



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Public Accounts

Seniors and Housing

Tuesday, November 16, 2021  
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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 30th Legislature  
Second Session**

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair  
  
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## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Seniors and Housing

Suzanne Anselmo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Seniors and Strategic Services

Lisa Sadownik, Deputy Minister

David Williams, Assistant Deputy Minister, Housing



**8 a.m. Tuesday, November 16, 2021**

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Why don't we start by going around the committee room and having folks introduce themselves. Deputy.

**Mr. Reid:** Good morning. Roger Reid, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod and deputy chair.

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

**Mr. Turton:** Good morning, everyone. Searle Turton, MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

**Mr. Singh:** Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Walker:** Good morning, everyone. Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

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

**Ms Robert:** Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

**Ms Rempel:** Good morning. Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

**The Chair:** We do have a couple of MLAs joining us via videoconference. If you could just introduce yourselves, and then we can move on to introduction of officials.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

**Mr. Toor:** Good morning. Devinder Toor, MLA, Calgary-Falconridge.

**Ms Lovely:** Good morning, everyone. Jackie Lovely, Camrose constituency.

**The Chair:** Okay. For Seniors and Housing officials, you can introduce yourselves as you speak later on.

I'm just wondering if the folks from the Auditor General's office could note their presence for the record.

**Mr. Wylie:** Good morning. Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

**Mr. Driesen:** Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

**Ms Hayes:** Patty Hayes, Assistant Auditor General.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda, friends?

Seeing none, I'll ask a member to move that the agenda for the November 16 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed.

**Mr. Reid:** So moved.

**The Chair:** That was moved by Member Reid. Is there any discussion on this motion?

Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried. Thank you very much.

We'll move on to the approval of the minutes. Friends, we have our minutes from the November 2 meeting. Are there any errors or omissions to note?

Seeing none, would a member move that the minutes of the November 2, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Moved by Member Turton. Is there any discussion on this motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

I'll move on to 4 here. Hon. members, as you're aware, the rules of the Legislative Assembly permit non committee members to participate in proceedings of standing and special committees. In this case, we're talking about independent members. Now, the committee may wish to deliberate on how they would fit into the speaking time allotment that we currently use. We think that we should probably have a subcommittee meeting on this and bring you back a proper proposal and weigh all of the options because there have been a variety of different approaches in a variety of differently constituted Legislatures over the years, so we have a number of different precedents to consider. I am going to just suggest that we table this item for now, and the deputy chair and I will bring you back a proper proposal that is more fully formed. Is the committee amenable to that? Yes? Okay. Very good.

Then we will move on to the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. I'd like to welcome our guests from the Ministry of Seniors and Housing who are here to address their annual report and any Auditor General deliberations or recommendations. Friends, you have 10 minutes to begin. How we've been doing this with all the various mixed media is that when you first begin speaking, Deputy, introduce yourself and your title, and then in the Q and A portion for the ministry officials if any other officials are speaking, just introduce yourself and your title or just say your name at least so that *Hansard* can appropriately attribute you for the record.

Your time starts when you begin speaking, Deputy. Thank you.

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everyone. I'm Lisa Sadownik, Deputy Minister of Seniors and Housing. It's my privilege to appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on behalf of the Ministry of Seniors and Housing.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to introduce the senior staff from the ministry with me here today: David Williams, assistant deputy minister, housing division; Suzanne Anselmo, assistant deputy minister, seniors and strategic services division; Shelley Engstrom, interim senior financial officer; and Lynda Cuppens, executive director, housing capital programs.

Seniors and Housing provides supports for those most in need of seniors' programs and services and individuals and families in need of affordable housing. In 2020-21 we delivered our programs and provided affordable housing through the two divisions of the ministry, the housing division and the seniors and strategic services division. The ministry also includes the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, through which housing programs are delivered and capital funding is provided.

To begin, let me tell you about our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We worked with our partner ministries and local senior-serving organizations to respond to social and economic issues affecting seniors living in the community and provided additional supports to help ensure the safety of residents in seniors' lodges. Our key initiatives included the following. We provided \$30 million to seniors' lodge operators to cover incremental COVID-19

related costs, including staffing, cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment. We worked with Labour and Immigration and Health to implement the critical worker benefit, which provided \$4.9 million to more than 3,770 seniors' lodge staff, ensured that eligible seniors continued to receive financial assistance without interruption, and maintained income-tested benefits for individuals who had difficulty filing their tax return on time due to the restrictions.

We supported the development and implementation of the collaborative online resources and education Alberta online knowledge hub, also known as CORE Alberta, to which the ministry provided a \$150,000 grant. This platform is used to engage and connect community senior-serving organizations on issues such as tax filing, transportation options, support for caregivers, and elder abuse. From its May 2020 launch to the end of the fiscal year CORE Alberta gained more than 650 members.

We co-ordinated the province-wide delivery of free face masks to community-based senior-serving organizations, increased flexibility for grant recipients to reallocate funding to address the immediate needs of seniors during the pandemic, supported the application review process led by Community and Social Services, or CSS, to provide \$30 million in emergency pandemic support funding through the family and community support services program to more than 460 organizations. The funding helped to address the social isolation of seniors; provided emotional support, delivery services, and co-ordination of services; and helped ensure that basic needs were met, including food security.

Seniors and Housing also participated in a crossministry review of the civil society fund, led by CSS, to provide \$7 million in funding to support 21 civil society organizations to build a more successful civil society sector. The ministry hosted regular minister and deputy minister calls with senior-serving organizations, housing community partners, and representatives from Health and Alberta Health Services to share information and hear about challenges and best practices. We also conducted six telephone town halls about the pandemic, all hosted by Minister Pon and attended by either the chief medical officer of health or the deputy chief medical officer of health.

Now to our housing division. Seniors and Housing is responsible for Alberta's seniors' lodges and funding affordable housing. Affordable housing is delivered through our ongoing partnerships with provincial housing providers. In 2020-2021 this included 91 housing management bodies that operate housing programs throughout the province along with municipalities and nonprofit and private, for-profit housing providers. During that same period more than 110,000 Albertans lived in 57,000 government-subsidized housing units. The ministry works to ensure a sustainable housing system through two funding envelopes, capital maintenance and renewal and family supports and housing.

We provided \$182.3 million in capital funding, including \$39.1 million in grants to increase and maintain the supply of affordable housing. We completed 10 projects and partially completed two more, for a total of 705 new housing units. Capital spending also included \$53.4 million through the capital maintenance and renewal program for planned repair, replacement, and maintenance.

The ministry launched the redesigned Indigenous housing capital program, or IHCP, in July 2020, providing more autonomy and flexibility for Indigenous governments and organizations to design, build, and operate affordable housing. Capital plan 2020 included \$32 million in IHCP funding. Four projects were announced in 2020-2021, totalling \$13.1 million, which will create 68 affordable rental units for Indigenous peoples.

Through the rent assistance programs \$58.5 million was provided for 8,300 households in need of affordable accommodation and

market rental housing. Announced in March 2021, the redesigned rent supplement program offers two benefits, a long-term benefit for those most in need and a new temporary benefit for working Albertans and those who may be between jobs.

To maximize the ministry's share of federal funds, we worked with our federal partners to apply \$22.6 million in federal funding for provincial housing programs. Seniors and Housing also concluded an agreement with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on a Canada housing benefit addendum to claim federal funding of \$222 million over eight years for rent supplements to be directly provided to tenants in market housing.

**8:10**

The last item I would like to mention concerning our housing division is the Affordable Housing Review Panel, appointed in July 2020. After consulting with key stakeholders and Albertans, the panel recommended that government redefine its role in affordable housing. The panel submitted its final report to Minister Pon in October 2020, and the government accepted all of the panel's 19 recommendations.

Now I will turn to the seniors and strategic services division. Seniors and Housing provides several income assistance programs for seniors with low income. In 2021 the Alberta seniors' benefit provided \$316.3 million in monthly financial assistance to more than 170,000 seniors to assist with living expenses. The special needs assistance for seniors program provided reimbursement for a range of health and personal supports, totalling \$13.2 million, to about 26,300 seniors. The supplementary accommodation benefit provided \$81.4 million in support to more than 13,000 seniors with low income living in long-term care or designated supportive living. The seniors' home adaptation and repair program provided 530 loans and 313 grants, totalling \$7 million, to allow eligible seniors to finance home repairs and adaptations. The seniors' property tax deferral program provided almost 2,300 low-interest loans, totalling \$8.3 million, to eligible senior homeowners so they could defer all or part of their property taxes.

The division is also responsible for developing policy and engaging with seniors, stakeholders, and communities to support diverse seniors populations. In addition to COVID-related measures, the division also works to address ageism, prevent elder abuse, and to recognize seniors' vital and ongoing contributions to Alberta. Other key supports included \$1.4 million in grant funding to address the needs of a growing seniors population, about 670,000 in Alberta as of March 31, 2021. These investments focused on priority issues such as social isolation, elder abuse prevention, including a \$750,000 grant to the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council to improve case management over two years.

