



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Human Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, November 19, 2015
9 a.m.

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W), Deputy Chair

Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participant

Ministry of Human Services
Hon. Irfan Sabir, Minister

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 19, 2015

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

**Ministry of Human Services
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good morning, everybody. If we could all take our seats, I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone this morning. I'm Heather Sweet, the MLA for Edmonton-Manning and chair of the Families and Communities Committee.

The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Human Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

I'd ask that we go around the table and introduce ourselves for the record, and, Mr. Minister, when it's your turn, if you could also please introduce your staff.

Mr. Smith: Mark Smith, Drayton Valley-Devon, deputy chair.

Mrs. Pitt: Angela Pitt, Airdrie.

Ms Jansen: Sandra Jansen, Calgary-North West.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, Minister of Human Services. With me are David Morhart, deputy minister; Lori Cooper, chief delivery officer; and I will shortly be joined by Carol Ann Kushlyk, assistant deputy minister for corporate services. I have from the department Sherri Wilson, who is executive director, employment and financial support; Jillian Carson, who is acting deputy minister for the disability services division; Ms Kathy Telfer, executive director, communications; Mark Hattori, assistant deputy minister, child and family services; Michele Kirchner, assistant deputy minister, early childhood and community supports; Ms Susan Taylor, ADM for family violence prevention and homeless support; and Mahmud Dhala, acting senior financial officer, corporate services.

Thank you.

Ms McPherson: Good morning. Karen McPherson, MLA for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mrs. Littlewood: Good morning. Jessica Littlewood, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Shepherd: Hello. David Shepherd, Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Payne: Good morning. Brandy Payne, MLA for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Luff: Robyn Luff, Calgary-East.

Mr. Westhead: Cameron Westhead, Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Hinkley: Bruce Hinkley, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and we'd ask that BlackBerrys, iPhones, et cetera, be turned off or set to silent or vibrate and not placed on the table as they may interfere with the audiofeed.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with consideration of the main estimates for the Ministry of Human Services, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make

opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation just outlined to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times for the first rotation are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the final rotation, with speaking times of five minutes, once again a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a maximum total of 10 minutes. The speaking rotation is set out in the standing orders, and members wishing to participate must be present during the appropriate portion of the meeting. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time.

If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly to either the chair or the committee clerk about the process.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Human Services. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting. The clock will continue to run through the break, usually after the third-party slot. Are members in agreement with a break? No objections? Thank you.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may also participate. Ministry officials may be present, and at the direction of the minister officials from the ministry may address the committee. Members' staff may be present and, space permitting, may sit at the table or behind their members along the committee room wall. Members have priority seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at noon.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on November 23, 2015.

If there are any amendments, an amendment to an estimate cannot seek to increase the amount of an estimate being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate by its full amount. The vote on amendments is deferred until Committee of Supply convenes on November 23, 2015. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. Twenty copies of amendments must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff, and the original must be provided to the committee clerk.

I would now like to invite the Minister of Human Services to begin with his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. Good morning to you all. Thank you for being here today. It is a pleasure to be here to discuss the Human Services 2015 budget and main estimates.

Human Services improves the quality of life of Albertans by making strategic investments in priority initiatives to achieve desired outcomes as identified in our business plan and by stabilizing the funding for key social programs. Our government wants to ensure all Albertans are supported, have the resources and skills they need, and are safe in their homes and communities. This year Human Services will invest \$4.3 billion to help meet that goal. In these uncertain times we are committed to stabilizing and improving the quality of our programs and services.

Regarding child intervention the budget is a total of \$730.2 million, which is an increase of a \$37 million investment above the proposed spring 2015 budget. Child intervention is about helping families to be healthy and supporting children to grow up in safe and nurturing homes. The number of children receiving child intervention services not in care and in care in Alberta, both aboriginal and nonaboriginal, has declined by 21 per cent since April 2012. The new funds will support five important outcomes: that vulnerable children live successfully in their community, that children in temporary care are reunited quickly with family, that children in permanent care are placed in permanent homes more quickly, that youth transition to adulthood successfully, and that aboriginal children live in culturally appropriate homes.

With respect to early intervention and early childhood development we are maintaining early intervention services and supports for children and young Albertans with \$90.2 million. This funding supports programs such as 53 parent link centres, the Alberta futures bursary program, and the Alberta mentoring partnership. We will continue to provide the current level of support and services and address caseload growth while finding 5 per cent in targeted reductions through administrative and operating efficiencies.

Child care. The child care budget is a total of \$297 million, an increase of \$17.1 million. This includes the child care subsidy program for low-income families, accreditation, wage top-up, professional development grants, and a staff attraction incentive allowance. Families can earn up to \$50,000 per year and still qualify for maximum subsidy.

Over the last year licensed and approved child care spaces have increased by nearly 6,000, for a total of approximately 105,000 spaces across the province. We intend to honour our platform commitment of moving towards \$25 a day in quality care as finances permit. In 2016-17 we will invest an additional \$75 million and \$100 million thereafter.

Homelessness and outreach supports. The Alberta government remains committed to our plan to address homelessness with an increase of \$15.7 million, for a total investment of \$178 million. This includes an additional investment of \$15 million in women's shelters and to help make a broader range of supports available for women and children affected by and fleeing from family violence. Regarding Alberta's housing first supports 11,800 Albertans have been served through this program since 2009.

9:10

Family and community safety. The budget line totals \$36.7 million, which is a \$15.4 million increase. This covers a range of programs and services to prevent violence and support people affected by it, and additional funding has been added to meet new commitments.

Family and community support services. We have also increased funding to family and community support services for the first time since 2009-2010. The \$24.6 million in new funding supports

preventive social programs that meet the needs of families and communities and brings the total funding to \$101 million. We have already allocated \$10 million, and the remaining \$15 million will be allocated based on the results of FCSS stakeholders engagement. This is a funding partnership between the government of Alberta and participating municipalities and Métis settlements.

The supports to persons with disabilities budget allocation represents almost a quarter of the ministry's budget, totalling \$1.06 billion, including an \$18.7 million increase. The increased funding will be used to deal with caseload growth and to maintain services to persons with developmental disabilities, family support for children with disabilities, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives. The overall goal is to support community living inclusion and independence where possible as well as employment supports so people with all abilities can fully participate in their communities.

Office of the public guardian and trustee services. The budget for this office has been increased by \$2 million, for a total of \$30 million. This office provides direct services to about 30,000 Albertans who need help with their financial and personal decisions because of circumstances such as illness, injury, or a developmental disability. It also provides support to 9,600 private guardians.

Assured income for the severely handicapped. The AISH program services budget has been increased by \$33.2 million, for a total of \$950.6 million. More than 52,000 adult Albertans who have a severe and permanent disability that limits their ability to earn a livelihood were receiving AISH benefits as of September 30, 2015. The budget increase addresses caseload growth, which grows by approximately 5 per cent yearly.

The employment and income supports program helps Albertans meet their basic needs and improve their employability. They are supported by \$763.5 million, which includes a \$43.6 million increase to address caseload growth. We are stabilizing funding for employment and financial support so that the government can be there for Albertans who fall on tough times and help them re-enter the workforce in a diversified economy.

The Alberta child benefit is a new benefit. It's a nontaxable benefit that will provide direct financial assistance to all lower income families with children. There is \$147 million budgeted in the 2016-17 fiscal year. It is expected that approximately 235,000 children and 130,000 families will receive \$195 million in annual benefits when the program is fully implemented. The Alberta child tax benefit complements the investment in services of Human Services in and across government that support lower income Albertans.

This concludes my remarks. I look forward to any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we will move into the first 60 minutes for the Official Opposition. Mrs. Pitt, will you be asking questions first?

Mrs. Pitt: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you. And would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

Mrs. Pitt: Please.

The Chair: Minister, you are in agreement with going back and forth?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Pitt: All right. Well, thank you very much for being here today, Minister and to the staff as well. A very large budget, lots of questions, so let's just get right into it.

Line item 1.2 in the budget has \$100,000 going toward the associate minister's office. I'm wondering what office this is as there is no associate minister listed on your web page.

Mr. Sabir: There used to be two associate ministers under the previous government, so these are carry-over expenses incurred by the previous government. We do not have associate ministers and will not have this line on a going-forward basis.

Mrs. Pitt: So the money in the budget is for what?

Mr. Sabir: The money is the carry-over for the expenses that were made prior to us getting into the government.

Mrs. Pitt: Would that be, like, severance packages? What is that? If there is no minister there, I don't understand the money being carried forward.

Mr. Sabir: It was the first five weeks of the previous government, who had allocated it. There used to be two associate ministers for this department.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. All right. So that should be gone here in the spring?

Mr. Sabir: Yes. That's the case.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Line 1.5, strategic services, has a small increase of \$42,000. What is strategic services responsible for, and what will this increase be used for?

