'm pleased to say that we developed and are actively monitoring a suite of indicators for the AISH program. These metrics, you know, assess the efficiency and timelines of AISH applications' process, including time from when an application is received to when an eligibility decision is made and benefits are commenced. Detailed results are reported to the ministry leadership on a quarterly basis. So I see those results and I look forward to seeing those results because they really do inform our process, and they also do allow us to really track practice improvements. In the recent assessment of implementation the Auditor General concluded that the ministry had fully implemented its previous recommendation to improve processes to measure, monitor, and report on efficiency of the AISH program. I think that's a very important thing for Albertans to be aware of.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that. The other two recommendations centred around program accessibility and eligibility procedures. Could you just touch on that again and share what steps have been taken to implement those recommendations as well?

**Ms Farmer:** We have also completed the implementation of these recommendations. The Auditor General is assessing our implementation, as mentioned. We've developed such actions as a plain-language guide – just how do you move through AISH? – which is really important, and a simplified application form to help Albertans understand the application process so that they can access the benefits for which they are eligible. The products were field

tested with clients to ensure that they met our goals of making the application process easier to understand and to complete.

We also know that in order to serve Albertans efficiently, the AISH program policies need to be standardized and applied consistently across the province. We've taken many steps to do that standardization. We've also, you know, taken important steps to monitor performance measures in terms of the application process. This includes regular monitoring and reporting on baseline processes in terms of updating our provincial training. Training is so important and vital. This ministry has approximately 2,400 front-line workers that are meeting with Albertans every day. It's important that we give them the tools so that they're trained appropriately so that when they meet with Albertans, they can walk you through the process. This is really important. We've also developed an AISH adjudication guide, an additional tool to help staff make consistent decisions. This work has been really embraced by the ministry staff. The ministry staff have worked really, really hard in terms of improving service for Albertans.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you for that. Now, obviously change is very difficult for any group within our society but particularly those with specialized needs. Obviously, changing the date that they receive their benefits was challenging, but now that that has been done, have you seen a stabilization in that funding model on the first of the month? Have you seen it achieve the results that were desired in making that change?

**Ms Farmer:** We have. Quite honestly, I think that – I spoke earlier about our change-management process. There were considerable efforts that took place in terms of our staff reaching out, information that was shared with our stakeholder community about the date changes, information that was shared for individuals that may be as far as getting rent, so to those stakeholders that provide accommodations for our clients to let them know that there would be a date change. We are monitoring and we will continue to monitor this year.

What we found was that there was less use of emergency benefits throughout the year, and we'll be pleased to report on that in this year's annual report. I don't have those numbers, you know, for this discussion, but what I can say is that there was a lot of work that was done on change management. There was a lot of work in terms of sharing the information about this date change. And our staff were one phone call away. As you know, we operate our contact centre 24/7, and if Albertans were in need, they could reach out to their worker, but they also could reach out to our contact centre. We found in those few weeks that we had less uptake of emergency benefits.

Now, if you don't mind, I do note that there was a question about NSF cheques, and there are conversations about NSF cheques. I would say that if a client, if someone under income support or under AISH, was charged for an NSF cheque, they have the opportunity to talk to their worker. They still have the opportunity to work with their worker in terms of: was that because of the late payment of our cheque, and can we work through our client and to help work with a client? It's important to note that there are many people that are getting income support and AISH and rely on the funding, but we do have workers that work with and are committed to individuals every day, to walk them through and to help and assist, you know, in terms of those changes.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Wonderful. Thank you for that. Yeah. I know in Lethbridge we have a significant proportion of our population that depends on their AISH payments, and this was a big change for them, but I've heard lots of strong and positive reports of landlords,

in particular, being accommodating to adjust for that change of date. That's gone well, and I'm very pleased to hear that the use of emergency benefits has gone down. That speaks to me of an incredible stabilization and cost savings and efficiency of the program, so I think that shows the benefit of this change, and hopefully we continue to see those kinds of beneficial uses carry on in the future.

I'm just going to change focus a little bit to inclusive postsecondary education, another highlight for my region with a college and a university. In your report the ministry acknowledges that "education accommodations play an important role in creating an inclusive and accessible educational environment for many students with disabilities." On page 33 of the annual report it outlines that

students with developmental disabilities are able to participate in Inclusive Post-Secondary Education, where [these students] participate fully in . . . post-secondary classes as non-credit . . . students. Aided and supervised by a facilitator, the student sets goals, selects courses and accesses tutoring and peer supports. [Inclusive Postsecondary Education students] receive a certificate of achievement upon completion of the program.

In 2019-2020 Community and Social Services provided \$2.1 million for this program, which was administered by Inclusion Alberta. What sort of oversight does the department have once this funding is set through Inclusion Alberta?

**Ms Farmer:** We're very fortunate to have Inclusion Alberta as a partner in this program. They must maintain financial records and provide biannual reports as required in the grant agreement. The grant agreement does require for them to provide reporting. They need to share with us and provide information on how many students were supported and their progress towards maintaining employment. Additionally, individual progress reports are provided in terms of the staff and to help them to complete case management activities. So there is a lot of information shared between the department and Inclusion Alberta and with the client.

8:50

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you for that answer.

Can the department talk about the funding process for this inclusive postsecondary education piece and how allocation decisions are made? Are they made by region or by school or by applicant of the student? Can you just talk a little bit about that process?

**Ms Farmer:** The persons with developmental disabilities program has provided funding to Inclusion Alberta since 1987. So it is a strong legacy program. Funding allocations for agreements with Inclusion Alberta have been based on the number of individuals that access these supports, with yearly reviews occurring to identify changes and requests of this service.

In '19-20 71 students were supported to attend classes through 14 postsecondary institutions. Inclusion Alberta's grant funding has continued this year also, in 2021. In the '21-22 period we will be looking at an expression of interest open to other public and postsecondary providers in the province in terms of providing postsecondary education.