Seniors and Housing also continued to advance red tape reduction initiatives that have produced positive changes for Albertans accessing our programs. For example, in March we introduced a fast, easy, and secure online application for seniors' financial benefits. The ministry completed its work to automatically enrol recipients of assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, into seniors' financial assistance programs upon turning 65. About 1,600 AISH recipients were enrolled between July 2020 and March 2021. We worked to reduce the administrative and reporting requirements for housing management bodies.

In 2020-21 we supported Alberta communities to host virtual Seniors' Week events and hosted a flag-raising ceremony to acknowledge the Day of Older Persons in Alberta on October 1. We conducted 23 videoconferences with the Medically At-risk Driver Centre, with more than 140 representatives from senior-serving organizations. We co-led a caregiver support working group with Health to support the needs of caregivers, and we

hosted a minister's advisory committee for seniors and conversations with police services, community organizations, and immigrant-serving organizations that will help inform future actions to address elder abuse. Finally, I would like to mention that Minister Pon co-chaired the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum during the fiscal year.

The seniors and strategic services division also provided secretariat support and co-ordinated cross-ministry efforts to assist Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces. The liaison, Leduc-Beaumont MLA Brad Rutherford, works to improve the experience of military members, military families, and veterans in Alberta. In 2020-21 the liaison provided leadership and direction and raised awareness on issues faced by Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, and military families. The liaison also participated in the Homes for Heroes funding announcement of \$1.1 million to build a community in Edmonton to be used as transitional housing for homeless veterans, and along with the Minister of Advanced Education he helped launch a two-year veteran-friendly campus initiative and the Alex Decoteau award of honour.

There are no outstanding recommendations to Seniors and Housing from the office of the Auditor General report, but we would be happy to respond to any questions.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee, Chair. I'm happy to answer your questions.

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

We'll now move to the Auditor General. Your time begins when your remarks start, and you have five minutes.

**Mr. Wylie:** Well, good morning, committee members and management of the ministry. It's great to be with you this morning. As the deputy said, we do not have any outstanding recommendations to this ministry. This is one of four ministries within the GOA that does not have any outstanding recommendations.

I would just like to highlight the one piece of work that we do, and that is that we do financial statement audits, as the committee is aware. We did complete within the last fiscal year an audit of the Alberta Social Housing Corporation for its year ended March 31, 2021, and there were no significant issues with that audit. It was a clean audit opinion.

Chair, that will conclude my opening comments. As I said, very brief this morning.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wylie.

We will now move over to our various questioning rotations. Just a reminder to folks that, obviously, we are in the in-session two-hour meeting structure. We begin with the Official Opposition with 12 minutes. I am seeing the hon. Member for St. Albert. Your time begins when you start speaking.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, first big snowstorm of the year; it's cold outside, and meanwhile homelessness is surging. In September 2020 the government updated the policy manual for income supports and changed eligibility for something called the supplemental benefit for additional shelter allowance. Now, I understand that this is with the Ministry of Community and Social Services. However, this has pushed many Albertans into poverty and onto the street, yet outcome 2 of this annual report is to make housing more affordable and accessible to Albertans. My first question is simple. You're the ministry responsible for housing and the most vulnerable in our society. Do you have or did you have then an estimate of how many additional people would be on the street because of this policy change?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you for the member's question.

Chair, just to confirm the protocol, am I to state my name every time we answer a question?

**The Chair:** There's no need. It's sort of by default. *Hansard* will be able to identify you.

**Ms Sadownik:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Again, thank you for the question. The answer is: no, we do not have that data on what the result would be from a homelessness numbers perspective.

**Ms Renaud:** You mentioned in your opening comments some of the work you did with your partner ministries. I'm assuming that Community and Social Services is one of those partner ministries. Was there any discussion, in this fiscal that we're looking at, about the impact of policy decisions around housing made in a different partner ministry that would impact Seniors and Housing?

**Ms Sadownik:** We do have regular conversations, as you say, with our partner ministries, including Community and Social Services. They're a key partner for us. There are established tables where there is sharing of information about policies going forward for a decision. Not having been with the ministry at that time, I'm not aware of any conversation that was had about this particular policy shift. I would anticipate, given normal protocols, that that would be the case. However . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Sorry to interrupt. At any of your policy table discussions were there any discussions in the fiscal year that we're covering, any discussions whatsoever, about policies that would be made in a partner ministry that would impact housing need in Alberta, things like losing a shelter allowance?

**Ms Sadownik:** Again, Member, I would anticipate that we do have ADM-level and deputy minister level tables where we have conversations for items going to policy committee and ultimately to cabinet for a decision. In the 2021 year I would anticipate that this would have been one of the items, but I would have to go back and look at the record, at the minutes, to let you know if that was the case.

**Ms Renaud:** If you would agree to table any minutes that covered any discussion about policy changes in CSS that would impact housing need, that would be terrific. If you'd commit to doing that.

**Ms Sadownik:** I will commit to finding out if that was a topic discussed and get back to you.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. We'll move on.

In 2020-21 you note that there were 20,000 people on the wait-list for housing. More recently, on November 1 of this year, the minister announced that the list was another 24,000 people. That's a 20 per cent increase in just one year during a pandemic. Obviously, there were some big changes in the year, in the annual report in the year that this report covers. Does the ministry know or have any sense of where the additional 4,000 people on that wait-list are coming from, and was it a result – I mean, I'm hearing the deputy minister say that there were no conversations specifically about shelter benefit. But can you tell me if you think, if you believe that any of these increases are due to changes to income support, whether that's deindexing of AISH, seniors' benefits, or income support, or the removal of supplemental benefits?

**8:20**

**Ms Sadownik:** As you know, 2020-21 was a pretty challenging year for a number of reasons. It would be very difficult to make a

direct correlation between a specific policy change and an outcome such as a wait-list given the economic situation, the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing, and a number of shifts happening at various levels.

**Ms Renaud:** Sorry. I'm just going to cut in. Looking at the annual report, it mentions again and again some of the supports that were in place to deal with the pandemic. Some of those things were income supports, federal income supports. There were additional shelter dollars, rapid housing, all of those things, yet at the same time period the wait-list grew just an astronomical amount. There are an additional 4,000 people on a wait-list. That can't be normal. It certainly is sort of questionable during a pandemic. Wouldn't you agree?

**Ms Sadownik:** I would agree with that increase in terms of the wait-list and how we track it. What I'm saying is that it's very difficult to identify specifically what contributed to that, and I don't have data to answer that question in a detailed sort of way. That said . . .

**Ms Renaud:** So here's a simple question: do you think that having your income reduced would impact your ability to secure housing? Would that impact the need for affordable housing if your income was reduced?

**Ms Sadownik:** In order to have access to affordable housing, there is an income test, yes. When the wait-list increases, it is likely a result of individuals who are now eligible.

**Ms Renaud:** I would suggest a direct correlation between, you know, a loss of income by deindexing and removal of supplementals – there's going to be a direct correlation to the need for affordable housing, correct? That's what I'm hearing you say.

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes. Income is absolutely a test for eligibility for affordable housing, and there are lots of reasons why individuals' incomes may be impacted, particularly in that fiscal year.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm just going to go back because I find it's somewhat alarming to me that these partner ministries aren't discussing really foundational issues like income support, like basic income to be able to afford to live, to buy food. Did the ministry, your ministry, not talk to the Ministry of Community and Social Services in advance of any of the supplemental cuts, the cuts to shelter allowances on income support? Now, that would directly impact someone's ability to pay for housing. If you did at all meet with CSS or anyone in your ministry met with the ministry, your partner ministry CSS, to discuss this, would you please table those specific minutes?

**Ms Sadownik:** Member, just to be clear on what my response was, we do have established forums where policy items are shared at various levels amongst ministries. My expectation would be that an item such as this would have been discussed in the fiscal year '20-21 or whenever the decision was moving forward. Not having been at those tables, I can't confirm for you right now that that item was discussed, but I've committed to go back and find out if that was on the deputy minister's community and family policy committee agenda, and I will confirm that after the meeting.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you.

For such an important cut, like the cut that I've described, the removal of shelter allowances, there had to be a decision by elected officials. I mean, there just had to be. It would have to be a Treasury Board decision because that's how decisions get made in this

system of government. I want to know when that decision document went forward from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to Treasury Board. Did the ministry responsible for housing have any input, and did you provide any analysis of the cuts to shelter allowance and what the impact would be on the number of people that are houseless?

**Mr. Turton:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Sure. The hon. member.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. The member across is asking not about implementation but about the development of policy. We're supposed to be talking about specific items in the business plan or in the documents before us, specifically in the years that were mentioned. I haven't heard a single page reference, a single point in terms of the actual, how the programs are being rolled out, that the member has been referencing. It's talking more about ongoing policy negotiations. I think it's just out of scope of what we're supposed to be talking about here in Public Accounts.