Mr. Sabir: Yes, there is a slight increase. Strategic services will be comprised of a chief strategy officer, legal services, policy and community engagement, planning and quality assurance, and operational engagement and strategy. These are the services that are provided through this line item.

Mrs. Pitt: Every budget area starts off with the line item Program Planning and Delivery. Is this the cost for staffing in each program area? Is this a staffing cost?

Mr. Sabir: That's a combination of both program planning and delivery, so that consists of costs for the program planning, staffing, and for the delivery, for the operations.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. What percentage of this budget does departmental staff take up?

Mr. Sabir: It is 15 per cent, roughly 15 per cent, of the total budget.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. I noticed that there were six different departments where the actual was less than the budgeted, yet you increased the budget anyway. Why?

Mr. Sabir: We increased the budget to address the caseload growth and to meet the needs of Albertans. If there is a specific line, I can speak to that increase and the particular, specific reasons for that increase.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. It's just kind of odd that the actual was less than what was budgeted previously, yet you still increased the budget. What kind of growth do you actually anticipate?

Mr. Sabir: Are you talking about a specific line? I can give you the details on specific lines.

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. Actually, line 1, staffing. Your office staffing in most items was – here we go. For corporate services, 1.6, the actual was \$17 million whereas the budgeted was \$19 million, and then you increased that, from the actual to \$18 million.

Mr. Sabir: We are talking about line 1.6?

Mrs. Pitt: Let's go with 1.6.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. One, the ministry's budget overall is reducing because we will not have associate ministers. So one thing is that we have reduced the budget significantly . . .

Mrs. Pitt: But it's still higher than the actual.

Mr. Sabir: . . . and the second thing is that we will recruit the necessary positions, which were not filled previously. When compared to the previous year's budget, corporate services show a decrease of 4.7 per cent, which is the result of cost-containment strategies such as a reduction in supplies and services and manpower savings through managed staffing practices. We may need to recruit some more staff, so that's why the minister's budget has been increased.

Mrs. Pitt: Is that somewhat true for every single department?

Mr. Sabir: You can ask me about the specific line if there is something.

9:20

Mrs. Pitt: Child intervention, line 3: the actual was less than the budgeted yet still increased in your estimate.

Mr. Sabir: What specific line are you talking about?

Mrs. Pitt: Pick almost any or all of them, really. Line 3.4. Actually, that's a bad example. That is one you did not increase . . .

Mr. Sabir: I can explain that one to you.

Mrs. Pitt: . . . which is interesting, actually. Why no increase there for foster care support? It's actually a significant decrease from the budgeted.

Mr. Sabir: I think that decrease represents more permanency and fewer children in care. As I indicated in my opening remarks, there was a decrease in the number of children in care since 2012. It was a 21 per cent decrease in care, so that's why this budget line has been decreased.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Let's move on. We're going to talk about employment and income support. This budget area received a \$63 million increase over last year's budget. With the downturn in the economy and more and more Albertans being laid off every day, I'm assuming that this increase was to accommodate the expected influx of clients seeking services?

Mr. Sabir: Yes. That increase was to address the anticipated caseload growth in this area.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Are there any new initiatives being added, or are these funds just topping up existing program areas?

Mr. Sabir: These are existing programs, so these additional funds will help us address the caseload growth.

Mrs. Pitt: They're just existing programs, not any new programming?

Mr. Sabir: That's correct.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. In your annual report you state, "Income Support clients, being one of the most vulnerable citizens, tend to be the last hired in times of strong employment and the first to be released in times of a weaker market." In fact, your performance measures confirm that only 60 per cent of program participants are employed after leaving income support. I find this number shocking. Why is this number so low?

Mr. Sabir: Are we talking about the business plan?

Mrs. Pitt: The business plan's performance measures, page 64, performance measure 2(d).

Mr. Sabir: And the question is on why that last-year actual is low?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. It's 60 per cent.

Mr. Sabir: That was the last-year actual we got. What I can tell you is that we have increased funding in this area, and we will try to improve the quality of services . . .

Mrs. Pitt: But shouldn't that number be higher, then?

Mr. Sabir: . . . and on a going-forward basis we will improve the outcome. We have targeted for 60 per cent.

Mrs. Pitt: But 60 per cent is a fairly significantly low number. I mean, to really get anywhere in terms of empowering people out of income support situations – what is your plan, moving forward, to increase that number?

Mr. Sabir: We will make sure that we improve the quality of our services and that we make our services more person centred. We'll work with them to get better outcomes for all Albertans.

Mrs. Pitt: For a program area that receives over three-quarters of a billion dollars in funding, I find it shocking that you only have one performance measure in your business plan, that being whether people stayed employed at the end. In what other ways does your department measure whether the programs offered under employment and income support are effective?

Mr. Sabir: Which program area? Is it persons with developmental . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Well, just in general. Your performance measures for people staying employed after they go through your programs: how are you measuring this, and how are you going to continue to support them after their income support is no more?

Mr. Sabir: I think the program, as the name suggests, is employment and income support. We are supporting them in the short term with their basic needs, and we are providing them the necessary tools, the necessary skills to upgrade their skills, improve their employability. The indicator essentially will be whether or not they are employed. That's why there is one indicator.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. What are you doing to ensure that this number increases and clients using the employment and income support find jobs?

Mr. Sabir: Well, we'll be working with the Albertans who access these services and we will be working with our partners, community

agencies, and employers to make sure that Albertans get the needed skills to become employed. That's what we will do to make sure that they are getting the skills that are needed.

Mrs. Pitt: Through, like, skills training programs?

Mr. Sabir: There are training programs. There are many different programs.

Mrs. Pitt: When an individual applies for career development services, are they able to choose whichever program they wish, or is there a set number of programs the clients can choose from?

Mr. Sabir: When Albertans come to access our programs, we sit with them, and we do an assessment of their existing skills. Based on that assessment, it's decided what they need to improve on or what they need to work on and what will be more beneficial for them to get trained in to be employed meaningfully. It depends on the assessment, and it's determined on a case-by-case basis.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Line 2.7, disability-related employment supports: I'm wondering if you could tell me what this area is responsible for.

Mr. Sabir: Line 2.7?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. With details, too.

Mr. Sabir: As the heading suggests, it provides disability-related employment supports. It provides services to Albertans with disabilities to assist them in overcoming the barriers they may face in obtaining and maintaining employment. Services are provided on an individualized basis and include job search, education, and workplace supports such as sign-language interpreters, workplace modifications. We have increased funding to provide employment support and services for these clients during this time of economic downturn.

Mrs. Pitt: It's very important. Interesting that it was budgeted to receive \$6.4 million; however, it only used \$4.4 million last year. Why are so few funds being used?

Mr. Sabir: What was spent depends on the number of clients who walk through and come in for the supports. There were fewer clients, so that's why fewer expenses were made.

Mrs. Pitt: Do you anticipate a significant increase in this area, then?

Mr. Sabir: We do anticipate that, and at the same time we do want to work with persons with disabilities to make sure that they have every opportunity to meaningfully participate in their communities, in the economic life, and to reach their full potential.

9:30

Mrs. Pitt: Of course. That's very important. I guess we'll see what's used, actually, in this area later on.

Let's go to child intervention. There are a couple of line items that concern me in this area of the budget. Line 3.4, foster care support, was budgeted for \$198 million in the 2014-2015 budget, yet only \$173 million was used. This year the funding has been trimmed back to \$170 million. It's a \$3 million cut from what was actually being used in 2014-2015. Why the cut?

Mr. Sabir: I think the primary reason for the drop is the drop in the caseload. As I indicated earlier, we have fewer children in care who are in need of these supports. That is because of a continued focus

on supporting families, with more preventive solutions and supports. We are anticipating lower . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Where are the performance measures for foster care, and how many children, roughly, are in foster care right now?

Mr. Sabir: At this point we have around 5,000 children in foster care and kinship placements. That represents a 16 per cent decrease in the caseload over the period of the last two years.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. The performance measures: I just couldn't find them.

Mr. Sabir: There are so many programs, and for some of them we don't have the performance measure in the program. But, at the end of the day, how successful those children are, how permanently they are placed in those homes: that's what determines our success. Foster parents do play a very important role in those children's lives in providing them . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Well, those performance measures shouldn't be that hard to find, though, right? Clearly, there was a reason for decreasing this area. Where are they? Where's the data?

Mr. Sabir: The decrease in this area: you can tell that's one thing that tells we are improving our services. The more children that get placed in foster care and that remain there on a more permanent basis: that is also a measure that they are doing well in those homes.

Mrs. Pitt: Line 3.5 of the budget, protection of sexually exploited children, for 2014-15 was budgeted at \$6.6 million, yet only \$6 million was used. Again, you've trimmed the budget to reflect the funds not used. However, what is being addressed to ensure that funding for this program is actually being used?