So I think there's a lot of good news here in terms of providing opportunity but also continuing to look for other opportunities for students to engage in postsecondary education.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you. Yeah. I know that we have a number of students that have tried to apply for that. Is there an appeals process for that funding? If, for instance, someone was ruled ineligible or was not able to initially access that funding, is there a process that

they can proceed with? Is that part of your processing for efficiencies that would allow them that?

**Ms Farmer:** You know, I don't know. I'm going to pass the question to Clay Buchanan, who is our ADM of disability services, just to comment on that piece.

Thank you.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy. To answer the question, because the funding is grant funding and we use a third party, really it would depend on the third party's process that they use. But if anybody needed some assistance in seeing if they were eligible or not, we would have staff that would work with them to help them. So if anybody has any issues, they can contact their worker, from a people with developmental disabilities perspective.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you for that. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the efforts towards maximizing accessibility to these programs and these funds, and sometimes that does also include the ability to appeal decisions that are made. So thank you for speaking to that.

Next question. An additional \$1.8 million was provided to directly fund postsecondary institutions at six postsecondary institutions. Can the department explain the difference between the \$2.1 million through Inclusion Alberta and this additional \$1.8 million?

**Ms Farmer:** The \$1.8 million provides a similar service, with the postsecondary institutions providing the direct supports for students. This allows for increased involvement by the postsecondary institution in the success of the students with developmental disabilities. These funding arrangements are monitored and managed by service delivery regions and are determined based on the interest of the individuals with developmental disabilities and attending programs through the postsecondary institution and the institution's ability and willingness to provide their supports. There were 76 students supported through six postsecondary institutions in '19-20.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you. So with that – I just want to clarify the staff, I mean, staff for Inclusion Alberta, which is part of the funding through Community and Social Services. That's the staff that we engage under the \$2.1 million. This \$1.8 million: would that staff also be funded through Inclusion Alberta, or is it staff directly hired by these postsecondary institutions?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass to Clay Buchanan again. Thank you.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you for the opportunity to answer the question, Deputy. The department posted an expression of interest, which closed on May 15, I believe. We're still analyzing the proposals that came in through that expression of interest process, but similarly to Inclusion Alberta, this funding would go to third parties and that funding would be used by a third party to potentially hire staff. So it wouldn't be government staff; it would be the successful proponent of the expression of interest.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you for that answer. I appreciate that. It just helps to clarify, again, that accessibility piece and efficiency of how that program is worked and the funding is being used.

My final question is: what measures exist to determine the success of this program and ensure that students with developmental disabilities are receiving the support that they need?

**Ms Farmer:** Reporting required for the services . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you, Deputy.

I'll now turn things over to the Official Opposition side for the next block of questions.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Maybe I can help out Member Neudorf a little bit. Maybe I'll just follow up on his line of questioning. Can the ministry tell me – Inclusion Alberta received \$2.1 million and supported 71 students. Six postsecondaries supported 76 students with \$1.8 million. Can you tell me: after completion of each program – some are two years, some are four years, obviously, depending on the institution – the per cent of graduates or the people that completed their program that were employed or found, secured a volunteer position after completion?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass this to ADM Clay Buchanan of disability services.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to respond. Unfortunately, I don't have those stats with me today. We can certainly provide those stats at a later time.

**Ms Renaud:** That would be great if you could provide those to the committee. Thank you.

My next question is that the deputy minister mentioned that the ministry would cover nonsufficient funds for people that had issues with the date change with AISH and income support. Can you tell me: will the ministry also cover evictions costs and moving costs and set-up costs as a result?

**Ms Farmer:** The ministry staff will continue to work with our clients in terms of issues that they were having with the payments. They will assist them in terms of looking at their budgets. They will assist our clients to make . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Is that, like, a no? The caseworkers will support them to direct them to other programs? I'm just asking directly – you know, you mentioned earlier that NSF fees would be covered.

**Ms Farmer:** I believe what I was trying to communicate – and maybe I didn't do a clear enough job – was that in the event that someone received an NSF cheque because of a late payment in April, our staff were working in terms of their clients to look at covering those costs. I can't . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay.

**Ms Farmer:** Is that fair?

**Ms Renaud:** Yup, that's fair.

Will the ministry do the same for eviction costs?

**Ms Farmer:** I can't comment on eviction costs just as – every client: we will look at their circumstances. Our worker will look at their circumstances . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay, fair enough.

I'm going to move on, I guess in the same thread here. I would just like to know briefly – there wasn't a lot of time between January 27, 2020, when the change was announced about the payment dates, to March 1, when it happened, to ensure that all AISH and income support recipients were aware of the changes, right? It requires calling your bank, changing payment dates, letting your landlord know – all of that – and not to mention during a public health emergency. So can you tell me what steps your ministry took to make sure that the information was timely, accurate, and accessible in terms of plain language or communication with

support organizations or other languages? Could you tell me what specific steps your ministry took?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass this to Jason Chance, who will be happy to walk you through the steps.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay.

**Mr. Chance:** Sounds good. Thanks very much, Deputy, and thank you for the question. Our staff worked directly with both income support and AISH clients before the change was made. Our first step involved ensuring that as many people as possible could shift to direct deposit. Currently we have 98 per cent of our clients now receiving their payments by direct deposit rather than by a mailed cheque. That makes a huge difference and, obviously, serves very well during the pandemic.

**9:00**

In addition to that, our staff throughout the province worked very hard, working directly with individual clients to ensure they understood and had . . .

**Ms Renaud:** A hundred and thirty thousand individual clients in a month?

**Mr. Chance:** We provided information out, and then, of course, if clients had any questions, they could contact us through both their workers directly or through the Alberta Supports contact centre.

To your question around in other languages, supports are available through the contact centre in over 100 . . .

**Ms Renaud:** But my question was: ahead of the change did your ministry reach out to any of the organizations that you regularly rely on to communicate with people with disabilities or people who live in poverty, people who do not have secure housing, who live on income support? What steps other than dealing one on one with 130,000 people and making sure they had direct deposit – what work was done to ensure that the communication was there and available so people could do what they needed to do with their banks, with their landlords, all of those things?