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the member was clear that we're talking about changes that did happen within the year that this current committee is reviewing, the fiscal year 2020-21, and that those changes had direct implications on the work of this ministry that we are currently hearing from today. Specifically, the member mentioned that the outcome related to housing is directly in the annual report. The annual report references wait-lists for housing. All of that is completely within the scope of this committee's review.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

I think what I'm going to say here is that, on the one hand, on page 27 we have \$48 million for family and community housing, \$58 million for rent supplements, \$17 million for specialized, and all of those programs are in some way, shape, or form rent geared to income. So income is generally calculated, and that will be a driver of those expenditures. In that sense, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is correct. However, in another sense, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain is also correct in that we don't really have a page number reference. What I'm going to ask the hon. member to do is simply move on because the deputy has endeavoured to table those conversations, and we will move on to a different topic, I think, now.

**Ms Renaud:** Great. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let's go back to talk about the number of people that are on the wait-list. There are currently 24,000 Albertans on a wait-list for housing. Can you tell me, of the 24,000, how many you define as special needs – that's the wording you use in the annual report – or have disabilities? If you don't have that number, you can just agree to table that at a later date so we can move on.

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you for the question. I'm going to ask Assistant Deputy Minister David Williams to answer that question.

**The Chair:** You're on mute, Mr. Williams.

**Mr. David Williams:** Okay. Sorry. Can you hear me now?

**Ms Renaud:** If you could just table that number, that would be fine.

**Mr. David Williams:** Hi. Sorry. My name is David Williams. Just to answer the question, we receive the wait-list numbers from all of our housing management bodies. They do not track at the level to



ask about an individual's disability or needs for accessibility when they apply, so that's not a number that we track or have available.

**Ms Renaud:** Am I understanding this correctly? There is no mechanism whatsoever in the government of Alberta to determine if someone needs accessible housing because of a disability.

**Mr. David Williams:** We have a number of units that are accessible, and again this is across all of our . . .

**Ms Renaud:** No. My question is how we determine the number of people on the wait-list waiting for housing that have a – excuse me, Mr. Williams. I'm just going to take my time back for a second.

**Mr. David Williams:** If they, you know, need an accessible unit, then that's within the housing management provider, that will look for that sort of level of accessibility and meet the needs, but we don't ask people about their disability when they apply for housing.

**Ms Renaud:** Mr. Williams, how do you determine the need for accessible housing if you have no idea how many people need accessible housing?

**Mr. David Williams:** We work with our housing management operators to look for, you know, what they're seeing in terms of needs and accessibility. Again, all of our builds are built to at least what the building code standards are, which include . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Yes. I understand what the building code standards are. Would you be able to commit to . . .

**Mr. David Williams:** . . . and obviously our . . .

**The Chair:** Okay. I'm just going to intervene here, Mr. Williams. Sometimes, when both mics are on, your audio is cutting in and out. We're just going to be mindful of that, and the hon. member and you are going to have to just manage that delay and that lag a little bit better. Okay?

**Ms Renaud:** I'm asking the deputy minister if she would agree to table the accessibility rating of all housing units in Alberta. Other than the building codes, how do you score the accessibility of housing units?

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. I'm sure we can get back to it. Somebody had just called in: (a) we don't know who it is; (b) well, I guess you've been muted by the folks. Just a reminder to mute yourself when you call in, and if you could put in the chat who you are for the record, that would be great.

Now we'll move over to the government side. I am looking at Mr. Turton. Please proceed.

8:30

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much, Ms Sadownik, for coming here today with your entire team. As much as I love to brag about Spruce Grove and Stony Plain – and I will probably do it again today – I know that there are obviously a lot of young families and kids, but obviously seniors and housing are key parts of my constituency as well.

So I'd like to ask a couple of general questions first and then get to everyone's favourite line of questioning, which is COVID-19. I guess it kind of kick-starts some of our general questions. You know, looking through the department's annual report, I made note of a few general and miscellaneous items that I just want to ask about quickly. First of all, on pages 4 to 5 of the annual report it mentions that the ministry works with other orders of government,

housing providers, nonprofits, and the private sector. Can your ministry please expand on this and provide details of this type of collaboration?

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes. Thank you for the question. That section of the report refers to ministry staff working in partnership with affordable housing providers and municipalities to ensure housing options for Albertans with low income and manage housing programs and services. The ministry also works with other orders of government and municipalities to negotiate funding for capital projects such as maintenance, renewal, and new builds. The private sector is becoming more involved in working with housing providers and the ministry to plan and develop new affordable housing as well. We also engage key stakeholders when we are looking to develop or amend policies and programs. For example, the housing management bodies provided input to our revised manual that outlines operating and administration requirements.

**Mr. Turton:** Perfect for that.

My next question, I will admit, was inspired by some of the horrible experiences that are being experienced by our neighbours to the west, out in B.C., with flooding. I just also want to, you know, say that thoughts and prayers are with those families that are affected by the floods in B.C. Regarding the flooding in northern Alberta, which was referred to on page 16 of the annual report, it obviously had a significant impact on many Albertans. Can the department please provide some detail on what the ministry did in response to the flooding to continue serving residents that needed help during that time?

**Ms Sadownik:** In 2020 the ministry staff worked in conjunction with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency through the Provincial Operations Centre to support evacuation and flood mitigation activities during the emergency phase of flood events in both Fort McMurray and Fort Vermilion. We also worked with local housing management bodies and their respective municipalities at that time to respond to the impacts of the flooding in those locations. The immediate response was of course to ensure the safety of residents in affordable housing owned by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation and find relocation options for those who were displaced.

In keeping with the recovery and future plans of the municipality, 15 units of temporary housing were purchased by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation for eligible Fort Vermilion residents as of March 31, 2021. No interim housing was required in Fort McMurray, and ministry staff also worked with housing management bodies and insurance representatives to inspect the damages to the government-owned units and to determine whether repairs, rebuild, or disposition of the units would be required.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you for the description on that. Obviously, when it comes to these types of disasters, for many families it's probably one of the worst days of their entire lives. Thank you to you and your entire team for stepping up and being able to help those families that were in need at such an obviously dire time.

To pivot just a little bit, again, a little bit inspired about Remembrance Day and, obviously, veterans in the military, on page 14 of the annual report it outlines the ministry's role in working with the Canadian Armed Forces members, military institutions, key stakeholders, veterans, military families, and, obviously, reservists here in Alberta. Can the ministry provide more details on what the ministry did during 2020-2021 to support these groups? Obviously, I know this is a key concern for a number of military members in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. They may commute to

the base north of Edmonton, so I just wanted to kind of ask you that question on behalf of many of our members in uniform.

**Ms Sadownik:** In fiscal year 2020-21 the ministry did actively support Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces and worked to meet Alberta's commitments to Seamless Canada. Seamless Canada is a program under Canada's defence policy that's designed to improve alignment of programs and services for military members and their families who are posted in different jurisdictions across Canada as part of their service.

The Veterans Service Centre working group, co-chaired by Community and Social Services and Seniors and Housing, continues to review the needs of veterans without housing in the province and to work with the community to provide them housing and supports through the Veterans Service Centre and Housing Supports project.

Significant research was also undertaken with several departments to explore opportunities for military members and their families to access Canada-wide resources and credentials between provinces and territories. We continue to further develop and update the military families resource web portal on alberta.ca in English and French to help ease the transition of military families moving to and settling in Alberta.

We also supported the liaison's outreach efforts to military and veterans' organizations and participation in commemorative events.

**Mr. Turton:** Perfect for that.

Obviously, a key part of Public Accounts is making sure of that financial oversight, making sure that taxpayer funds have been spent in an appropriate manner. So I guess my follow-up question is: can you please elaborate on what metrics were used to support the success of this support? I understand that you kind of listed off a broad range of positive things your ministry is doing, but obviously those metrics are pretty important because it kind of provides that due diligence from taxpayers' perspective that the funds are being spent well.

**Ms Sadownik:** As you heard, a lot of the emphasis is on providing information and programs. One of the analytics that we monitor is the military families resource web portal on alberta.ca to see what pages are accessed most frequently and where updates may be needed. We also work with Community and Social Services to track usage of the Veterans Service Centre and Housing Supports project.

**Mr. Turton:** Okay. One final general item before I get to our favourite line of questioning. I'd like to know about the variation between the ministry's budget expenditures and the actual expenditures as it appears on the table on page 46 of the annual report. Just wondering if you could potentially speak to this unexpected increase.

**Ms Sadownik:** Yeah. We'll get a little bit into this more if you do ask a question about COVID-19 related costs. The \$6.5 million variance that you see there – our original operating budget was \$728 million, with actual spending at \$734.5 million – is mainly due to in-year approval for additional COVID-19 related costs for seniors' lodges and additional capital grant requirements. This was a total of \$33 million but was partially offset by surpluses in the seniors' financial assistance programs, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting uptake in some of our programs. That was a surplus of about \$24 million.