Mr. Sabir: This program provides a continuum of co-ordinated, community-based prevention, treatment, and protection services to assist sexually exploited children and youth to end their involvement in prostitution. Examples of the programs within this element will include prevention of sexually exploited children and the services to deal with that. The budget has essentially increased slightly, and the increase basically represents the salary settlement with AUPE.

Mrs. Pitt: How many children has this program helped? There are, again, no performance measures in the business plan or the annual report.

Mr. Sabir: Between 1999, when this legislation, the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, was introduced and March 31, there were 1,505 children and youth served by this program.

In terms of a breakdown, in 2014-15 137 distinct children were served, which is a 6 per cent increase.

Mrs. Pitt: It's an increase.

What is your department doing specifically to ensure that these children are getting the supports they need? This number is going up. That's a problem. What's your plan?

Mr. Sabir: Certainly, we want to see this number go down, and that is the reason that we have a slight increase in the budget line. We will be working with these children to make sure that they have the needed supports and services.

Mrs. Pitt: Line 3.2, child intervention services, has seen an increase this year. Can you provide an overview of where this \$471

million is going, first of all, and then let us know why there is an increase in the budgeted amount?

Mr. Sabir: Line 3.2 is child intervention services. It represents a 5.3 per cent increase over the last year's actual. The program provides a wide range of services to children and families in cases where children are found to be in need of intervention services. It includes family enhancement, child protection, support and financial assistance agreements. I can go into a bit more detail on these agreements. For instance, family enhancements refer to cases where a child or youth has experienced abuse or neglect but can still be safe in the home if possible. The supports are provided to the family. The supports include conflict resolution, parenting skills, and counselling. The child protection . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Sorry to interrupt. The child intervention round-table held in January 2014 identified a number of problems in that system. One of them was that there were many recommendations being made in the system but that they were not being tracked, and the progress of implementation wasn't being reported. What are you doing to improve this?

Mr. Sabir: That's an area where we clearly need to do better. What we have done is that we have restored the funding to child intervention services. This line represents a \$37 million increase over the proposed spring budget. What we will be doing: we will strive for continuous improvement of those services. We are certainly looking at those recommendations, and we are also looking at implementing an independent oversight, where a body can look into child death and serious injuries. We also have plans to bring in a process where we can track those recommendations and implement the intent of those recommendations to improve those services.

Mrs. Pitt: Will that be available in the spring?

Mr. Sabir: It's a continuous process of improvement, and certainly there will be improvements . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Sorry. For the tracking process, performance measures.

Mr. Sabir: We do track all those recommendations, and we do post a response publicly. They are available on our Human Services website.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. What would you say that your top priority for child intervention is?

Mr. Sabir: I think the top priority for child intervention is that we want to see every child in this province succeed and reach their full potential. In order to do that, we will be working with the families, and we will make sure that children are raised in their family, in their communities, and that they have opportunities, that they have services available to them to reach their full potential.

9:40

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Line 1.2 of the business plan calls for: "Increase affordability and quality of child care and create new child care spaces." In the budget we see that child care subsidy and supports received an additional increase from \$184 million to \$191 million, yet the actual expenses of the child care subsidy were only \$181 million. To me, this suggests that the money was available but wasn't being used. Whyyy? [laughter] I wrote it that way, too.

Mr. Sabir: I think I'm not expected to speak to why it was not used or about the previous government's policies. But I can speak to the increase . . .

Mrs. Pitt: That's what I meant.

Mr. Sabir: . . . how we will use that, what that money will be used to support.

Mrs. Pitt: Why did you increase that when the actual wasn't used?

Mr. Sabir: We believe that it's an important issue, that parents with children need to have quality care options to meaningfully participate in their communities and economic life. That's why we are increasing that, so that we can increase the supports and access to quality child care.

Mrs. Pitt: What are you doing to ensure that that money is going to be used?

Mr. Sabir: There is a demand. That's why we are increasing it. We anticipate that there is a demand for child care spaces, and that's why we increased it, and for that reason, to respond to that demand for access to quality child care, we are also allocating money in out-years to create more spaces. That's in anticipation of more people seeking quality care. That's why we have increased it.

Mrs. Pitt: That's actually an interesting one in this economy, where there are fewer jobs available and probably fewer people going to work and in need of child care spaces. But if you see the need, I think that's great.

Your government has made no secret of its desire to bring in \$25-a-day daycare to Alberta. While I don't see this line item in the budget – and I'm sure there's some exploratory work that has to be done – do you have any idea how much this program will cost?

Mr. Sabir: Some money has been allocated in out-years, \$75 million in '16-17 and \$100 million thereafter. As you said, there is certainly some exploratory work that needs to be done, and we will certainly be planning to make sure that we deliver on our promise.

Mrs. Pitt: Will the \$25-a-day daycare be tied to income like a child care subsidy, or will one replace the other?

Mr. Sabir: It's in the planning stages, so we will have more to say once that amount gets into the budget.

Mrs. Pitt: While programs exist to help families find daycare, what programs, if any, exist to help parents that choose to stay at home and raise their children rather than return to the workforce?

Mr. Sabir: I think it's parents' choice whether they want to stay at home and raise their children. The programs available to them are means tested, income tested. If somebody chooses to stay at home and raise their children, there are income support programs. At the end of the day, it will depend upon the particular individual's circumstances, but we do have the new Alberta child benefit coming in, and they will be benefited by that. We will enhance the employment tax credit, but that, I guess, comes in for employed parents. But we have tax credits, so they can use those.

Mrs. Pitt: I'm concerned with a lack of performance measures for AISH and, actually, many areas in this budget. No performance measures are included in the business plan, and the only ones we can find are on page 40 of the annual report. They show an overall satisfaction of AISH clients at 73 per cent for 2014-15. What are you doing to improve these numbers?

Mr. Sabir: Last year it was actually 78 per cent, and we're targeting better outcomes for that.

Mrs. Pitt: How?

Mr. Sabir: We do it by combining four measure indicators: whether AISH helped the clients to meet their needs, assistance in management of health issues, whether it helped them to live independently, and whether they had improved involvement in their local community. So we will be watching for those outcomes, and we'll make sure that we improve our services to meet those targets, and we will make sure that we get the data to be able to assess those outcomes.

Mrs. Pitt: We understand that there could be a reduction to AISH clients' benefits when they turn 65 and move on to seniors' benefits. Is this the case? If it is, can you explain the problem and if your ministry is working to fix this?

Mr. Sabir: I think this question relates more to the Ministry of Seniors, and there are certain transition issues which we will work on with the Seniors ministry.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. As long as you're aware.

All right. PDD. I want to talk about general PDD line items found under the support to persons with disabilities budget area. While funding has increased from \$965 million to over a billion dollars, what I find interesting is that in some areas we're underfunded according to actual costs, such as line 6.2: \$158 million was allocated in 2014-2015; the actual spent was \$168 million and then cut further to \$158 million. In contrast, line 6.6 was allocated \$21 million, used \$17 million, and had its funding increased to \$23 million. Why do some areas that appear to need a funding increase not receive them and areas that appear to need additional supports receive cuts? How do you decide which is which?

Mr. Sabir: With regard to line 6.2, operating supports, there you see a decrease of 6.2 per cent, and the explanation for that decrease is that there were cost containment strategies in place such as a reduction in supplies and services, contracts, manpower savings like not hiring staff. For that reason, that number shows a decrease, and at this point we maintained that we should be able to continue the operations with what we allocated in the budget.

9:50

In line 6.6 the surplus was from '14-15, essentially from a program called residential access modification program, due to, I guess, lower than expected client uptake. That program was initiated to address the concerns of clients who were affected by the safety standard regulations for the modifications in their homes to make improvements to meet the Safety Codes Act requirements, since there were client concerns. They didn't use that money, so that's why this money is there. Should there be a need to make accommodations for those residences for these clients, that fund will be used for that.

Mrs. Pitt: So is it safe to assume that the PDD safety standard building code program will be going forward here in the spring? The money is there for upgrades to their homes, right? I'm concerned because I believe that you agreed to a consultation process with the stakeholders, but this budget reflects a very different motive.

Mr. Sabir: This program is there, I guess, for those modifications. But as you indicated, we have decided to consult. As a result of consultation, whatever the outcome of that consultation is, these funds can be adjusted accordingly.

Mrs. Pitt: Another concern for me is the lack of performance measures for PDD programs provided in the business plan. The only one is 1(c), and the data is from 2012-2013. While 1(c) shows that satisfaction in families receiving support is 91 per cent, I'm wondering if you have any recent data to show if these programs are successful.