**Mr. Chance:** We provided the information to a number of our partner agencies as well as a number of stakeholders, including the self-advocate groups and others like that, that we continue to have discussions with around the impact of any policy on an Albertan.

**Ms Renaud:** Could you tell me when you did that, what date you advised the self-advocates of the change?

**Mr. Chance:** I don't have that information at my fingertips, but I do know that there are ongoing . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Could you provide that to the committee at a later date?

**Mr. Chance:** We can look into that for sure.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Would you provide the date that you communicated that information to the self-advocacy networks?

**Mr. Chance:** We can provide information in terms of who we contacted and when.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh, thank you very much.

**Mr. Chance:** In addition, I guess I just would like to add also that I also personally had conversations with the landlord association of Alberta to make sure that they were aware of the change and had

ongoing conversations subsequently to ensure that there was as minimal disruption as was possible.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you.

I'd like to talk about the Appeals Secretariat. I note on page 11 of the annual report, where you're talking, again, about red tape reduction, it goes on to say, you know, that a number of things are going on, and really it's about lessening the use of appeal panels to adjust different things. One of the things noted is commencement dates, but as I go through the report or as I went through the report and looked elsewhere, I couldn't find any information about appeals. I would like to know, in this fiscal year covered in this report, how many appeal hearings were conducted for AISH-related appeals, income support related appeals. How many persons with developmental disability appeals were supported by the Appeals Secretariat? Same with family supports for children with disabilities.

On top of that, I would also like to know: in these four categories how many decisions were overturned?

**Ms Farmer:** Thanks for that. I'm going to pass the question to Tracy Wyrstiuk, who is responsible for appeal panels.

Thank you.

**Ms Wyrstiuk:** Thank you, Deputy, and thank you very much for the question. So, yes, our citizen appeal panels are there to provide fair and impartial decisions for Albertans who have received our services, and, you know, we very much are thankful for the work that they do on behalf of Albertans. In '19-20 we received 3,615 appeal notifications that were filed. Of those, the appeal panel heard 1,561 appeals and rendered decisions. For the specific numbers: the AISH appeals, there were 1,212; income support, there were 325; PDD, there were 18; and with FSCD, there were six decisions.

Your final question, I understand, was on the number of appeal panel decisions that reversed the original decision. With respect to AISH appeals 40 per cent of the decisions were reversed; income support, 17 per cent; PDD was 17 per cent.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Great. Thank you very much for that.

**Ms Wyrstiuk:** You're welcome.

**Ms Renaud:** I am going to move on just, I guess, to income support, specifically talking about – there are two programs, obviously, in income support. One is barriers for employment. The other is expected to work. Barriers for employment we all know. This is where you will find Albertans that are really struggling, whether it's chronic health, mental health, a disability, they're not yet on AISH, all of those things. The core benefit for a single person is \$866 a month, like, half of what AISH is. We know that that's impossible to survive on. I mean, it's impossible.

Understandably, there are a number of supplemental core benefits available. There are actually two pages of them that go on to talk about the different things that people are eligible for. So I would like to know: in the period covered by this annual report, how much was spent specifically on supplemental benefits? My next question is: from that amount, how much specifically was spent on additional shelter code 1109?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass the question to Jason Chance to respond.

**Mr. Chance:** Thanks for the question. Unfortunately, I don't have the breakdown in the expenditures in that way. We can certainly

take a look at the financial expenditures and look at the codes and get back to you with those.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Are you committing, then, to table for the committee the total amount spent on the additional shelter code for this fiscal period? Is that a yes?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chance:** May I answer the question, Chair?

**The Chair:** I suppose. I mean, very quickly.

**Mr. Chance:** Yup.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Chance:** We will look at the information available and provide what's available.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay. Good. Thank you.

I'm moving things over to the government side now for the next round of questioning, please.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Chair. This is regarding enhancing community well-being. On page 39 key objective 3.1 is identified as providing "funding to municipalities and Metis Settlements through the Family and Community Support Services program to design and deliver preventative social programs." The family and community support services program, outlined on page 40, falls under this key objective, helping to design and deliver local preventative social services. The funding model for this program is stated to be 80-20, where CSS provides 80 per cent of the funding and the municipality or Métis settlement contributes a minimum of 20 per cent. Once its funding is provided to the municipality or Métis settlement, what sort of oversight does the ministry have to ensure that it is being spent efficiently?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you, Member, for the question. FCSS operates under a dual level of accountability, as required by the province under the Family and Community Support Services Act and regulation and the partnering municipalities and the Métis settlements and with respect to the requirement to the Municipal Government Act and local government policies and procedures. Formal funding applications are completed for each municipality or settlement, and the FCSS program operates as a funding partnership, as you mentioned, with 80 per cent provided by the province and a minimum of 20 per cent by the municipality or the settlement. This contribution must come from municipal sources and therefore has been subject to review, prioritization, and a decision-making process consistent with the exercise of local governance by a municipal body.

Reporting of the allocation and use of the FCSS program funding is completed annually by each municipality or settlement in accordance with municipal obligations and consistent with the requirements of the FCSS Act and regulation. The FCSS programs receiving more than \$100,000 but under \$500,000 must also provide a review engagement, and programs receiving more than \$500,000 are required to provide an audited financial statement in addition to their annual report. In signing off their annual report, the designated authority for the municipality or the Métis settlement, usually the chief administration officer, signs a statement verifying that FCSS expenditures are in compliance with the FCSS Act and regulation.

Annual program reports are reviewed in detail by our staff, and a reconciliation statement is prepared for each participating municipality or Métis settlement. Funds which are not spent as intended or which are not used in accordance with the act and regulation are excluded from the reconciliation calculation, and provincial staff support FCSS programs through timely advice on FCSS legislation. So we have a number of controls and a number of pieces of legislation that really do strengthen the reporting and the accountability of the FCSS program.