**Mr. Turton:** Okay. Well, thank you for that description.

Obviously, I have a couple of last questions here about COVID-19 because no meeting here at the Legislature would be complete without at least a couple of references to COVID-19. Obviously,

the pandemic has had a significant impact on every one of us and the families that live in our respective ridings, and I also assume that it would have an impact on the department's 2020-2021 fiscal year. I guess, a couple of questions, starting off with page 13 of the annual report. It outlines the specific initiatives undertaken by the department to address social isolation of seniors. Obviously, I know this is more of a wide-ranging societal question, but obviously we're going to stay focused on seniors for today. My question is: can the department please explain how the ministry addressed this issue, particularly for those seniors in community living?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thanks for the question. I'd like to take this opportunity, first of all, to really thank and acknowledge our partner organizations in civil society. There was a lot done within the government of Alberta and the Department of Seniors and Housing, but a lot of that relied on our civil society organizations stepping up and really working as partners during that year and the COVID pandemic.

With the partnership of those civil society organizations we have continued to explore, develop, and support strategies for diverse populations of seniors with a focus on healthy aging and enhancing care in the community. This includes actions intended to address seniors' social isolation and mental health in addition to ensuring no interruptions to seniors' financial assistance, benefits, and programs. We did find some efficiencies during this period, in fact, to process applications more quickly, so that was a good outcome over that year.

**8:40**

The ministry also provided \$1.4 million in grants for community-based supports to meet the needs of seniors facing a range of issues, including elder abuse, ageism, and social isolation. This included support and funding for the community-based senior-serving sector initiative, which included launching – I mentioned this in my opening remarks – the collaborative online resources and education, or CORE, Alberta digital knowledge hub and allowing aging well in community grant recipients flexibility to implement projects to address the needs of isolated seniors facing food insecurity and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. One example I can share is that the Calgary Chinese Community Service Association amended its community action for seniors project to also address local needs for seniors related to the COVID-19 pandemic by mobilizing community resources to address social isolation and support aging in place with a focus on online programs.

**Mr. Turton:** Perfect. Well, thank you very much for that description.

At this point, before I ask my last question here before time runs out, I just want to give a shout-out to some of the seniors' facilities out in my neck of the woods: the Meridian foundation, St. Michael's, Good Samaritan, Copper Sky. You know, these facilities have done such a fantastic job of looking after their seniors over the last year and a half. Obviously, I want to give a big shout-out to our newest facility out in Stony Plain, Folkstone Manor, which has a certain number of suites dedicated to our men and women that have served in uniform.

My last question is continuing with this theme. The seniors' congregate settings were greatly affected by the pandemic during the 2020-2021 year, so what did the ministry do to protect seniors in community living, and what lessons were learned during this time?

**Ms Sadownik:** I mentioned previously that we supported community-based senior-serving organizations and the CORE Alberta online knowledge hub, which is a website to enable

information sharing and collaboration across organizations. Evaluation we've done since then shows that the platform is effectively supporting organizations to in turn promote positive outcomes for seniors; 85 per cent of core Alberta . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you, Deputy. I'm sure we will get back to it.

I'll now move over to the Official Opposition. We're in block 2: 12 minutes, beginning with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Madam Chair. According to ministry data there are 10,450 units of seniors' lodges in Alberta where people are living in congregate settings. Of those seniors living in the 10,450 units, how many were infected with COVID-19, and how many died in the fiscal period that's under review today?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thanks for the question. We are looking into if we have on hand the specific data. I will say that we do track – I believe it started daily and eventually moved to weekly – the status of COVID-19 infections in our lodges. That did include tracking of new infection rates for both staff and those residing in the lodge and when people did recover. So we do have that data, and we have been tracking it over time. We're just checking if we have it at our fingertips to get into the record now.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you. I'll perhaps move on to my next question, and we can provide an update on the data as the team works to find it.

Now, page 16 of the annual report talks about providing \$30 million to seniors' lodges to cover eligible incremental expenditures due to COVID-19. You specifically mention PPE. You know, what else did you do to reduce risk of transmission? You talk about including staffing. How many additional staff did you hire, for example? Can you be more specific about exactly what you provided, to whom, and when with that \$30 million?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thanks again for the question. As you say, we did provide an additional \$30 million that did cover personal protective equipment, staffing, training. A lot of the requirements were site specific, so we worked very closely with Alberta Health Services and had very regular conversations with those operating lodges, the housing management bodies, to get clarification from the chief medical officer of health about what the expectations were, what the requirements were, and what they had within their discretion in terms of putting additional protections in place. So every lodge and community had sort of their own individual needs and did have some autonomy to apply beyond what the absolute requirements are under the medical emergency or the health emergency situation additional measures in place. Some examples might be: for visitors . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry, Deputy Minister. I appreciate hearing that you have worked with the chief medical officer of health and they provided site-specific recommendations, I guess, for every individual building. Can the ministry commit to tabling for this committee a list of every health recommendation that was provided for every site and how this \$30 million was spent to make those health measures implemented?

**Ms Sadownik:** This specific request, Member, it would be quite detailed in that there's quite a bit of variation. We absolutely can provide the amounts provided to each of the housing management bodies and even the specific locations. So that's something I can definitely commit to get back to you with.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I appreciate that. I would like a list of the specific recommendations that the chief medical officer of health made for each site as well. You know, transparency should be no barrier. I understand that it's a lot of work, but we are elected members and we are here to work on behalf of the citizens of Alberta to make sure the government is protecting them. So please feel free to provide all of the information that I've asked the ministry to provide.

Now, I do have one question that perhaps you could answer for me today. Did the Ministry of Seniors and Housing ever ask the chief medical officer of health about how COVID is transmitted? Specifically, did you seek advice on whether or not COVID is airborne, and if so, how that . . .

**Mr. Turton:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Sure. Yes.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Under 23(b), again when the hon. member is talking about questions to the chief medical officer, I'm still waiting for a page number in the annual report or a line item in the business plan. What he is referencing, you know, the line of questioning that he is pursuing is outside of the scope of this committee and, I believe, even of the ministry. Again, I would just hope that the hon. member can stay on task in terms of the actual reason we're sitting here in Public Accounts.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Over to the other side, please.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that, you know, pages 16 and 17 of the annual report outline the COVID-19 response of the ministry with respect to a number of measures, including seniors' lodges, and of course we know that outcome 1, which is on page 19 of this annual report, specifically addresses making life better for Alberta seniors and their caregivers.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Yeah. I think what we have here is a matter of debate on how \$30 million was spent in terms of the response to COVID-19. If the hon. member could keep his comments to within those parameters, that would be great. We'll let him get to the end of his question before we call a point of order, I think, and the hon. member will obviously cite page numbers whenever he can.

Thank you.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you. So with respect to the – you know, you provided \$30 million in operational funding, you provided a significant amount of capital maintenance and renewal money to Seniors and Housing projects. How much of that was spent on improving ventilation in seniors' care and housing that the ministry oversees?

8:50

**Ms Sadownik:** In order to allocate our capital maintenance and renewal dollars, we do work directly with the housing management bodies and seek their advice on what the priorities are. Now, understanding that everybody was clearly following the chief medical officer of health's orders and requirements and that they would be looking into what would be the needs or change requirements in their own facilities, we did not track ventilation requirements as an ask; however, that would be within the scope of what housing management bodies could prioritize in that period or any period of time as part of the expenditure of their CMR dollars. So there's not a breakout.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I mean, we are in the midst of a global pandemic. Seniors and Housing is obviously in a privileged position in terms of having access to the best information for how to prevent COVID transmission. Did Seniors and Housing ever undertake to tie any strings to the capital maintenance and renewal dollars that were being spent this year, or did you work with the housing management bodies to say, “Hey, we need to make sure that our capital maintenance and renewal programs are focused on preventing COVID transmission this year?”

**Ms Sadownik:** Absolutely. We work regularly with housing management bodies, and as I said, we look to them to identify what the priority needs are within their facilities.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, then. Could you commit to tabling for this committee a detailed breakdown of how the capital maintenance and renewal money was spent in total and, like, give us an entire breakdown of those capital maintenance and renewal dollars and highlight, of those projects that were funded through capital maintenance and renewal, how those projects affected the transmission of COVID in the housing?

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes. We can agree to table that information about how the capital maintenance and renewal dollars were allocated across seniors’ lodges in the fiscal year 2020-21.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much.

Now, you also house people with disabilities in 1,800 units of special-needs housing in Alberta. How many of those people contracted COVID and died in the fiscal 2020-21 year?

**Ms Sadownik:** Our tracking of COVID-related infections across our programs is quite different given the nature of the different housing we provide. Along the spectrum there is everything from self-contained to completely independent and is just an affordable housing consideration, the eligibility being income based, as we talked about earlier, and then we have housing where there are supports provided. For that housing that’s along the spectrum where it’s independent living, I did not . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We’ll move over to block 2. Nine minutes, please, Mr. Turton.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and again thank you very much, Ms Sadownik, for being here. I just would like you to elaborate a little bit on the answer that you started giving before we ran out of time. Just to refresh, the question was about how congregate settings were greatly affected by the pandemic during the 2020-21 year, so I was just hoping you could elaborate on what the ministry did to protect seniors in community living and the lessons learned during this time.