Mr. Sabir: I think that that data is collected biannually, so that's the last data we have, and we will be doing that in the coming year. We are collecting data. We will be providing results for that outcome measure.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. PDD programs for children is 91 per cent according to 1(c). One has to go to the 2014-2015 annual report to find any performance measures for adult PDD programs. On page 39 of the annual report it shows only 87 per cent satisfaction in families and guardians of adults with developmental disabilities with PDD-funded services. What are you doing to ensure that adult PDD programs continue to perform?

Mr. Sabir: There are a number of interrelated factors that may influence the results of the performance measures such as funding, caseloads, PDD regional leadership and staffing, service agency staffing, natural support of people served, geographic location of people served, number of clients with high needs, age distribution of people served, accessibility of new technologies, and even media coverage of PDD programs. What we plan to do is that we will be working with all concerned to improve those outcomes. In that regard, we have increased the funding to address the caseload growth and the needs of the persons with developmental disabilities.

Mrs. Pitt: Line 1.5 of the business plan calls to "Strengthen the focus on preventing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder" in our province. This is great news. According to your 2014-2015 annual report more than 46,000 Albertans are affected by FASD. My question is this. Neither in the business plan nor in the annual report do we find any performance measures for FASD reduction. How many children a year are born with FASD? Are the actual numbers of cases decreasing year over year, or is it the opposite?

Mr. Sabir: I will get back to you on the specific numbers of the kids born with FASD, but I can tell you that these are the grant dollars which are going to the community agencies and groups who are supporting Albertans with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Mrs. Pitt: Line 6.9 in the budget: fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives taken by the department were budgeted at just under \$24 million; however, the actual money used was \$38 million. What are you doing to ensure that the FASD initiatives are properly funded?

Mr. Sabir: The reason for the actual increase is that there was a one-time spending increase made by the previous government. Those grants won't carry forward in the 2015-16 budget.

Mrs. Pitt: What were those grants?

Mr. Sabir: These grants were issued to the 12 FASD networks across Alberta, which apply a prevention, diagnostic, and service delivery model that is client focused and results based. These grants were issued prior to our becoming government.

Mrs. Pitt: My concern is: will we suffer, not carrying forward these grant programs?

Mr. Sabir: We will not carry forward these grants.

Mrs. Pitt: Why not?

Mr. Sabir: There is money already invested in those programs, so we are maintaining basically the standard support in order to make sure that those programs continue to deliver quality service.

Mrs. Pitt: So you're satisfied with what happened.

All right. Provincial disability supports initiative, line 6.6: can you give me more information about this? Where did the money go?

Mr. Sabir: These initiatives provide community supports for adults with disabilities through programs such as the Alberta brain injury initiative, community access for people in continuing care, crossdisability support services, and RAMP, the residential access modification program.

Mrs. Pitt: Brain injury supports used to have its own line item. I'm glad we found it. Why is it now in this line item? Just curious.

Mr. Sabir: I think that was done with a view to simplifying the estimates. Another reason for that is that we were trying to move towards a more integrated service delivery, where we consolidated programs. That was the reason.

Mrs. Pitt: It seems that maybe that might not have been the right approach. This is, again, a case where the actual was less than the budgeted, yet you still increased this area.

Mr. Sabir: Program supports pretty much remain the same. The extra money added to this area was that residential access modification program, which we talked about, relating to the modifications under the developmental disabilities standard 8. That was increased in anticipation of expenses for that program.

Mrs. Pitt: What is the purpose of initiatives related to the PDD transformation plan? What are the measures and evidence of success for the plan? What is the cost to date of the plan? What are the results?

10:00

Mr. Sabir: Can you be more specific so I can understand the question?

Mrs. Pitt: On the website, the PDD transformation plan: what is this? What's the purpose?

Mr. Sabir: I do not have the website in front of me, but if the question was more specific I would be able to . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. We can talk offline about that.

How many individuals are currently supported under the PDD program? How many individuals are on a wait-list? What is the projected uptake over the next three years?

Mr. Sabir: This program serves approximately 11,000 Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Mrs. Pitt: How many are on a wait-list?

Mr. Sabir: I can get you the specific number on the wait-list.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Do you know the projected uptake over the next few years?

Mr. Sabir: It is historically a 4 to 5 per cent increase over the year.

Mrs. Pitt: All right. FCSS. I was very happy to see FCSS receive an increase in this budget. I know Airdrie is also very grateful for

the FCSS funding. This is something that the Wildrose has actually called for in the past. However, FCSS is responsible for a whole host of programs: parent and child development activities, support services for school-aged children, youth development, and retirement planning, just to name a few. FCSS is now receiving \$101 million in funding and has only one line item in the budget. That's line 8. How is the money being spent? Is it just topping up existing programs?

Mr. Sabir: FCSS is a partnership between the provincial government and municipalities and Métis settlements; 309 municipalities are arranged into 207 FCSS organizations. The funding formula is that the government funds 80 per cent of the share, and 20 per cent is funded by the participating organization. The reason there are no details of the program is that this program essentially supports the local, grassroots community initiatives. The participating organizations, based on their community needs, develop the programs, what's needed in their communities.

Mrs. Pitt: Were there any new agencies included in that funding, or was it existing agencies?

Mr. Sabir: These are existing organizations.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. And performance measures?

Mr. Sabir: We have planned to engage with FCSS organizations. In the interim supply budget there was \$10 million, which was distributed according to the existing formula, where everybody got 10 per cent over their base funding. Along with the distribution of the remaining funds we plan on engaging with FCSS organizations not only to look at the regulations, whether they are meeting these communities' needs, but also to discuss how we can measure the success of those programs, how we can align those programs with ...

Mrs. Pitt: Do the agencies provide performance measures to you, then, to receive this funding?

Mr. Sabir: What was the question?

Mrs. Pitt: Do the agencies then provide performance measures to you to receive this funding?

Mr. Sabir: They do report on an annual basis about the results, about the success of their programs.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. A 17-member board of directors oversees operations. Are these board members paid a salary, or is it a volunteer board?

Mr. Sabir: You mean the FCSS board?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: Those members are chosen by the FCSS organizations, and my understanding is that it's a voluntary board. If that's not the case, I will get back to you on this.

Mrs. Pitt: Excellent.

All right. Let's talk about homeless shelters and women's shelters.

Mr. Sabir: That's another very important area.

Mrs. Pitt: Absolutely. In line 9.3 actual expenses for homeless shelters was \$39 million. In this budget you have only set aside \$37.6 million. With unemployment rising and the number of

homeless increasing in Alberta cities, what are you doing to help out agencies that are struggling to meet the demand of growing unemployment in the population?

Mr. Sabir: These funds are used to support the operations of homeless shelters, and those shelters are located throughout the province. I have been informed that there were some grants issued last year, which were more than one-year grants. So that's the reason.

Mrs. Pitt: From this budget?

Mr. Sabir: Previously. In general we are maintaining the supports for homeless shelters.

Mrs. Pitt: So you don't anticipate seeing an increase in the need for homeless shelters?

Mr. Sabir: There is certainly a need for housing, and we will be working with the Ministry of Seniors, basically, to come up with a better plan, where homeless shelters can be used just as a triage desk. People walk into homeless shelters, and the shelters work with them to come up with a plan so they can be connected with other resources and services available in the community. What we view for the future direction is that these shelters will not be providing just the beds, but they will work with those individuals to deal with the issue of their homelessness by connecting them with the proper support and services.

Mrs. Pitt: Women's shelters, line 9.4, received a funding increase of \$15 million, which is fantastic. I know my community of Airdrie is desperately trying to get a women's shelter. How does your ministry decide who gets these funds?

Mr. Sabir: I think we were working with the association of women's shelters and existing partners. There was a request from them that they need additional support, and the increase of \$15 million is divided among the shelters throughout the province. The plan is to invest the new funding together with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and its member shelters so that they can provide services such as counselling, outreach services, the wraparound supports for those ...

Mrs. Pitt: Is this funding increase only for the Alberta women's shelter group, or do you have private partners in this area as well?

Mr. Sabir: There are private partners. There are folks out there such as in Airdrie, where community groups are doing a wonderful job, but this new funding is to support services being provided to women and children leaving violence. No funding was allocated to communities or to agencies with shelters at the planning stage.

Mrs. Pitt: Is the money spent already, or are there future funding initiatives?

10:10

Mr. Sabir: It has been allocated, but if there are any other community groups who are at the planning stage, I would encourage them to contact my staff as they develop their plans.

Mrs. Pitt: How are you going to ensure that the smaller communities, that may not service a high population and may have a smaller need than Calgary or Edmonton, still receive the supports they need when it comes to women's shelters?

Mr. Sabir: I mentioned in response to your question earlier that I would encourage the smaller communities who are at the planning

stage for women's shelters and such services to get in touch with my staff so that we can jointly plan those services.

Mrs. Pitt: Under line 10 outreach services access was budgeted \$15 million this year. What is the area responsible for?