**9:10**

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you. How has the ministry worked with the Métis settlements to identify the types of social programs that are needed and ensure that they are delivered in a culturally appropriate way?

**Ms Farmer:** You know, really key, as far as principle for the FCSS program, is local responsibility for the allocation of the resources based on local needs and priorities. Métis settlements know their community and are supported by a dedicated outcome measures trainer who supports them in identifying culturally appropriate programs and outcomes for their community, and the FCSS Association of Alberta supports outcome measurements. There is a Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta that does work with FCSS communities and municipalities in terms of outcome measurement.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you. The report states that outcomes are measured by improved self-esteem, confidence, quality of social relationships, access to service, quality of social networks, and community awareness. Can the ministry tell us how data for these measures is collected, and how are the results of these measures used to inform the program?

**Ms Farmer:** Data is collected by individual FCSS programs, primarily by the use of surveys and interviews before and/or after participation in an FCSS program, and data is collected and stored by the FCSS program. There are a number of surveys that are done, and we do rely on those surveys to really give us a good indication of the outcomes of the program.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you. The next question I have is on family violence. Page 43 of the report mentions that in 2019-2020 Community and Social Services increased digital awareness activities for family violence prevention campaigns. Here the report mentions that this led to a 342 per cent increase in Twitter impressions, a 295 per cent increase in engagement, and that there was a 187 per cent increase to the Alberta family violence prevention website. In addition to online engagement numbers, were there any other measures to determine the success of these campaigns?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you very much for the question on this important area. What's also really important is giving information to individuals so that they know how to get help. Before '19-20 the government campaign materials were available in hard copy and by digital download from alberta.ca. In 2019 the Family Violence Prevention Month campaigns switched to solely digital. Downloads of resources digitally available before and after the shift really did increase when we moved to solely digital, and that was important for us to see in terms of the increase by 532 per cent of our social media graphics. We've had some good tracking that we can do on these materials and how many downloads we're getting.

Traditional media coverage was relatively stable from the previous year despite the shift to the digital campaign. The

traditional media engagement of Family Violence Prevention Month did have 52 articles and four videos. It was a decrease in articles from the year before, but we were and we will continue to really rely on a digital platform in getting the message out. This has been a really important experience for us in leading up to COVID because COVID has really been challenging for some families that are facing some really difficult situations at home. They need to be able to raise their hand and find out where help is available, and we need to be able to respond.

Thank you.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you. I'm having some Internet issues here. I'm sorry. Page 45 of the report mentions that in 2019-2020 the ministry provided \$4 million in grant and contract funding to 24 community organizations to provide a range of services and supports for family violence prevention and promoting healthy relationships. What are the eligibility requirements for organizations to have access to this grant funding?

**Ms Farmer:** I am going to share the time, if you don't mind, with Maryna Korchagina as far as responding to this part of the question.

**Ms Korchagina:** Sorry. My apologies. Thank you, Deputy. Thank you for the opportunity to respond. The ministry provides funding to civil society organizations that offer family violence supports and services through the following grant categories. Safe visitation: this program is intended to provide families impacted by family violence the highly secure and supervised space for children and their noncustodial offending parent to interact. This maintains the relationship between the child and the offending parent and supports positive interactions. Children are protected from their exposure to family violence and have a chance to build healthy relationships.

The next category is the collaborative community response. This program is intended to support . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'll now turn things over to the Official Opposition side.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you very much. I am going to move on to some questions about disability supports. Okay. PDD, which is persons with developmental disabilities, is an oversubscribed program. We know that at the time of this annual report, over 2,000 people were waiting for services. Page 15 of the annual report discussed new ministry-developed tools to assess the needs of people with developmental disabilities. Now, this is significant because it will determine where they are on the list, if they go onto the urgent list, and what kind of supports they receive. So my question is: who was involved in the development of this tool? Was the disability advocate involved or consulted? Was the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities consulted in any way? Which other stakeholders were consulted? If possible – I don't imagine you have access to it right now – if you would agree to table a copy of that assessment tool, that would be much appreciated.

Thank you.

**Ms Farmer:** Thanks very much. I'm going to pass, as far as the comments, to ADM Clay Buchanan. Thank you.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to respond. Unfortunately, I was not with the organization at that point in time, so I can't comment on who we actually engaged. To my understanding, there is no new assessment tool that is used. Again, I'll have to come back with that information. My apologies.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. On page 15 it says, “The [PDD] program began piloting these tools in spring 2020.” That would suggest that it’s a new tool or a new process. If you would agree to go back and look through your notes or, you know, consult with other officials to find out what tool this was and what process was undertaken and make that available to the committee, that would be most appreciated.

**Ms Farmer:** We will commit to do that review for you.

**Ms Renaud:** Great. Thank you.

Does the ministry have plans to address this huge wait-list, documented plans, something on paper, that there are people that have agreed to steps, there’s a process? Are there plans in place to address the PDD wait-list?

**Ms Farmer:** What I can say is that we’re treating our wait-list quite seriously in terms of working with families through the PDD, in terms of coming up with service plans, really identifying, as mentioned in your previous comments, in terms of those urgent and critical – so we are seriously looking at, as far as the number of people . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So that’s no; there’s not, like, a dedicated plan to address the wait-list other than we all recognize it’s vitally important that we address the wait-list. Is there a plan that the ministry is working with to address the wait-list of PDD?

9:20

**Ms Farmer:** We are looking at – and as far as looking at our program and the wait-list and the number of people that are asking for services and what types of services that they’re asking, we are prioritizing, as far as those critical and urgent, as we’ve commented earlier . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So I’m going to go with: there’s no dedicated plan. That’s what I was looking for, that there is a plan with strategies, outcomes, and measures to monitor the work that’s done. I’m going to assume that there is no plan for us to look at.