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you for the question. The ministry hosted regular minister and deputy minister calls with senior-serving organizations, housing providers, and lodge operators to share immediate updates and information, to identify needs, and to hear about challenges and best practices during the pandemic. This included, and I’ve talked about this briefly already, six telephone town halls about COVID-19 with ministry stakeholders, the chief or deputy chief medical officer of health, mental health experts, and Alberta Health Services representatives to get clarity on accountability and implementation of public health orders and to respond to concerns.

The ministry also promoted and supported resources for senior-serving organizations to address the needs of seniors such as the

CORE Alberta online knowledge hub to help community-based senior-serving organizations co-ordinate efforts to address the needs of seniors in Alberta during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. We also developed guidance for seniors’ centres and senior-serving organizations for during the pandemic and relaunch.

We learned that promoting ongoing communication and collaboration is key to ensuring timely and responsive supports to seniors in need. This included with our seniors provider stakeholders as well as with our partner ministries. We also learned that it’s important for partner ministries to have an understanding of each others’ core businesses and stakeholder clients. Having information quickly available online and electronically provided the necessary clarity to help ensure measures were in place to protect the safety and well-being of residents. We also learned that responding to a pandemic in seniors’ lodges requires both short-term and long-term strategies to address the needs of both residents and lodge staff.

**Mr. Turton:** Awesome. Well, thank you very much for that descriptive answer there, Ms Sadownik.

As much as I’m completely biased about Spruce Grove-Stony Plain being the greatest riding in the entire province, I’d like to hand it over to the member representing another riding that is almost as good as Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, and that is the amazing Member Jackie Lovely. Go ahead.

**Ms Lovely:** Well, thank you, MLA Turton. I do appreciate those kind words. Yes, I am very happy to share with you all that I have almost double the provincial average number of seniors in my community, and Bethany is one of the largest employers in the community. I’m very grateful for the work that you and your teams do. I’ll just get to the questions now.

My first question. The desired outcome 1 for the department is “Make Life Better for Alberta Seniors and their Caregivers.” In light of this outcome I have some questions about how the department achieved this in 2020-21, which are listed on page 13 of the annual report. Can the ministry tell the committee what services and/or supports were provided by the special needs assistance for seniors program during those years? And please explain why this was undersubscribed during the year under review.

**Ms Sadownik:** The special needs assistance for seniors, or SNA, program, as we often refer to it, provides financial supports to eligible seniors with low income for critical needs, including things like appliances. That can include fridges, washers, dryers, specific personal and health support such as medical appointment expenses, diabetic supplies, CPAP machines, and assistance with prescription costs. The SNA program is regulated, and all eligible applicants receive assistance. Therefore, spending is based on the actual needs of seniors with low income. There’s no limitation on this spending based on the budget. In general all seniors who are eligible for the Alberta seniors’ benefit are also eligible for these SNA benefits. In fiscal year 2020-21 about 26,300 Alberta seniors accessed the SNA program, receiving an average benefit of approximately \$500.

As you noted, MLA Lovely, we did not spend the entire amount that we had forecasted or budgeted for 2020-21, and that was essentially or primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and seniors who would be eligible, and maybe under normal circumstances seeking out some of these supports, not being comfortable having somebody in-home, for example, so pursuing those types of benefits, in-home services or deliveries such as housekeeping. There was also less long-distance travel for medical and things like podiatry. The reductions in costs were primarily due to the COVID-19 related situation.

If I might, MLA Lovely and Chair, I do have the answer to the previous question. Would this be an okay time in terms of numbers?

**Ms Lovely:** Sure. Please go ahead.

**Ms Sadownik:** Okay. Going back to MLA Schmidt's question about COVID impacts in lodges: in fiscal year '20-21 there were 63 deaths in lodges. There were 660 infected staff and residents. That's both staff and residents in lodges.

**Ms Lovely:** I'll resume my questioning here. Is the ministry able to provide details on how this program and funding compared to other Canadian jurisdictions during 2020-21?

**Ms Sadownik:** This SNA benefit: Alberta is actually the only province where seniors with low income can access a benefit like the Alberta seniors' benefit through one window. Enrolment in the Alberta seniors' benefit program is leveraged to also enrol a senior in to the SNA program. This reduces the need for multiple application forms. Seniors are also able to quickly obtain reimbursement for expenses if they take advantage of our online service to make their claims.

9:00

In March 2021 Seniors and Housing introduced online application service options for seniors' financial assistance programs. This fast and easy, secure online application enrolls seniors into the Alberta seniors' benefit, the special needs assistance for seniors, and Alberta Health's dental and optical assistance and coverage for seniors programs. More than 2,000 seniors' financial assistance applications are received each month.

**Ms Lovely:** All right. Thank you for the answer.

There was a decrease to the supplementary accommodation benefit program for seniors. Can the ministry explain the importance of this program and why there was a decrease during 2020-2021?

**Ms Sadownik:** I talked a little bit earlier briefly about the supplementary accommodation benefit, so just as a reminder: seniors with low income living in long-term care or designated supportive living facilities can be eligible for a monthly income supplement to assist with accommodation changes. This supplementary accommodation benefit is based on ensuring that seniors living in these facilities have at least \$322 remaining after their accommodation costs and monthly disposable income. That includes rooms, meals, and housekeeping. These funds help pay for items such as clothes, haircuts, other personal expenses.

The decrease in the grant payments in the supplementary accommodation benefit was due to a delay in the annual long-term care accommodation rate increase. Normally it would happen in July; it did not happen until October, so that resulted in some savings. The accommodation charges are determined by Alberta Health and typically increase in July. They are indexed to the Alberta consumer price index. Additionally, typically the number of supplementary accommodation benefit recipients grows year to year, so we would have done a forecast or a budget expectation ask based on that growth. In 2020-21 the number of seniors receiving this benefit . . .

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

We will now go on to block 3. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Deputy, for being here today. I'll just indicate quickly that if I do cut you off at any time, it's not to be rude; it's only because we do have very limited time to talk today.

I want to ask you a little bit about the Alberta seniors' benefit. As we know, the Alberta seniors' benefit helps our lowest income seniors, who are probably some of our most vulnerable population. Earlier in this government's mandate a decision was made by the government to suspend indexing of this benefit, so every year this benefit – basically, its value and its purchasing power get eaten away, and it gets decreased. We've seen through this pandemic, of course, that inflation is certainly a problem as well as we've seen the particular vulnerability of seniors and low-income seniors during this time.

As of this coming year, for 2022, we know that the Alberta seniors' benefit will be worth 10 per cent less in terms of its purchasing power than what it was when the current government took office. I'd like to ask about this benefit a little bit, and according to your report, the annual report indicates that 170,000 seniors in Alberta are receiving this benefit. In the fiscal year which is under consideration for this committee, did your department undertake any analysis of what inflation was doing to the purchasing power of this Alberta seniors' benefit?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you. That's an excellent question. I agree that is the case, that there was a pause put on indexing for programs across the government of Alberta. That was in effect in the year '20-21, and part of the thinking going into that, I understand, is around prioritizing spending to ensure sustainability of important programs. We have been able to maintain – and that was a platform commitment of this current government – seniors' benefits, so we did not have any reduction or loss in benefits to seniors during this fiscal year.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Deputy. I agree that it was not necessarily cut, but you can understand that for seniors and low-income seniors if how much they can purchase with that benefit goes down, it certainly feels like a cut. What I'm asking you as the deputy is: did you take an analysis of that purchasing power of that benefit and what the impact of inflation was for seniors who were purchasing groceries? Costs were going up. You know, did you do any analysis in your ministry about the effect of that deindexing on Alberta seniors' benefits?

**Ms Sadownik:** We have ongoing conversations with the senior-serving organizations and key stakeholders to understand where pressures may be, where our programs are working well, and where there are opportunities for improvement, and '20-21 would be no different in that through our minister's advisory committee or council for seniors, minister's tours, where she visited with a number of organizations, we listened very openly to where there may be challenges. Certainly, the cost of living I think we all can acknowledge has gone up and is a consideration. We do have the opportunity to continue to look at our programs and continuously improve and make some decisions about what priorities are and where we need to revisit some of our benefit levels. In the year '20-21 we did not collect the specific data that you are asking for. But, as I said, we do have ongoing conversations, and we strive for continuous improvement in all of our programs, including our benefits.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. If I'm clear on the answer, then, Deputy, you're saying that the ministry did not collect information about the impact of inflation and the purchasing power specifically of the Alberta seniors' benefit other than sort of the general conversations about – of course, it's been a tough year for people but particularly for the most vulnerable, which are our low-income seniors. I'm wondering, then: on what basis would you be able to really do a review if you're saying that you're going to be doing a constant

review of this to see what's going on? I mean, if you don't have that information, how are you going to put forward, I guess, a case or a position about whether or not indexing should be reinforced for this benefit?

**Mr. Walker:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** Sure. Yes.

**Mr. Walker:** Standing Order 23(c). The member is persisting in needless . . .

**Ms Sadownik:** I will . . .

**The Chair:** We have a point of order on the floor. Sorry.

**Mr. Walker:** The member opposite is persisting in needless repetition. There's been a back and forth here with, mind you, also very vague, no clear page citation or a line item number on this. I'm just asserting that she's engaging in needless repetition. I'd ask her, through you, Chair, to move on and get more clear with citing page numbers and citations.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Understood, hon. member.