Mr. Sabir: Under this line programs are delivered basically through community-based organizations to support permanent housing and wraparound outreach support services using a housing first model. Assistance is provided to homeless families and single adults to move to permanent accommodation, with access to various important services to help them remain housed. Examples of these programs will be homeless and outreach support services, youth homelessness program delivery, Youth Secretariat.

Mrs. Pitt: We were wondering where the youth was.

Line item 9 actually says, "Homeless and Outreach Supports," and you just said line item 10 had that. Can you just clarify that?

Mr. Sabir: Common service access?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Line item 10 is for Alberta Supports centres, and the idea is that these centres – there are 10 centres across the province – will help us provide person-centred, one-stop shop services at one place so that people can . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Do they currently exist, or is this is a new initiative?

Mr. Sabir: They do exist. There are 10.

Mrs. Pitt: Where are they?

Mr. Sabir: They are within Alberta, and I can provide you the details.

Mrs. Pitt: I hope that they're within Alberta.

Mr. Sabir: I can provide you the locations. They are in St. Paul, Slave Lake, Whitecourt, Peace River, Fort Mac, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Calgary, and Edmonton. They are spread across the province, both rural and urban centres.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. What about women's shelters and homeless shelters? How many agencies does your department deal with specifically? I won't ask where. How many social housing agencies?

Mr. Sabir: Are you asking about both men's and women's shelters?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah. And homeless shelters.

Mr. Sabir: For women we have 30 emergency shelters, 11 second-stage shelters, and five First Nations on-reserve shelters with fee-for-service arrangements. With respect to men's shelters I can provide you the details of where they are located in the province.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member.

We will now move to our 20-minute rotation with the third-party opposition. Ms Jansen, you'll be asking questions?

Ms Jansen: Yes. Back and forth would be preferable for me, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Ms Jansen: Excellent. Thank you very much, Minister and to all the staff from Human Services. I have to say, of course, that this

whole group holds a special place in my heart as I was the former associate minister of family and community safety.

I do want to start out by saying that from everything I have heard from the staff in your department, they are very happy with the work you have been doing so far, that the way that you have dealt with them is dignified and respectful. I want to commend you for that. I think that it is a very difficult job, and you have some excellent, hard-working people in this department.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member.

Ms Jansen: I want to start out with an area – I was going to go in a linear fashion, but I want to start out with the area that, of course, is the one very close to my heart, which is family and community safety. It's important to me, I think, because of the work that we had done in the past on this. I want to skip right down to section 12 in the line items. One of the things I want to start with is the family violence framework that had been completed. Just as a little bit of background – and you may know this already – it was five years in the making, that framework, through the department when I came into my role there. I was lucky enough to bring it forward not as the author of that document but as the advocate for that document. That document was put together by many of the folks in this room right now, and I want to commend them for that document.

As I travelled around the province with that, folks would hold it up. It was full of stickers and Post-it Notes, and they talked about the fact that they were using it as an active document. This document – and I won't dwell on this – was referred to earlier by your colleague as deplorable. I just want to say that that document was not written by me; it was written by your hard-working staff, and I would hope in the future, as you move forward, that you recognize the fact that these folks put years of hard work into that document, and it deserves in respect an acknowledgement of that work. So I just want to make that comment.

You know, I think when we talk about these issues – they're complex issues. I want to commend you for the additional funds that have gone into women's shelters. I know that when our government had made an increase of \$3 million and I talked to the women's shelters, there was a real, tangible piece that they managed to accomplish with that money. So I think it's – what? – \$15 million this time around.

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Ms Jansen: That \$15 million is hugely impactful, so I want to thank you for that. You know, I think that that's the kind of money that has life-changing consequences for women in this province. I think that is a terrific addition.

When we talk about some of these issues – I want to go through some line items now. Sexual violence prevention services, and that is 12.3, where we have that here. The decrease is \$137,000 over the amount budgeted in 2014-15. Can you just give me a sense of what that is?

Mr. Sabir: So you want me to go to what programs and services it provides?

Ms Jansen: Yeah. Is there a particular program that was cut or services that are no longer being offered? I just wanted to get a sense.

Mr. Sabir: I think the purpose of the program is that we all need to work towards an Alberta that is free from sexual violence, and the province has an important role to play in it. We fund 11 sexual assault centres and the provincial association for the provision of

sexual assault services to victims of sexual violence. Why it was decreased? That's the question.

Ms Jansen: Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: I think that being a member of the caucus who was the previous government, you would be in a better position to know that, but there were some one-time spending grants in 2014-15.

Ms Jansen: Right.

Mr. Sabir: These costs will not carry forward. These were one-time costs. So we will maintain the core support within this budget.

10:20

Ms Jansen: Okay. I've had the opportunity to meet with many of those 11 centres and to talk about the work they're doing. Oftentimes, certainly, direction in the past has been an issue. That's something that we were working on, and that's why we had completed but hadn't released the sexual violence framework. Is that a document you're still going to use, or are you looking at scrapping it and starting all over again?

Mr. Sabir: I think, as you can see, our budget is stabilizing the funding for existing services.

Ms Jansen: Right. But I'm speaking specifically to . . .

Mr. Sabir: I'm getting to that document as well.

Before that, I can tell you that we view this as an important issue. That is the reason we have increased funding for the women's shelters. That is the reason we have increased funding for family and community safety program grants. But as a government we got elected on a platform which expressly said that we will have a new look at women's issues. It was right in our platform that we would create a ministry which is responsible for the status of women.

Ms Jansen: This actually is not specifically women's issues. This is sexual violence, so I'm not sure . . .

Mr. Sabir: Unfortunately, they are the victims for the most part, so that's why – but I should use more neutral language. I agree with you.

Ms Jansen: Well, it's just that the sexual violence framework actually dealt with – we did have a chance to sit down with stakeholders across the province who dealt with, you know, all manner of sexual violence, so that framework is a completed document. My question is really not about where funding is going, but whether you're actually going to use that document going forward.

The Chair: Member, I just want to interject for a minute because this is kind of going towards more of a policy question, I think. It might be a conversation that needs to go offline. Maybe we can bring it back to the budget line.

Ms Jansen: Respectfully, Chair, there is a cost associated with doing that kind of consultation. If you plan to go back and start the consultation all over again, we're talking about millions of dollars here. Respectfully I would suggest that it does become a budgetary item if you've made a decision not to use it. So that's my question. Is there a plan to use it? If there isn't, then the price tag on that is certainly something that should be noted.

The Chair: I can encourage the question to be more around the consultation piece, then.

Ms Jansen: Sure. Yeah.

Mr. Sabir: I can still briefly speak to it. As I mentioned, we take this issue seriously. I will be working with the other government departments who may have an interest in this framework, and we will review this.

Ms Jansen: Okay. So it's safe to say that you haven't made a decision yet, right now, on what you're going to do with that framework. Is that safe to say?

Mr. Sabir: No, I haven't made any decision yet. We are reviewing it. Certainly, you will agree with me that it's a policy matter, and as the government of the day it's our prerogative that we should be able to review and look into those frameworks.

Ms Jansen: You absolutely should. I would agree with you on that.

I want to jump down, of course, to the family and community safety program. I'm assuming that what we're talking about here is the \$20 million, that I had announced a number of years ago, that was the family and community safety program, which is a series of grants for agencies in the community that partner with each other. Is that what we're talking about?

Mr. Sabir: That's certainly, I guess, the case. You had announced it, and some of your colleagues then cut it down to \$5 million.

Ms Jansen: Yes, they did.

Mr. Sabir: We reversed that. We think that it was a good investment, that it's a needed investment.

Ms Jansen: Yeah. It's actually a terrific investment, so I was very glad to see that. I want to ask the question because when we talked about that line item, we actually talked about having groups apply. All the groups applied, and the deadline passed, and they were told that they weren't getting the funding. Do they now have to reapply?

Mr. Sabir: We will be working with existing partners and with whoever applied.

Ms Jansen: So we can say to our stakeholders who got letters saying that they were refused that they could potentially be back in the mix again?

Mr. Sabir: They were refused because funding was proposed to be cut, right?

Ms Jansen: Well, I'm not sure of the reasons for the refusals. I would assume that under the grant program there were a lot of applications, so there could be many reasons why they were refused. It's just that there are a lot of stakeholders there, and some of them rely on this money in order to be operational. They've been contacting me because they were pretty excited to see the line item back in the budget. I'm just concerned about how that process will work going forward.

Mr. Sabir: The unfunded applications will be reviewed, and funding will be focused on supports and services on an as-needed basis in rural areas, aboriginal and cultural communities as well as on programs that respond to urgent family violence priorities.

Ms Jansen: So I can say to the stakeholders who are contacting me that, potentially, if they've been turned down already, they might actually be qualified based on their original application for funding?