I’m going to move on to another disability support, which is FSCD, family support for children with disabilities. Now, again, the government data tells us that there was a total of just over 15,000 children and families supported by FSCD on March 31 of this fiscal, that we’re covering. We can all agree, I think, all of us in this room and online, on the importance of early intervention as it relates to children with disabilities. My question: does the ministry have any documented plans to address the unmet needs of children as evidenced by the massive wait-list? Now, I would like to point out that at the time that was covered in this report, there were about 3,500 children or families – I mean, they’re interchangeable – waiting for service, at different stages but waiting for service. Is there a plan in the ministry that you are working with with specific outcomes and benchmarks that we can, as a committee, look at in the future and say whether or not the efforts were successful?

**Ms Farmer:** I’m going to pass this to Clay Buchanan to speak to disability services.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to respond. For FSCD families either you’re in planning, which includes families where a family’s needs have been assessed and FSCD services have been identified but no agreement is yet in place, or have a draft agreement in place waiting to sign off by both parties, or an agreement has expired, and we’re waiting for renewal or require only information. So either you’re in planning or you’re on the caseload. There is no wait-list for FSCD other than . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. If I could just interrupt. I’m sorry. I understand that. It’s documented in your open data, so I do understand what you’re saying. But if you are waiting for service and your agreement isn’t signed, you’re waiting for service. You don’t have it yet, so that’s a wait-list. My question is: is there a co-ordinated plan in this ministry to address this massive wait-list of children and families that are not yet receiving the supports they need in terms of early intervention and in terms of support?

**Mr. Buchanan:** We continually engage with families that are receiving FSCD to ensure that their services are met. That’s a continuous process, that we work with families to resolve any outstanding needs.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you. So I’m going to go with: there is no formal plan to address the wait-list in FSCD, which is fine. Now, I’m going to suggest that – I understand that, you know, finances are limited and it is difficult. These are massive wait-lists, and there are price tags attached to them. I understand that.

I’m going to move on to the new Premier’s civil society fund. Now, for reference, on page 41 of the annual report it introduces the establishment of the Premier’s Council on Charities and Civil Society. Now, what we learned at this announcement is that over three years from the time of the announcement \$20 million would be reallocated within this ministry to fund the Premier’s civil society fund, the activities that this group was going to choose. My question is that I’d like to know a little bit about the thinking process or the rationale behind having these monster wait-lists. We know that the little children especially – and I’m not downplaying the needs of adults. But when you are losing time in terms of early intervention for children that are waiting for support but we are redirecting \$20 million over three years to this new activity, I’m just wondering what the process and thinking was of prioritizing this work as opposed to dealing with the wait-list.

**Ms Farmer:** As mentioned earlier, I was appointed in January. So I will commit to looking as far as what the understanding was with the civil society as far as the fund and sharing that information with the committee, well, once I collect . . .

**Ms Renaud:** I appreciate that. Thank you. I appreciate that, and I understand that you were not there at the time.

My question is: you know, because I don’t know what the average cost per file is in FSCD or PDD, just out of curiosity, for perspective, if we were going to use this \$20 million, what would that translate into in terms of children that we could support in FSCD? Mr. Buchanan might be able – I don’t know if he has the average cost per child in FSCD.

**Ms Farmer:** Sorry; my mute button. Clay, I’ll just pass it to you.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you for the opportunity to respond. Unfortunately, I don’t have that average cost in front of me right now, but I can certainly get that average cost for that ’19-20 period.

**Ms Renaud:** Perfect. Thank you very much.

Just based on the panel makeup – I just had a quick scan of the people that are on there – it would appear that management within CSS, or Community and Social Services, didn’t apply the gender-based analysis plus. Now, if you’re not familiar, of course, this includes gender equity and so much more, but it also looks at having people with real, lived experience, particularly people with disabilities. So is it fair to say that the group responsible for assigning people to this new Premier’s civil society fund did not use a GBA plus? Is that correct?

**Ms Farmer:** What I can, as far as – in terms of the committee structure and committees we work with . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you, Deputy.

I'll turn things over to the government side, please.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. Thank you very much. Following on our family support for children with disabilities, just relative to wait-lists, what are historically the size and length of a wait-list relative to this period?

**Ms Farmer:** I am going to have to get you that information. I'm sorry; I don't have that in front of me right now.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. Fair enough. Just thought I may need to know.

That relates to funding. On page 35 the report outlines that the family support for children with disabilities program provides supports for services for families who have children with disabilities. It mentions that in '19 and '20 Community and Social Services invested \$219.6 million to provide 14,858 families with FSCD funding or services, I guess. It's got to be challenging. You know, you don't know – it's a bit of a guess as to how many families and children you're going to be looking after, so I'm just wondering: how is the funding determined on an ongoing basis?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass this to Clay Buchanan to share.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, and thank you for the opportunity to respond to the question. The funding for family support for children with disabilities, as indicated on page 35 of the report, is the actual amount that we spent for family support for children with disabilities. It's the actual expenditure.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. How do you determine it, though, like, on an ongoing basis? Or is it just what you spent? Like, you just budget the same as last year, a little bit more, a little bit less.

**Mr. Buchanan:** That's correct. We use that as the benchmark, and then, you know, given that caseloads can increase, costs can increase, costs can go down, caseloads can go down, it fluctuates over any given period of time.

**Mr. Rowswell:** So you meet the need as it comes up is kind of what you're mandated to do, then.

**Mr. Buchanan:** That's correct, Member.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. Very good.

What are some of the criteria used to determine eligibility for FSCD?

**Ms Farmer:** To be eligible for FSCD, a child must be under 18 years of age, have a legal guardian, be a Canadian resident ordinarily residing in Alberta, and have a disability as defined under the FSCD Act. The FSCD Act defines disability as "a chronic developmental, physical, sensory, mental or neurological condition or impairment but does not include a condition for which the primary need is for medical care or health services."

9:30

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. All right.