On the other side, please.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yeah. Well, just for the benefit of all of the members of the committee, my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud is clearly asking about the seniors' benefit, line 3.2 in the budget, presented on page 81. If the member wants to open up the book and actually have a look at what the matter is here today, he can see it clearly there. I think that the member is well within her rights to ask what the impact has been. You know, the members opposite clearly talk about implementing programs all the time. The amount of the seniors' benefit has a significant effect, so I think that the member should be allowed to continue her line of questioning.

**The Chair:** I mean, this is a fairly large expenditure out of the ministry, so how it was spent is fair ball within the guardrails of what we're here to do. If the hon. member will keep her comments to within how the money was spent and how the decisions were made to spend what and when, that is much appreciated.

Please continue.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The ministry, you know, on page 21 of the annual report indicates that the primary outcome, outcome 1, is to make life better for Alberta seniors and their caregivers. Obviously, the intent of this benefit is to assist low-income seniors. I think the deputy has acknowledged that there were obviously cost-of-living increases, as there were for all Albertans, during that period of time, but that would significantly impact the life of Alberta seniors and if it's better. So my question is: if you haven't collected information about sort of the purchasing power of that benefit, how are you going to assess whether or not you're actually making life better for Alberta seniors?

**Ms Sadownik:** I'm going to ask ADM of seniors and strategic services, Suzanne Anselmo, to respond to the question.

Over to you, Suzanne.

9:10

**Ms Anselmo:** Thank you very much, Deputy Minister, and thank you for the question, committee member. Currently the division of seniors and strategic services looks at the Alberta seniors' benefit in context. As the committee knows, the ASB program is income

tested and helps protect seniors most in need by supplementing federal income support programs for those with lower incomes. As you know, it is a regulated program where all eligible seniors who apply would be provided benefits, and the reason why I mention this is that we must look at the Alberta seniors' benefit in context of its relationship to federal benefits. That said, we are monitoring how the Alberta seniors' benefit contributes to seniors' income as it relates to measures around food security, housing security, et cetera. So . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Sorry, Ms Anselmo; I didn't mean to cut you off.

If you can then – if you've said that you're monitoring that and you're assessing that, would you be able to table with this committee any assessment of the value of that Alberta seniors' benefit for the fiscal year 2020-21?

**Ms Anselmo:** Yes.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you.

Deputy, if I may ask, so then during this fiscal year under consideration were any plans drawn up by the ministry to – as you indicated, the deindexing was a, quote, pause, although what we're hearing is that it's not very clear if that pause is ever going to be lifted. So I'm questioning: in this fiscal year did you put forward any plans to Treasury Board to argue for reindexing the Alberta seniors' benefit, or is the ministry, I guess, content to accept that the Alberta seniors' benefit loses value every year and Alberta seniors have less purchasing power?

**Ms Sadownik:** A policy decision was made, including a legislative amendment, to pause indexing across programs within the government of Alberta. That indexing remains in effect, and we have not as an individual ministry challenged or requested a review of that policy. We do have many other mechanisms and means to continue supporting the senior-serving sector and seniors in Alberta. So that's part of the ongoing conversations, you know: what can we do through some of our targeted grants or working collaboratively with our partners to support seniors in Alberta? But the answer to that specific question is no. That is not something that we pursued in '20-21.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Deputy. I appreciate that. I think part of the challenge, too, is that, I understand, there are actually no performance measures for this outcome 1 in your annual report, about making life better for seniors. There are a couple of performance indicators, but there are no actual performance measures. You know, I think this might be a very good example of where a performance measure would be very valuable, to actually assess the value of the benefit and how it's actually serving your objectives as a ministry. So I'll put that out there for your consideration.

I just want to move back to the question about deaths in seniors' lodges. You indicated 63 deaths in seniors' lodges and 660 seniors were infected. So going back to the annual report where it specifically talks about the investment of \$30 million in a COVID response in seniors' lodges, can you, you know – I guess my question is: given those numbers, 63 deaths, 660 seniors infected, did you use or why didn't you use any of that COVID money to put HEPA filters in these congregate care settings? And did you ever get advice from the chief medical officer of health? Did the ministry get advice to do that, to put HEPA filters in?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move over to the government side for block 3.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you so much. In discussing seniors, I think it would be remiss not to discuss the very real issue of elder abuse, particularly during such a trying year. What did the ministry do to address this issue during 2020-21, and what were the measures put in place to protect elder Albertans?

**Ms Sadownik:** In addition to the financial assistance – I talked earlier about \$1.4 million in grant funding that was spent on community-based supports to meet the needs of seniors facing a range of issues, and that included elder abuse as well as ageism and social isolation. Hearing from our partners, the potential for elder abuse was higher during the pandemic due to seniors' isolation, so we also provided a \$750,000 two-year grant to the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council for enhancements to case management by Alberta's co-ordinated community response models to address elder abuse across the province. In the 2021 year \$400,000 – so that was year one of that total \$750,000 – was provided to the council.

To support service providers to address and prevent elder abuse at the community level, we also provided webinars. They were developed and implemented in collaboration with civil society organizations within the elder abuse prevention group on the collaborative online resources and education Alberta hub, or what we often refer to as CORE, and there was a great deal of positive feedback about those webinars and the training that was provided to community-based, senior-serving organizations.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you for the answer.

Page 13 of the annual report notes that 1.4 million taxpayer dollars were provided for strategic investment on multiple items, including transportation. Can the ministry provide details on the work done to enhance transportation for seniors during 2020-21, particularly in rural areas?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you for the question. As I'm sure most of us are aware, access to transportation is really critical, particularly for those seniors who wish to stay in their communities and age at home. The need can be greater in rural areas, in particular where seniors must travel longer distances for medical appointments, errands, and to socialize. Transportation is especially critical for the 90 per cent of Alberta seniors who live in the community not in congregate care settings, and they often rely on supports such as medication and meal delivery, home care, ride services, and home maintenance supports to remain independent and in their home. Providing affordable, accessible transportation and mobility services for seniors is a complex issue requiring an integrated approach, so as I said earlier, we rely pretty heavily on the partnerships that we are very fortunate to have with community-based organizations, particularly in rural areas.

The SNA benefit also provides financial assistance for seniors with the cost of medical trips greater than 80 kilometres round trip to see a medical specialist or for medical testing or treatment. Grant funding was provided as well to the Drive Happiness Seniors Association to expand transportation options for seniors in the province, with a focus on widening service areas around larger centres to assist seniors by providing rides to medical appointments, shopping, banking, and to visit friends and family.

Funding to the University of Alberta's Medically At-Risk Driver Centre, or MARD, is helping to improve transportation options available to seniors through information sharing and collaboration, and in April 2020 the MARD Centre hosted 23 video teleconferences with over 140 representatives from alternative service transportation providers, family and community support services, and seniors with collaboration amongst providers in the early months of the pandemic. A key finding was that rural and

remote alternate transportation providers experienced a substantial decrease in revenue and static or increasing costs. In response, the MARD Centre provided grant funding to 23 rural and remote alternate transportation providers.

This same centre and other alternate transportation providers also used the CORE, our online platform, to address transportation barriers for older adults accessing the vaccine, resulting in seniors being able to call Alberta Supports to access a ride to get their vaccinations.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you for the answer.

Alberta's population is aging, and this means that there are a higher number of seniors each year. Can the ministry tell the committee what impact this and the pandemic had on the Alberta seniors' benefit program this past fiscal year?

**Ms Sadownik:** The Alberta seniors' benefit, or ASB as we call it, program is income tested and helps protect seniors most in need by supplementing federal income support programs for those on lower incomes to better meet their basic needs and assist with monthly living expenses. As it is a regulated program, all eligible seniors who apply will be provided benefits. Any increase in the ASB caseload is from an increase in the seniors population. As of March 31, 2021, there were about 670,000 seniors in Alberta. Of these, more than 170,000 seniors, or 25 per cent, received ASB every month, and the average amount is about \$144 per month, or \$1,728 annually. We're very pleased that the pandemic had no impact on the ministry's ability to provide ASB payments on time with no interruptions and that processing times for applications to the program actually improved over this period despite staff working remotely.

**9:20**

**Ms Lovely:** The lodge assistance program, mentioned on page 28, was underspent during the year 2020-21. Can the ministry explain why this happened, and can the department inform the committee what happened to the surplus dollars?

**Ms Sadownik:** The lodge assistance program, or LAP, provides seniors' lodge operators a per diem grant to supplement lost revenue for residents below an income threshold. LAP funding was held at \$40.8 million for the fiscal year 2020-21. During that same year the ministry provided 7,700 LAP allocations to seniors' lodge operators, totalling \$37.7 million. In terms of the surplus dollars, the remaining unallocated dollars were used to off-set overexpenditures in the rent supplement program and community housing, so it was reintroduced into other needs that surfaced during that year.