Mr. Sabir: I think it would be safe to say that those applications would be considered.

Ms Jansen: They don't have to reapply?

Mr. Sabir: Not for the same program, no. If they are essentially presenting the same application with the same program, same description, they do not have to reapply.

Ms Jansen: Okay. Maybe I'll continue that conversation with you offline if I could get some information from the department on that, because I do have quite a few people contacting me.

Mr. Sabir: Sure.

Ms Jansen: One of the things that I found in the department when we were talking about things like the bullying helpline – where would you find that in a line item? I'm just wondering: does it come out of 12.2?

Mr. Sabir: It is 12.2, promoting healthy relationships.

Ms Jansen: Would you have a sense of the breakdown of the costs? I was given the idea that it was somewhere around \$500,000 for the helpline. Am I in the right neighbourhood still? Like, out of the 2014-15 budget I think we've got \$1.8 million down there. Would you say that about \$500,000 was for the helpline?

Mr. Sabir: I think my staff will provide me with . . .

Ms Jansen: Susan Taylor will absolutely have the answer because she always does.

Mr. Sabir: It was \$400,000 for family violence and the bullying helpline.

Ms Jansen: This is more of a suggestion, and this is not going to come as a surprise to anyone in the department because I think I've probably suggested this before.

Mr. Sabir: I'm open to suggestions.

Ms Jansen: You know, that's fantastic. I've heard that you are, so that's good.

I'm not necessarily sure that the government should be in the business of providing helpline services when we have – Kids Help Phone is an amazing organization. When you look at that amount of money, \$400,000, the Kids Help Phone can take that and make an amazing difference with that kind of money. So my suggestion to you would be that you could take even a portion of that money and offer it to the Kids Help Phone, which already has the ability to democratize the reach in all Alberta schools. They already have national sponsors, they have a great group of people working there, they already have LGBTQ-trained counsellors, so they certainly have a huge asset base.

A suggestion would be that instead of sort of spreading out and having two services offer helplines in Alberta, perhaps you could direct grant money towards the Kids Help Phone and enable them to grow because they certainly have a reach across the country. They have a huge sponsor in Bell, and it might actually offer the opportunity because their brand is better known. One of the things I've found in the past is that with a brand that's less known – and we were certainly always out there with the antibullying bracelets. It's an opportunity to get a little more bang for your buck, so to speak, and I think that's why, you know, we're looking at these line items and saying: how do we get that? So there's a suggestion there.

I'm not sure if you've met with the folks from Kids Help Phone or not.

10:30

Mr. Sabir: I haven't met with them, but certainly I can consider that.

Ms Jansen: Excellent.

Mr. Sabir: In any spending essentially the idea is: where can we get the most benefit when we are spending any public dollars, and how can we be more accountable to the public? We will certainly be looking at ways to deliver services more efficiently, whether it's through a nonprofit partner, whether it's through the government operation, whatever is more beneficial for Albertans, whatever is more economical for Albertans. Certainly, those are the considerations.

Ms Jansen: I'm told I only have five minutes left. I did want to ask a couple of questions about child care because that's another area that I hear a lot about in Calgary-North West. It's, obviously, very concerning to families in my community, where the median age is 37 and the average person has two children in their family. I was really gratified to see the new motion that was passed by the Member for Sherwood Park, I think it was, on having a discussion about child care in public spaces. Just for clarification, that discussion never involved funding the child care spaces; it was just about providing the space. Is that right?

Mr. Sabir: I think that discussion went too far, but that discussion was only about urging government to consider the feasibility of having child care spaces on a going-forward basis in new government buildings. It went a little bit too far, but there was only this much discussion, that we should consider the feasibility of having or creating child care spaces in new government buildings. Certainly, we recognize that the provision of quality care is an important issue, and we will certainly be exploring ways to best provide accessible, affordable, and quality child care to all Albertans.

Ms Jansen: Are you making any changes to the funding that's in place for the current child care spaces that you have? It's over 100,000 now, isn't it?

Mr. Sabir: It's 105,000 spaces. We have increased funding, but that increase for the most part will be used to address the caseload growth, to address the wage top-ups, accreditation top-ups, but we have allocated money, \$75 million in the next year, '16-17, and \$100 million the year after. We are in the planning stages of how to best move forward.

Ms Jansen: Do you have a sense of what that money is going to be earmarked for?

Mr. Sabir: We campaigned on a promise that we will make sure that everybody has access to affordable child care, and the number that we believe is affordable is \$25 a day. No decision has been made, but the overarching framework of the priority will be that we meet our campaign promise of \$25 a day and we deliver quality care which is accessible to all Albertans.

Ms Jansen: I'm assuming, by "accessible," that you're going to be looking at the idea of child care in nontraditional hours for folks who work shift work?

Mr. Sabir: Certainly, everything is on the table. Whatever the needs of Albertans are, we'll make sure that our program responds to those specific needs, and shift workers are no exception.

Ms Jansen: No. Very true.

Finally, what would you consider to be, budgetwise, your biggest challenge in terms of growth in this budget specifically, that we're looking at?

Mr. Sabir: With the downturn we are expecting some pressures on Alberta Works and income support programs. That's one area which I can think of. At this point I think that's the major ...

Ms Jansen: Are you hearing, as we've heard reports in the news about ... [A timer sounded] Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Member and Minister.

We will now take a five-minute break, so if I could ask everybody to be back by 10:40. We will be starting right on time, please.

[The committee adjourned from 10:35 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

The Chair: Thank you, everyone. We'll call the meeting back to order. If you could all have a seat.

We're now going to be moving into the 20-minute rotation for the leader of the Liberal opposition party. Dr. Swann, would you like to go back and forth?

Dr. Swann: Yes, I would – thank you – if the minister is comfortable with that.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Please go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Well, having missed the earlier part of the meeting, I will likely be repeating some questions that you've dealt with before. Thank you to you and your staff for fielding the questions around the budget. It's a challenging time in Alberta's history and especially for the kinds of work that you folks are doing in our communities across the province. The circumstances of stress and strain are palpable in the communities, and I for one am very pleased that you have seen fit to increase the supports for people in their most vulnerable times.

I wanted to ask some questions on child care, questions about AISH and homelessness.

As you know, I've been working with the committee on mental health and addictions issues in the province, and this overlaps with a lot of what you're dealing with, and I hope that I can learn more about how to strengthen our capacity to work with people with mental health and addictions with your ministry.

With respect to child intervention – I'm sure you have talked about it already – almost two-thirds of children in care are First Nations. There's growing concern in the First Nations communities that they're losing children from their community that could be managed better in the community. I gather from line item 3 that you've estimated \$730 million, an increase of \$23 million over last year's budget, and are hoping to increase child intervention funding by another \$32 million next year and a further \$42 million in 2017-18 to reverse the cuts made to services for children in care. Can you tell me about how your approach is shifting around First Nations children?

Mr. Sabir: Certainly, the First Nation children are overrepresented in our system. Our approach – I may digress a little bit – needs to be seen in the overall context of the government of Alberta's policies. The first thing we did: there was a letter issued by the hon. Premier to scan this point of interaction and services that are provided to First Nations through the government of Alberta. That's ongoing work. All ministries, including Human Services, are looking into their services, what they are providing to First Nations, with a view to aligning those services with the United Nations

declaration on indigenous peoples. That's ongoing work. That's ongoing work, and the first report will be presented to cabinet in February. The lead on that is the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. That's one thing that we are anticipating will help us to deal with this matter and other matters in relation to aboriginal people by aligning those services to the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

That's the overall context, but in specific we have adopted an intervention practice framework, which ensures that we are delivering more culturally appropriate services. We have seen a decrease in the last three years in the number of aboriginal children in care, and that's as a result of that practice framework, such as signs of safety, which does early planning with aboriginal families, looks for their strengths, looks for their risks, maps out what supports will be available should the child come into care like kinship care with aboriginal people. With all those programs, in particular working with aboriginal communities, we are anticipating that we will be able to decrease these numbers, and where it's unavoidable, we will work with the aboriginal communities to find care which is more culturally appropriate to the First Nations children.

Dr. Swann: Two related questions. Do you have aboriginal staffing, and is there a priority in building your aboriginal staffing? Secondly, how do you deal with the federal-provincial conflicts that continue to create a two-tiered system and many falling through the cracks?

Mr. Sabir: We do have an aboriginal engagement co-ordinator, and we do have aboriginal staff. Aside from that we do have training in place for cultural sensitivity so that every intervention worker understands the cultural context and the priorities of the department in how we want to work with First Nations to make sure that their children stay with the families, with the communities, or in culturally appropriate care.