Ongoing, what sort of oversight or assessment tools are used by an administrator to ensure that the individual family support plan developed by FSCD workers is adequate at the time and goes on as the needs change? How is that dealt with?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass this to Clay to speak to.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the question. The support planning process is completed using a family and child assessment of needs. This tool is used to capture up to three years of information from the FSCD worker's engagement with the guardian. The information captured informs the decision and rationale for the most appropriate supports and services for the child and family, and these are used to create what's called an individual family support plan. The individual family support plan supports the family in receiving services. These plans are reviewed, minimally, on an annual basis with the caseworker, and the caseworker would address any changing needs as they arise. If there is a significant change in the family's or child's situation, it would be reviewed and the plan would be updated.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. Thank you.

Also, on page 37 is performance measure 2(b), which indicates where families feel that the FSCD program has had a positive impact. They are fairly high numbers. I know that in talking to some of the families, without FSCD they just – you know, it's life changing if they didn't have good access to it, so for them to be happy with it is important. I understand that 91 per cent felt that this was the case in 2012-13, that they were happy with it; however, that drops to 87 per cent in '18-19. Can the ministry explain this drop in satisfaction and tell the committee what steps were taken to increase this number in '19-20?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you for the question. I'll pass the answer to Clay Buchanan, ADM of disability services.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to respond. I believe that some of the issues attributed to this are the unprecedented workload pressures on our front-line staff due to the significant caseload growth. Staff turnover and high caseloads may be related to the drop in family satisfaction with the FSCD program. Certainly, there are continued economic pressures on families due to the struggling economy and may also affect reporting of family well-being. In 2018 a number of FSCD families brought forward concerns with the FSCD specialized services policy. These concerns may also have contributed to the reduction in this performance measure. To increase family satisfaction with the program, the department addressed staff shortages, changed policies in response to stakeholder consultations related to specialized services, and initiated a full review of the FSCD program to identify opportunities for program improvement. These are some of the reasons for the decrease in satisfaction, I believe.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. Well, it sounds like you're making headway, so that's good to see.

This metric is derived by averaging the positive responses from survey questions that assess the impact of FSCD program services on the family. Can the department tell the committee how this survey is administered and what the survey looks like as a whole?

**Ms Farmer:** Again I'll pass to Clay Buchanan, ADM of disability services.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to respond. The result for this measure was obtained through a survey of all families with an active agreement on October 9, 2018. Although the survey was provided to all families, the final valid population size, which is the total population minus not-in-service telephone numbers, business numbers, individuals who stated that they did not receive services from FSCD, was approximately 12,556 people. An



introductory letter to respondents was developed to inform parents of the intention of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and confidentiality of the information they provided to the consultant; 2,343 people who had accessed services through the FSCD program voluntarily completed the survey. The survey response was about 18.7 per cent. This would be 2,343 completed surveys divided by a population of 12,556. The overall margin of error for the survey results was equal to plus or minus 1.8 per cent 19 times out of 20. Respondents had the opportunity to participate by telephone, online, or by faxing or mailing in their completed surveys.

Full survey administration was completed from November 2018 to January 2019. Respondents were given approximately two weeks to complete the survey online, request a paper copy, or by calling a toll-free number. Following this two-week period, respondents who had not yet completed the survey were contacted by telephone and invited to participate.

The FSCD family and guardian survey is designed to receive feedback from families about their experience with the program. The survey collects information from parents and guardians of children about access to the program, participation in decisions, the relationship with the FSCD worker, satisfaction with services and supports, achievement of outcomes, and the overall impact of the involvement with the FSCD program.

Thank you.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Okay. Thank you very much.

I've just got a few seconds left here, so I'll – the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, you know, listens to disability communities and brings that forward to the ministry. Can the ministry explain how recommendations and advice from the council are received and what the process for evaluating these recommendations is and what sort of feedback the ministry has received from the council and how this feedback has been used?

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member.

I'll turn things over to the Official Opposition side for their final round.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to department officials for being here. I actually want to follow up on the questions from the member earlier about the FSCD survey and the performance measures that are part of the annual report for 2019-20. Specifically, I actually want to carry forward on the methodology and the choice of this particular performance measure. This is the only one in the annual report that speaks to FSCD and its efficacy. I note that on page 52 of the annual report, the question that was being asked of families, of the number of families that did answer, was: "How much do you agree that the services provided to you by the FSCD program have had a positive impact on your family?"

Of course, these are families who are receiving supports under FSCD, so really this question is a pretty easy one to answer because the comparison for these families is getting no supports versus getting some supports, so obviously any support is going to make a positive impact on families with this program. But what this does not appear to measure is actually the efficacy of this program. I'm wondering why this is the only performance measure for the FSCD program in 2019-20. It does not seem to speak to the concerns that I have heard and many of my colleagues have heard from families in FSCD about the wait-lists, as the member earlier spoke to, about whether those supports actually meet the needs of the family.

I've heard concerns about the fact that a minimal amount of supports are provided at first. Sometimes families are not even aware of the supports that could be provided. It's very subjective in nature to whoever their caseworker happens to be. It's different from region to region. None of that is measured by this performance metric in this annual report, so I'm wondering what other metrics the department is keeping on: is this meeting the needs of families? How many parents have had to leave their work as a result of, you know, having a child with disabilities? Is this keeping families working? Is this actually providing early intervention supports to support the child later on? Are there any metrics within the ministry on that?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm going to pass the question to Tracy Wyrstiuk with strategic services to respond. Tracy?

**Ms Wyrstiuk:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to answer, and thank you for the question. It is correct that the performance measure that we're using for the annual report and our business plan is in relation to the survey. We do do a fairly thorough assessment as to what is an adequate measure. There are measurement standards that we have to comply with in order for it to be one that's selected for the business plan and one that we can report on.

**9:40**

Having said that, to your question about other things that we're tracking, we do have service standards in our ministry in '19-20 that we were monitoring the performance of FSCD against. There are about 20 services standards that were developed in our ministry that we look at such as when the assessment need was initiated, the number of days that new files are assessed within. So we do have a number of performance standards within our ministry that we're tracking to determine our efficiency.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. I appreciate that. Would you be willing to table with this committee that performance standard review and how the department performed in 2019-20 with the FSCD program? Can you table that with this committee?