**Ms Lovely:** Page 13 of the annual report notes that the seniors' home adaptation and repair program provided 530 low-interest loans and 313 grants to help seniors finance repairs and adaptations of their homes in order to stay independent longer. Can the ministry tell the committee whether the funds disbursed in 2020-21 were at the anticipated level?

**Ms Sadownik:** The seniors' home adaptation and repair program, or SHARP, is intended to support independent living for Alberta seniors by helping them use the equity in their home to make necessary repairs and adaptations that help them age in their chosen community. The program offers low-interest home equity loans to a maximum of \$40,000 per household to senior homeowners who have a minimum 25 per cent home equity. The same program, SHARP, also includes home repair grants for seniors with low income who do not qualify for a home equity loan. For example, if

they don't have enough equity or are mobile-home owners on rented land, they still can be eligible but for a grant rather than a loan. Both the SHARP grant and loan programs were lower than the 2021 budget due to lower uptake, and this is likely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and some of the considerations we talked about earlier as seniors were not as likely to have contractors or other service providers in their home over that period.

**Ms Lovely:** Another important program that the ministry administered in the 2020-21 year was the seniors' property tax deferral program, referenced on page 13 of the annual report. Was this program administered successfully, and what metrics did the ministry use to measure the success of this program?

**Ms Sadownik:** This seniors' property tax deferral program is voluntary. When a senior is approved for a loan, the province pays the property taxes directly to the municipality on behalf of the senior. The senior then repays the loan with interest when they sell their home.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We are now on to the nine-minute block for the Official Opposition.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to turn now to some of the reporting that your department requires as part of the housing management bodies established under ministerial order by Seniors and Housing. Given that there are 91 of the housing management bodies, I'd like to focus on just one. I'd like to focus on the Lethbridge Housing Authority. We know that HMBs are supposed to file a business plan and include their financial statements. That's pretty clear. For Lethbridge they did this in 2016, and here's what it looks like, the business plan 2016-2020. It appears that in 2019 this is what they submitted. Fast-forward to 2020, the annual report that we're talking about, the fiscal period that covers this, and the Lethbridge Housing Authority business plan doesn't disclose its financial statements at all. Is that acceptable to this ministry, to this department?

**Ms Sadownik:** Thank you for the question, Member. If I may just seek a little bit of clarity. You talked about a 2016 submission, which you're not questioning. It's the 2019?

**Ms Renaud:** It's 2016-2020. This report is really – it gives us an operating fiscal plan, but that's about it. There are no financial statements in here. Now, is that sufficient for this ministry from a housing body?

**Ms Sadownik:** I'm going to ask David Williams, ADM of the housing division, to respond to that question. Apologies if it's noisy. We're going to try a different system so there's no echoing.

**Ms Renaud:** Just so we're clear, I wanted to reiterate. For 2020: there are no financial statements for 2020, so this fiscal year that we're talking about today.

**Mr. David Williams:** Yeah. We do get annual audited financial statements that are submitted to the department every year from every housing management body. As well, they submit a budget for approval every year.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. You don't have one for 2020 for the Lethbridge housing group?

**Mr. David Williams:** We would have audited annual financial statements for the Lethbridge Housing Authority for 2020, yes.

**Ms Renaud:** So, yes, you do have audited financial statements for 2020 for Lethbridge?

**Mr. David Williams:** Correct. We have audited financial statements . . .

**Mr. Walker:** Point of order, Chair.

**Mr. David Williams:** . . . or we are to receive audited financial statements for every housing management body every year.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Yes. There's a point of order on the floor.

**Mr. Walker:** Yeah. Thank you, Chair. I would ask the member to tie her questions to the annual report of Seniors and Housing for 2020-2021. Further, you know, we are here to discuss the committee's focus on government administration, the economy, and the efficiency of program delivery. I feel that the member is asking about the merits of policy, and it's not even in the document, the report in question. So I would just ask you, Chair, to ask her to tie it to the annual report.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. The financial statements for organizations established under ministerial order are consolidated. All of those expenses are consolidated into the overall GOA, so I don't see a problem in asking for financial statements from organizations that get the vast majority of their funding from this department. It's a simple query about the availability of a financial statement in the fiscal year under consideration.

Hon. member, if you keep it to within those confines, I think we're good.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you.

I guess my question is then: would you table for this committee the audited financial statements for 2020 for the Lethbridge housing management body?

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes, I believe we can do that, Member.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I have a quick question here about CEO pay at housing management bodies established under ministerial order subject to any kind of review, guidance, or set of standards such as has occurred with the review of CEO pay at Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. Has that happened specifically for the CEOs of housing management bodies?

**Ms Sadownik:** I'm going to ask ADM David Williams of the housing division to answer that question.

**Mr. David Williams:** At this time we have no specific restrictions required for CAO pay or compensation.

**Ms Renaud:** Do you collect that information from the 91 housing management bodies, any of the CEO pay? Do you have any of that information?

**Mr. David Williams:** We are aware of some of the CAO pay. Some of it would be disclosed, obviously, in their audited financial statements, depending on how they work through those financial statements, but specifically we don't collect or direct any of the compensation information provided to us other than through the financial statements because they're not our employees – they're employees of the board of the management body – just like we don't for any employees within there. We do have a general understanding



of the wage ranges based on surveys that we do collect through our partner organizations, though.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I understand that the government does provide the funds to the housing management bodies to do their important work. I understand that. But is there no oversight from this ministry to know what the compensation and benefits, the wages and benefits, are for the CEOs of these housing management bodies other than that you might know some of them from some bodies?

**Mr. David Williams:** Again, they're not our employees, and housing management bodies receive funds from other sources in addition to the government of Alberta, including funds that they raise on their own and receive from municipalities. They may receive from other sources as well. Again, they're not strictly considered to be an agency, board, or commission. They're a different type of delivery partner that we have that are established under ministerial order. There are guidelines to provide it. Again, not all funds come from the government of Alberta, so it's a bit of a different relationship from that perspective.

**Ms Renaud:** Yes. I understand that there's a mix of funds that go into that.

Here's my question, and it's really looking at getting into oversight from this ministry. We know that between 2016-2020 at specifically Lethbridge, human resource costs go up about 10 per cent, but the number of employees stayed the same at 36. A new CEO started in 2017. The Alberta average weekly earnings increase from 2017 to 2020 was 5.5 per cent, but we know that it has gone a lot higher in Lethbridge. So I'm wondering: what kind of oversight does this ministry provide to the 91 housing management bodies to ensure that the vast majority of funding that is getting directed their way is not going to CEO compensation, so that it actually is going to programming? What kind of oversight does this ministry provide?

9:30

**Mr. David Williams:** Again, the organization and the management and the oversight of the housing management body is included through the Alberta Housing Act and through the management body organization regulation. There are a variety of procedures and policies laid out there. At that time, again, we require that the boards operate within the approved budgets that they are provided there, and boards, as independent board-governed organizations, are required to operate within the budgets that they are provided, again, recognizing that they get funding from multiple sources. You know, outside of the breadth of this committee there are other approaches coming forward around oversight, including the bill that's currently before the House, so I would have no comment on that at this time.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. So there's not a lot of oversight there.

Okay. I'm going to switch topics very quickly. On page 28 of the annual report there's a chart that breaks down the different types of housing, so I would like to know – under a couple of the headers, under community housing, which are approximately 10,800 units, it specifically talks about individuals with special needs. How many of these 10,800 units are wheelchair accessible, are accessible to people with mobility issues?

**Ms Sadownik:** This relates to a question and answer that ADM Williams provided earlier around access and disabled residents in our affordable housing units. We do commit to the standards that are set for us in terms of building requirements; however, we don't track or report on the number of wheelchair accessible or other disability-type units we have or residents.

**Ms Renaud:** Out of all of the thousands of housing units that the province of Alberta manages, oversees, you cannot tell me how many are wheelchair accessible? There is no idea of how many we need to increase, if we need to increase, if we need to decrease, if it's good? There is no measure whatsoever to determine if there is sufficient accessible housing in Alberta for people that are low income?

**Ms Sadownik:** In the allocation of our capital dollars, whether it's new builds or maintenance and renewal, we work very closely with our affordable housing providers, so the needs may be very different across localities. We really rely on them to do the needs assessment with their municipality and to identify what the needs are, including if there's increased need for accessible units.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Fourth block. Over to the government side, please. I believe it's Mr. Toor, correct? Yeah. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you. I just wanted to say thank you to everyone and especially the department for doing the great work for the seniors and the people who need help. My question starts with outcome 2 for the department as listed. I'll quote this. "Make housing affordable and accessible for Albertans." With the pandemic dominating the fiscal year in question, there was significant pressure on Albertans as they found their incomes reduced quite significantly, so affordable and accessible housing was critical and, certainly, that's very vital, too. If you look at page 27, it mentions the Affordable Housing Review Panel. Can the minister expand on how that review panel was structured and provide detail on the recommendations that came out of the review?

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes. Thank you for the question. In July 2020 Minister Pon appointed a 10-member independent advisory panel that was led by MLA Mickey Amery to seek stakeholder advice and make recommendations on making the affordable housing system more sustainable while addressing the growing need. The panel members that made up that 10-member panel were from a diverse range of experience and expertise backgrounds that included housing providers and developers, policy and academic experts, advocates, and civil society organizations.