On the federal side there is an initiative going on, a child and family services engagement process, and we are working with Aboriginal Relations from our government, aboriginal engagement and northern development Canada, the federal counterpart – they may have changed the name of that ministry – and each of the provincial treaty organizations. We will try to work with these partners. Since we became the government, I can mention one thing. There was one issue: children receiving medical services on- and off-reserve were getting deferential treatment, commonly known as Jordan's principle. So we have also committed that we will recognize that, that no child should ever have to suffer from those jurisdictional conflicts. Those issues are there, but certainly we are willing to work with our federal counterparts and our First Nations. We're willing to play our role, and broader work across the GOA, led by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, will also help us sort out many issues.

Dr. Swann: What do you do about the money if you treat somebody and you feel it should have been paid for by the federal government? Is there some kind of exchange both ways when Jordan's principle is applied?

Mr. Sabir: That is a money issue. That's what I am saying, that the child shouldn't have to suffer for that reason. Essentially, by recognizing it, we are willing to take that responsibility and pay up front and deal with those money issues with the federal government later on. The purpose here is that the children shouldn't suffer because of that.

We do have recoveries in our budget showing that we received ...

10:50

Dr. Swann: What's the average exchange, the net exchange, generally? How much of this actually happens, that you actually use Jordan's principle, that you provide a service and then get reimbursed? Do you have any sense?

Mr. Sabir: I do have facts around that. Just let me provide . . .

Dr. Swann: I hear anecdotally that children still fall through the cracks. It's difficult to get to care when they have to fight to get to care. It's not necessarily appropriate for them and their family, and in many cases they simply stay where they are and try to manage until it's too late because of the many barriers that they experience crossing between federal and provincial jurisdictions. So this is adding not only to the child's health risks but also to the delays in getting care for the parents who need care for whatever condition they're struggling with.

Mr. Sabir: And that was the intention behind accepting Jordan's principle, that children and families shouldn't suffer.

I do have a revenue summary about the exchange, what we received from the federal government. For services on First Nations reserves last year we received \$53.6 million. This year we are estimating that it will be \$60.4 million. In terms of labour market developments we received last year \$158.4 million, and this year we are expecting \$151.5 million.

Dr. Swann: What were those last numbers about?

Mr. Sabir: Labour market developments.

Dr. Swann: If you're doing training for First Nations people off-reserve?

Mr. Sabir: It's for everyone, all Albertans.

There are other transfers, \$25.5 million; we are hoping we will get \$22.1 million this year. Premiums, fees, and licences: in that regard we get \$5.5 million; it's supposed to stay the same for the current estimates. There are other revenues amounting to \$29 million, and we are expecting to get less than that, around \$20 million, for a total of \$259.7 million. That's what we are expecting to get this year. Last year it was a bit higher.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

With respect to child care I came in at the tail end of your conversation. I'm pleased to see that you're moving somewhat in the direction of making child care more affordable and accessible in Alberta. Can you tell me: in the current financial climate what are you actually planning to do, if things continue as they are, about making child care more affordable in the next three years? You talk about \$25 a day per child. Is that really where you're headed in the next three years?

Mr. Sabir: There is an increase in the current budget, and I mentioned earlier that that increase will be used to address the caseload growth, current needs, accreditation top-ups, and those things. We have allocated \$75 million in '16-17 and \$100 million thereafter.

Dr. Swann: We're talking about only 25 per cent of families having access to child care, according to the statistics I've been reading. We're dealing with a huge number of children that need child care. What are you realistically thinking about in the next three years for spending on child care?

Mr. Sabir: That's the need we are responding to. At this point, in these estimates, we didn't allocate money for the \$25-a-day plan, but in '16-17 and the year thereafter we have allocated \$175 million in total. So we will be planning to develop a program which is affordable, which is accessible, and which is of a better quality and which helps children in early development. The plan is that with the money in the out-years we will be working towards \$25 a day.

Dr. Swann: What proportion of children or families that need child care are getting it now? Am I wrong in saying that only about 25 per cent of families needing child care are getting it and that we're going to have to triple the availability?

Mr. Sabir: That 25 per cent number sounds correct when it comes to licensed care, but there is other care available, too. What I can do is get back to you with details on the exact percentage.

Dr. Swann: How important is licensing? Are we moving towards getting more licensed daycare?

Mr. Sabir: I think licensing directly relates to the quality of the care, so the better and higher the standards are, the expectation is that the better the care will be. At this point all daycares are licensed, but there is still care that is not licensed. As of June 2015 there were 2,478 licensed child care programs run by for-profit and nonprofit operations, and the accredited programs received the wage top-up to help them hire quality staff. There are also daycare program professional development grants. All these grants are there to help the child care providers to enable them to provide quality care.

Dr. Swann: So only the licensed ones.

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Dr. Swann: I assume we're working on getting them all licensed at some point. That's about quality and reliability and safety.

Mr. Sabir: That is correct.

Dr. Swann: You're working to get all of them licensed?

Mr. Sabir: That is correct.

Dr. Swann: How much more will you have to do to get them all licensed? What percentage are unlicensed?

Mr. Sabir: As I indicated that I only had the number in licensed care, I will not be able to speak to this question unless I have the details you asked about previously. I can build this into that answer as well.

Dr. Swann: With respect to early intervention services for children and youth, one of the key messages we're getting in the mental health review is that there's no communication between Human Services and the health system and that we lose people as a result of the breakdown in sharing information around a child. Can you tell me what plans are in place to try to build stronger communication around children and families at risk?

Mr. Sabir: I think as a government we recognize that we need to do better on mental health. That was the purpose of launching that review. We look forward to the recommendations and to the review report. In light of that, certainly, changes will be made. That was the purpose of that review, that we can improve on those services. At this point only you are privy to the details of that report. I am not.

11:00

Dr. Swann: I'm glad to see an increase of \$1.2 million in promoting healthy relationships and preventing bullying in line 12.2. There's, understandably, a lot of concern in our communities and schools about that in relationship to the rest of our health protection package. Conversely, though, on sexual violence prevention services you've cut \$4.2 million from the last year's actual of \$7 million. How do you reconcile those two decisions?

Mr. Sabir: With respect to the cuts first, that was not a cut. Actually, there were one-time payments made. There were some prepayments that were made in the previous year, but we are maintaining the funding for core services. So in the previous budget the previous government made one-time funding, but the core funding for services remains the same.

With respect to promoting healthy relationships and preventing bullying, the goal is to work towards an Alberta free of bullying through a co-ordinated provincial response that includes the promotion of healthy relationships and a range of supports available to those who are impacted by bullying. So that was the reason that we increased the funding in that area, to be able to provide all needed supports.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

The Chair: Nice timing, Minister.

We will now move on to the last 20-minute rotation for the government caucus. Ms Payne, I believe that you will be asking questions of the minister.

Ms Payne: I will.

The Chair: You would like to go back and forth?

Ms Payne: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Ms Payne: First of all, thank you, Minister, for the opportunity to have you here and to be asking you questions on behalf of my constituents in Calgary-Acadia. Certainly, Human Services is one of our largest ministries, with quite a few programs and quite high-demand programs, I would add, too, under its umbrella. So I'm really honoured to have the opportunity to dig a little deeper on some of the services provided as well as the impacts on the budget.

In the budget line 8 on page 153 is around the funding for family and community support services. I know we've talked a little bit about this so far, but I'm curious to hear some more details about how the increased funding for FCSS programs will support community-based prevention programs in both urban and rural areas.

Mr. Sabir: So we are talking about which line item?

Ms Payne: Line item 8, particularly around the increased funding for FCSS programs and the impact on our urban and rural communities.

Mr. Sabir: Human Services is focused on a number of initiatives to support rural and remote communities. That \$25 million increase in FCSS funding represents a significant investment towards that end and to support the well-being of Alberta's families and communities. This funding is provided through programs that are developed by the communities based on their needs in the communities, and it's a partnership. Government partners with the participating municipalities and FCSS organizations and Métis

settlements on a formula based on an 80-20 split; 80 per cent of the expenses are provided by the government, and 20 per cent is provided by the participating municipality. Approximately 36.7 per cent of the total FCSS funding is allocated to go to the communities which are outside of the seven major municipalities, which are Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and Wood Buffalo.

Ms Payne: Wonderful.

Do we have a sense of how many Albertans benefit from the increase to this funding?

Mr. Sabir: FCSS programs serve communities and municipalities that represent 99 per cent of Alberta.

Ms Payne: Wow. That's great. Thank you.

I want to shift focus a little bit and talk a bit about the fact that, you know, everyone around this table is aware that we are in tough economic times, and certainly those economic times have left us with a lot of Albertans struggling to make ends meet. I'm just curious how the Human Services budget reflects the fact that with the economic downturn more people will potentially require support.

Mr. Sabir: I think that we do know that due to the sharp drop in oil prices it's challenging economic times for all Albertans. The Department of Human Services along with other departments across the GOA are working together to help Albertans during these tough economic times. There is a strong correlation between unemployment in Alberta and the need for supports, in particular income support and employment supports, so we have increased funding in that area in anticipation of increased demand. That's one thing we have done.