**Ms Wyrstiuk:** We will definitely look into that and table with you what we are able to provide.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. On FSCD, Deputy, can you tell the committee how many multidisciplinary team panels were heard in the 2019-20 year, those MDT panels?

**Ms Farmer:** I'm just trying to get that information for you, Member.

**Ms Pancholi:** Perhaps you can just commit to tabling that with the committee.

**Ms Farmer:** Happy to table that information. I know I have it in my binder, so I apologize, but I'm happy to provide . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** No problem. We're just a little short on time.

I just have one more question to clarify an earlier comment. I just want to clarify with respect to the NSF fees. I'm trying to clarify my understanding. If an AISH or an income support client indicates that they received an NSF charge as a result of either the payment date change or a late payment, can the deputy confirm that the ministry will commit to paying those NSF charges?

**Ms Farmer:** I am committing to looking at the NSF charges, and if the late payment was a result of the date changes, to look at those

clients and to make a decision. Yes, I am committed to look at that charge.

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

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Marie Renaud.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to ask a few quick questions about service dogs. That would be in disability supports, I believe. I think we already know that there are 1.5 FTEs, or full-time equivalents, that manage this work, and approximately \$300,000 in grants were assigned in the fiscal year that we're covering. I'm wondering – if you don't have the information, it'd be great if you could table that or make it available for the committee – what criteria was used to select grant recipients and what information is required to be tabled or shared with the ministry following the completion of the grant. As well, if you could tell me the percentage breakdown in the grants. What per cent went to for-profit companies, and what per cent went to nonprofit providers?

My next question about the service dogs is: in the fiscal year that we're covering today, how many new service dogs or new service dog teams – I'm not sure what the correct word is – began working in Alberta or were licensed to work? Of those service dog teams that were new in this fiscal year, how many are as a direct result of the grants that were awarded, so not the approved list of providers but the grant recipients? If you don't have that information, I understand. It's quite specific. If you could table that, that would be great.

**Ms Farmer:** I'm actually going to pass this to Clay Buchanan. He does have information on the service dog piece. Thank you.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Deputy, for the opportunity to respond. The number of qualified service providers increased from zero to five since the 2018 reg change. The number remains the same . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Mr. Buchanan, I'm sorry. I'm asking about the service dog grants, not the qualified provider list.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Sorry. Could you repeat your question?

**Ms Renaud:** I'm asking about the service dog grants. As a result of the grants how many new service dog teams began operating in Alberta? What was the percentage of for-profit versus nonprofit of the service dog grants?

**Mr. Buchanan:** Sorry. My apologies. In 2019-2020, 126 service dog teams were qualified in Alberta. It averages about 44 per year and is currently at about 252. I don't have the percentages between profit and nonprofit.

**Ms Renaud:** If I could just ask a question, just to clarify, let's say an organization like Dogs with Wings, who regularly graduates – I don't know – 20, 25 dogs a year – really, other than being listed on your list of qualified providers, they don't actually receive anything from the government of Alberta, but do you count their dogs in this number?

**Mr. Buchanan:** I would have to get back to the member on that. I'm not sure. In 2019 we funded Aspen Service Dogs, Canadian Canine Training Corp., Hope Heals Service Dogs, and Red Dog Training Solutions.

**Ms Renaud:** Yes. I know.

**Mr. Buchanan:** That was where the funding for the \$300 K went.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. If you could just commit to tabling the percentage that went to for-profit, per cent to nonprofit, that would be great.

My next quick question is on inclusive communication. I think that we've learned through this pandemic how vitally important communication is. There are people, there are Albertans that need different forms of communication. Now, there is an existing policy from 1994 that talks about – it's actually called GOA Alternative Communications Policy. That lays out pretty clearly what the expectations are. My question is: how many times was the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities consulted regarding inclusive communication during this fiscal period?

**Ms Farmer:** I don't have that information available. I can commit as far as making inquiry and sharing the appropriate information. What the annual report does state is that within our contact centre we do have over 100 different languages, as far as translations that are available, in terms of communicating with Albertans. I am delighted that today we have a pilot in terms of sign language. What I am also very thankful, in terms of . . .

**Ms Renaud:** I'm just going to – sorry; I am thankful as well. I'm sorry. I've got 30 seconds. I'm wondering if the ministry could commit to tabling just the cost and benefit or the information that was used to make the decision to fund Hope Mission. That was a significant investment.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'll turn things over to the government side, please.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the departmental officials as well as the Auditor General's officials for being here and for all the work you do. Being mindful of time, I'm going to move right into my questions. I'll be focused on workforce participation as well as shelter space.

To begin, page 28 identifies outcome 2 as "Participation – Albertans participate in their communities through employment and other opportunities to reach their individual potential." Page 33 mentions that labour force participation is lower for individuals with disabilities and that, unfortunately, adults with disabilities who do participate in the labour force are less likely to be employed than their counterparts without disabilities. Page 34 of the report mentions that Community and Social Services administers a number of initiatives that promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and help employers tap into the unique skills of this segment of the workforce. Now, the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program, as stated on page 34, provides employment preparation and placement supports to assist individuals in developing skills and knowledge for finding and maintaining paid employment, connecting 2,859 PDD, or persons with developmental disabilities, individuals in 2019-2020 to the labour market. Now, can the department speak to how this program works to connect persons with disabilities with employment?

Thanks.

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you. The employment supports provided, as far as through the PDD program, are delivered in two broad areas. Employment preparation services: these services are provided to assist individuals to develop the skills necessary to obtain employment and are primarily delivered through community service providers that use best practices for assisting individuals with disabilities to enter the labour market. Services may include: training, referrals for inclusive postsecondary education, work

experience, career exploration, and job search development, and 1,227 individuals participated in this service in 2019-20.