In the summer of 2020 the panel also sought out perspectives of other stakeholder organizations representing groups most in need of affordable housing through virtual engagement sessions and written submissions and used this feedback to create its final report and 19 recommendations for transforming affordable housing.

In December 2020 government accepted the panel's report and recommendations, which focused on shifting the province's role from owner and controller to that of a partner and funder, changing programs to support Albertans, not focused on buildings, and drawing on local and private-sector expertise to provide more housing options as well as updating regulations to encourage innovation and reduce administrative red tape.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you. Did the ministry take any action during 2021 on any of the recommendations made by the review?

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes. There was some progress made as early as 2021 on implementing those recommendations, and that would start with recommendation 1, which was to develop a provincial strategic plan for affordable housing. That would articulate how the government would take those recommendations, those 19 recommendations of the panel, and turn them into a strategy for the future affordable housing system. There was also work done on recommendations 2 to 7, which focused on developing an asset

management plan to identify opportunities for sale transfer or redevelopment of government-owned assets.

The action on recommendation 11, the redesigned rent supplement program, was actually completed and announced at the end of that fiscal year, in March 2021. The rent assistance benefit supports those most in need such as recipients of the assured income for the severely handicapped benefit and the temporary rent assistance benefit, which is a new stream that supports Albertans who require a modest subsidy to maintain housing security. So quite a bit of work done to start implementation of that report.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you. Obviously, accessibility is a major element of this, and on page 28 of the annual report there were more than 20,000 households that were wait-listed. How did you compare this to the previous year, and what did the ministry do to address this long waiting list?

**Ms Sadownik:** The number of households who have applied and found to be eligible for social housing has increased over the last several years, and we did talk about this earlier. Approximately 24,000 households were on wait-lists for housing units and programs as of March 31, 2021, and that was a change, as mentioned earlier, of 4,500, an increase from the beginning of the fiscal year.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you. On page 30 of the annual report it is noted that the national housing strategy bilateral agreement brought an additional \$10 million in funding for net zero affordable housing units in Morinville. Can the ministry provide more details on how precisely this \$10 million was spent?

**Ms Sadownik:** Yes. The \$10 million is funding that was cost matched with the federal government under the national housing strategy with both the federal and provincial governments each providing half of that, or \$5 million each. The funding was not tied specifically to net zero construction but for all affordable housing construction. Homeland Housing, the housing management body that proposed the project, had included net zero elements in its capital proposal.

**Mr. Toor:** Were there any additional oversight processes put in place to monitor the use of these funds?

**Ms Sadownik:** Any of our capital development projects are given clear oversight by the department. We do that by assigning a ministry project manager to oversee all costs and keep the project on budget. The project to construct this development, Paul Krauskopf Court, came in on budget.

**Mr. Toor:** This being, I think, the first net zero development, were there any unique challenges to complete the project?

**Ms Sadownik:** It was a great opportunity to have this type of project because there are always things that can be learned. In this case we did learn that there were a limited number of net zero companies to work with for larger commercial-scale developments that require specialty skilled labour and equipment. That's something we need to keep in mind going forward.

**9:40**

**Mr. Toor:** If you look at pages 29 and 30 of the annual report, it outlines some of the ministry's capital projects undertaken during the '20-21 year. Can the ministry explain how these capital projects support outcome 2?

**Ms Sadownik:** Outcome 2 is about making housing affordable and accessible for Albertans. One way to make this happen is by providing lower rent within existing Alberta Social Housing Corporation owned or market units. By expanding the number of units available either by investing in building new units or refurbishing old ones, more housing is affordable and accessible to Albertans.

The ministry spent \$182.3 million in fiscal year 2020-21 on capital projects through capital plan 2020, \$143.2 million was invested in ASHC-owned properties, and \$39.1 million was granted to support affordable housing projects owned by nonprofit organizations. The capital plan also allocated \$53.4 million in 2020-21 for capital maintenance and renewal of social housing. Ten projects were completed in 2020-21, and that was 705 new units built, five more than was our target for this fiscal year, and 1,842 units were committed to and in progress as at March 31, 2021.

Capital plan 2020 did not include new project approvals due to the affordable housing review taking place. It only included funding to complete projects that were already approved, but as you see from our numbers, that panned out very well and was actually more feasible given some of the challenges related to this COVID-19 pandemic year.

**Mr. Toor:** Thank you. Can you go into more detail on where these new units were provided?

**Ms Sadownik:** We're just looking up that information. If you could hold for one moment, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now move on, friends, to the fifth rotation, which is three minutes per side afforded to each caucus to read questions in to the record for written follow-up from the department. We request that written follow-up to us within 30 days.

So over to Member Pancholi. Your time starts when you start speaking.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Deputy, I'm just going to follow up on a question I asked you before, to ask you to table with this committee information about the 63 deaths in seniors' lodges and 660 infected by COVID during the 2020 year. Can you table whether you put HEPA filters in with the \$30 million in COVID funding? If not, why not, and did you ever get advice from the chief medical officer of health that COVID-19 is airborne? Thank you.

I'll turn it over to MLA Schmidt.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you. In addition to that, I'd like the ministry to provide a written breakdown of where those 63 deaths occurred and those 660 infections. I understand that it is 660 staff and residents. If you could break it down by the number of staff and the number of residents, break that out, and indicate which sites those people were infected in.

In addition, I want to know if the ministry has any data on how many staff are reportedly suffering from long COVID after being infected.

Can the ministry table its plan from 2020-2021 to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the housing stock? Please identify the plan and the associated amount of spending for this initiative in fiscal '20-21.

Can the ministry please table the plan to make sure that housing stock is more resilient to climate change?

Can the ministry table any information as to how many structures it oversees that were affected by the Calgary hailstorm and what

was done to repair the damage and any cost estimates related to the damage from that?

Can the ministry provide a list of the capital projects that were delayed? Page 47 says that there was an \$8.2 million reduction in capital grants due to project delays? Which projects were delayed? If the ministry can also provide a reason as to why each of those projects was delayed.

The next question. The government instituted a COVID-19 eviction ban. Can the ministry discuss how many of the people that it houses were affected by the ban? Did the ministry track how many evictions happened despite the ban, how many complaints were made, and how many of those complaints were resolved?

The deputy said that housing authorities provide information on the need for accessible units. Provide this information and a forecast of the need for new and accessible housing stock and the capital planning process the department is doing as a result of these forecasts, give us the wait-list data from each of the housing management authorities that led to your claim of a 20,000-person waiting list, and provide us a capital plan forecast and analysis for what the ministry is going to do to address that wait-list.

Some housing management bodies report that clients receive a subsidy via the private landlord rent supplement and direct-to-tenant rent supplement and are paying significantly more than market rates. These programs may be simply pushing up rental rates. Does the department track whether the direct-to-landlord payments are simply artificially inflating rent rates?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Over to the government caucus, please.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you. Page 47 of the annual report notes that there was a \$13 million decrease from the budget due to reprofiling done by the CMHC. I'd just like to get the ministry to explain exactly what that meant and the effect that it had on the department's work in 2020-2021.

Also, page 59 notes that the Alberta Social Housing Corporation incurred an additional \$30 million in expenses during 2020-2021. What caused the additional expenses? Were these additional expenses one-off additional costs? What measures were used to ensure that these funds were being used efficiently?

Pages 46 and 47 provide a high-level overview of the ministry's finances during the 2020-2021 years. It's important that taxpayer dollars are being used to their full potential. Page 46 notes that

revenues remained relatively consistent even though the actual revenues from major sources were down compared to budget. Can the ministry provide an accounting of this deviation?

One source of revenue that was higher than expected was other revenue, which umbrellas a few different sources of revenue. Donations and other contributions were well above the expected level. Can the ministry explain what happened to see such increases in this particular form of revenue?

The other source of revenue I would like some clarity on is the miscellaneous category. The ministry budgeted for no miscellaneous revenue but received \$2.9 million, which is considerably higher than the previous year. Can the ministry provide details on this source of revenue?

Turning to page 50, the annual report notes that grants were up by about \$40 million from the previous year. Can the ministry explain the increase? Were these targeted grants? What were the conditions placed on the grants, and what were the metrics put in place to ensure that these grants achieve the desired outcomes?

The last one. Page 52 of the annual report notes that the value of the ministry's capital assets increased from the previous year. Can the ministry provide the committee with the details of this increase?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. That's everything?

**Mr. Rowswell:** Yeah. That's it.

**The Chair:** Good. Thank you very much, hon. members.

We will, first of all, thank the officials from the Ministry of Seniors and Housing for attending today, and we ask that, of course, those outstanding questions that we read in to the record are followed up within 30 days and forwarded to our committee clerk.

Are there any other items for discussion under other business, friends?

Seeing none, the date of our next meeting is Tuesday, November 23, with the Ministry of Health.

We'll now move on to adjournment. Please take your cups and various other items with you. I will call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? Moved by Deputy Chair Reid. All in favour? Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 9:49 a.m.]