The other area is employment placement services. These services are provided to assist individuals to maintain paid employment once employed. Services may include on-the-job support to help an individual meet employer expectations and/or the development of a work environment that supports the individual, and 1,632 individuals utilized this service to maintain their employment during 2019-20.

**9:50**

**Mr. Walker:** Noted, and thank you. I appreciate the granular data there.

Now, what sort of indicators does the ministry have in place to measure the success of this program and ensure that adults with disabilities are receiving the support in the workplace that they need?

**Ms Farmer:** It's an important question. The PDD program provides individual case management, and as we've said throughout this conversation with Public Accounts, our front-line workers are, as far as focusing on the needs of all of our individuals and our clients in terms of that case management, as far as discussion – when individuals are receiving PDD services such as employment services, the delivery of services is guided by an ISP. An ISP would be an individual support plan, and they are monitored at least on an annual basis just to make sure that they are effective. We also make sure that when they're evaluated, if there are any adjustments that need to be made, those adjustments take place, too.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you.

Now, staying with the annual report, it also states that the ministry provides funding to the Rotary employment partnership. What oversights does the ministry have to ensure that this funding is being used effectively?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you. This is an important partnership, and this is a huge opportunity for many Albertans in terms of getting a foot in the door and engaging in terms of employment in Alberta. During 2019-20 the PDD program provided \$523,354 to Inclusion Alberta to support 34 Rotary clubs to create employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities through their members. Oversight of this grant funding is accomplished through the required reporting and ongoing agreement management activity that we do within the department. In the 2019-20 period it indicates that 45 jobs were created and 124 individuals were being supported within a five-year time frame of obtaining employment.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you for that.

My final question, staying with the theme of the workforce participation program, is: what work has been done with external and civil society groups to help provide support and opportunities to Albertans with disabilities?

**Ms Farmer:** Community and Social Services has supported external and civil society groups in increasing opportunities to Albertans with disabilities by providing labour market transfer agreement grant funds to deliver employment services. The grants are expected to result in increased opportunities for full- and part-time employment, training and education, or other services that move an individual closer to the labour market. These services are intended to supplement existing services and will be delivered by service providers currently delivering employment services contracts and grants within the north and south delivery zones. The

success of these grants will inform, really, our future opportunities to offer these services through the procurement of new initiatives.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you very much, Deputy Minister Farmer.

I will now, with my time remaining, shift to the theme and the program of shelter space. Key objective 1.3 is identified as: "Partner with civil society organizations, municipalities and other ministries to improve housing stability through programs such as Housing First and provide appropriate supports for Albertans affected by homelessness." Now, page 20 of the annual report says that over the past year roughly 2,700 people stayed in an emergency shelter each night. One of my questions here is: how is the ministry working with stakeholders and shelters to make sure that vulnerable people are supported to find and keep permanent housing?

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you very much for the question. Community-based organizations – and we refer to them as CBOs – in Alberta's seven major cities have continued to focus on moving people experiencing homelessness to stable housing with supports. As fund administrators the CBOs provide funding to more than 75 agencies across Alberta to operate a range of programs that move individuals experiencing homelessness into housing with supports, including supportive housing, intensive case management, rapid rehousing, and outreach. The CBOs leverage funding on behalf of all orders of government to lead local responses in homelessness in their communities, co-ordinate community planning, and ensure that there is a system of care in place to rapidly move people from the street or homeless shelters into housing with supports.

Supportive housing is really a key to housing solutions for individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness and may have more complex issues. Work is still under way to explore more how we can expand supportive housing models. COVID-19 has really forced our – you know, as far as we are focused on that every day in terms of housing, we know that there are needs and individuals that need supports. The team is very committed to working with communities on a path for individuals that are experiencing homelessness to find solutions that make sense for that individual.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you. I'm glad to see that your department is adapting to the impacts of COVID-19. That's good to know.

Page 20 mentions that Community and Social Services is in the process of reviewing and updating the performance metrics for funding for emergency shelter and short- and long-term supportive housing. Can the ministry provide a status update on this review?

**Ms Farmer:** The department staff have developed a logic model and performance measure framework for emergency shelters and short- and long-term supportive housing which has to be tested and validated with shelter operators, community-based organizations, and other key stakeholders. So we are in that process, and we . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you, Deputy.

I'll turn things over to the Official Opposition side for their read-in portion, please.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you. If possible, I would like to ask for the regional differences around the income support additional shelter benefits, that supplemental benefit that you agreed to share with us.

My next question is just a follow-up. You mentioned the Rotary employment project, with the funding directed through Inclusion Alberta. I'm wondering, for this fiscal, if you could give me the number of people that were employed as a result of this work and the total funding for that fiscal period.

Also, I'm wondering: under the service dog section I would like to know if the ministry monitors costs that are passed on to Albertans. If grant funding is going to the service dog organizations and they're receiving, let's say, \$100,000 in funding and then turning around and charging Albertans, say, \$45,000 for a dog, does the ministry monitor that at all?

Also, I would like the ministry to table any evidence that was used to make the investment decision around funding the Hope Mission, the new building. Also, my question is: was anyone from the Premier's office involved in any of the discussion about the investment with Community and Social Services?

For women's shelters I note that there are only 30 emergency shelters and two elder abuse shelters in Alberta at the time of this report. That clearly is not sufficient based on the numbers. But we heard of a new shelter coming on stream, Jessie's House, that was not funded in terms of operational funding. So I would like to know: what is the criterion to add a new provider to be able to increase the spaces? I am not clear on what that is.

Finally, in terms of inclusive employment, other than the investment into inclusive postsecondary – and we know that some goes directly to the institution – what was the total number of Albertans that participated in inclusive postsecondary in this fiscal? I think I heard you give one number for one investment, but what is the total number for the period covered in this report? And what additional data is collected in terms of whether it's employment following completion or it's securing a volunteer position, or perhaps they're extending their stay in the postsecondary institution?

I think that my time is probably up.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I have 10 a.m.; therefore, this meeting is adjourned.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10 a.m.]