Then, secondly, we have introduced a higher minimum wage as well, which we also expect will help Albertans to make ends meet. We have also introduced a new Alberta child tax benefit, and that will be available to all Albertans who are earning under \$41,000. We have also enhanced employment family tax credits so more money gets to Albertans. So there are a number of programs within Human Services and across the government of Alberta that are directed at addressing the needs of Albertans during these tough economic times.

Ms Payne: Thank you.

Minister, do you feel that – there are a number of areas within Human Services where the budget adds a little bit to program delivery. Do you believe that this budget does enough to support those who may be struggling as a result of the economic downturn?

Mr. Sabir: I think there is always room to do better, to do more, but what this budget does is that it stabilizes the services that are available to Albertans, and where we anticipated that there will be increased demand, we increased funding for that area. Where we recognize that there is a need for more support, we increased that support, too.

The second thing that this budget does is a major policy shift, that we are focusing more on the prevention side of things; for instance, the increased funding for FCSS programs. These dollars, these funds, support programs which are preventive in nature and address many social issues within communities, and they are developed and designed by the communities. We also increased funding for the women's shelters for those women and children who are affected by or fleeing from violence. This time that particular funding, the increased funding, is going towards providing the wraparound supports to those families.

By focusing more towards prevention, we hope and anticipate that pressure will decrease on the intervention side of things. So through better planning and focusing more on prevention, we are hoping that we will be able to reduce pressure in certain areas.

11:10

Ms Payne: Wonderful. Thank you, Minister. You know, as the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure in a lot of cases.

I wanted to shift topics again and talk a little bit more about child care. As a mom engaged in the workforce it's a keenly important issue. I just also wanted to say that, you know, just in the same way that all moms are working moms whether they work outside the home or not, all parents are raising their kids, whether or not they're engaged in the workforce. I wanted to specifically target in the business plan initiative 1.2, which discusses increasing the affordability and the quality of child care. I'd like to know how this budget's funding for child care addresses the current issues around access to affordable and quality child care.

Mr. Sabir: I'm glad to hear, I guess, support for child care programs across the board from all members, across all political divides. It remains a priority of our government that we be able to better the choices for all Albertans when it comes to quality child care. In the current 2015 budget it's increasing by \$16 million, which represents a 5.7 per cent increase. This increase in the funding will respond to the caseload pressures and to the child care subsidy and child care accreditation. But in the out-years we have allocated \$75 million in '16-17 and a hundred million the year thereafter.

The plan is that we will work toward \$25-a-day child care, which is accessible, which is affordable, which is of a better quality, which helps children and families with the early development of children. The ministry is currently examining the options to improve access, and we will be planning an increase to child care spaces in targeted areas where there is higher demand. We will seize opportunities to enhance program quality by embracing an evidence-based practice framework leading research in that area. We are hoping that in '15-16 we will be able to create 5,000 more spaces along with addressing the caseload growth and other pressures.

Ms Payne: Thank you.

Speaking particularly to child care subsidy, I mean, part of the challenge in times like these is that there's a threshold for family income after which point – under a certain threshold you qualify for the child care subsidy, and over it you don't. As we're seeing job losses across the province, I think we're seeing more families relying on a single income, and I expect we'll see more families that are going to be needing to access the subsidy. I was wondering if you could comment a little bit more about how this budget works to increase the affordability of child care spaces and improve access to subsidy when it's needed.

Mr. Sabir: I think child care subsidy is available to a family earning up to \$50,000 per year, and they can still qualify for the maximum subsidy. There are approximately 24,000 children in low- and middle-income families receiving subsidies to help them access quality and affordable child care. As I said, we have increased the funding in this area, so if through job losses more people wanted to access subsidies, we will be able to respond. But at this point I can tell you that there is no wait-list for the subsidy.

Ms Payne: That's wonderful to hear.

I'd like to continue along the line of talking about children and families, particularly around the child tax benefit that was outlined

in the business plan at priority initiative 1.4. I'm curious to hear a little bit more about how this benefit is going to support specific families who are struggling to make ends meet. For example, if we had a single mom with three kids in her family who is perhaps making under \$30,000 a year, what kind of impact would she see on her family's budget?

Mr. Sabir: The Alberta child tax benefit will be direct financial assistance to all lower income families. The income cut-off is \$41,220, meaning that a family making \$41,220 and below will be eligible for this benefit. The requirements for eligibility criteria for this benefit are that they must have resided at least a month in Alberta, they have filed a tax return, and the kids are under 18. This benefit is also available to those who are receiving other government income support services such as AISH and other income support. It won't be clawed back from their income. It's a tax-free benefit.

We are hoping that 235,000 children in 130,000 families will benefit from this benefit. The total amount for this benefit is \$195 million when it's fully implemented. I can give you a bit more detail. For a family with one child it's \$1,100 per year, for two it's \$1,600-plus, and for three it's around \$2,000 or \$2,100, for a maximum of \$2,750. It's a tax-free benefit, so it will certainly help families to address the basic needs of their children and provide them with better options.

We have also enhanced the Alberta employment family tax credit. What was happening before with that benefit – that benefit is only available to working families. In order to qualify you have to make around \$2,750, and after that this benefit kicks in. Prior to enhancement they were phasing in at a rate of 8 per cent; now they will phase in at a rate of 11 per cent. Prior to enhancement they were phasing out at around \$36,000; now they will phase out at around \$41,450, the same as the Alberta child benefit. That enhancement along with the new Alberta child tax benefit means that families will have more to spend on their needs, and it will help us address poverty in this province.

11:20

Ms Payne: Wonderful. I think that's a really great investment to make in our province and in families that could use a little extra help.

On a slightly different tack, I understand that the ministry is making some new investment in the child intervention system, particularly referenced in line 3 of page 152 of the budget. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how this reinvestment in the child intervention system is going to be used.

Mr. Sabir: This budget basically restores stable funding to the intervention system, and this funding will be used to make investments in the following critical areas: supports for children to remain safe at home with their families whenever that's possible – that's the priority – specialized supports for children with complex needs; addressing various mental health challenges faced by children and youth who are involved with the intervention system; supports to caregivers, including foster and kinship families; and supporting successful transition to adulthood. This increase represents a \$37 million reinvestment in child intervention from the proposed March 2015 budget. We are hoping that with this investment we will be able to provide families with the right supports when they need them and where they need them.

Ms Payne: Wonderful.

The Chair: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Minister.

We're now going to move into our 10-minute rotation with the Official Opposition, and I understand, Mr. Cooper, that you're going to be asking the questions.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I'd just like to start . . .

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, are you going back and forth, just to clarify?

Mr. Cooper: Oh, yes. Sorry.

I'd just like to start by saying thank you for your service to the province and to the people that you serve, children and adults that receive services from Human Services. I can't imagine the workload or the challenges that you face, so I really do appreciate the work that you do there. I know that it's a difficult task, so thank you.

The majority of my time this morning will be spent discussing some issues around the business plan – desired outcomes, priority initiatives, performance measures – particularly desired outcome 1 and predominantly around 1.6, "Build on preventive approaches in the child intervention system," and it goes on from there. I'm just curious if you can very briefly outline what, if any, major directional changes you are making to how the department interacts with children in care or children coming into care.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. We are talking about 1.6, the desired outcome, right?

Mr. Cooper: Correct.

Mr. Sabir: I've talked about this briefly, and I will repeat or add to what I have said earlier. What we really want to see changed is that our focus should change from last-minute interventions to the prevention side of things. On that front, the increase in FCSS funding essentially represents the change in that direction. Similarly, funding for family shelters, women's shelters also represents the change towards the prevention of things so that they have funds available to provide the wraparound supports.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Understood.

In 1.6 it talks about keeping families together. Let me be very clear. While many of my comments today will be surrounding adoption, I am a huge supporter of keeping families together where at all possible. In the name of full disclosure I've adopted two children, and I've had that opportunity because something horrible has happened in their lives. Keeping families together is a laudable goal and absolutely should be our primary responsibility.

With respect to family reunification, over a number of years there have been a lot of changes with respect to how we reunify families and a number of different strategies. Is there currently a set number of reunification attempts prior to moving towards permanency or a PGO?

Mr. Sabir: First, let me begin by saying that foster parents, including yourself, Member, play a very important role in providing children with caring homes and helping them achieve their full potential, and for that I thank you and thank all foster parents in this province for doing that amazing service for our province.

With respect to the policies around foster parents, as you outlined at the beginning of your comments, the priority is always that children should be able to stay . . .

Mr. Cooper: So is there a set number of reunification – I'm sorry. We only have 10 minutes together.

Mr. Sabir: . . . with their families and within their communities. So when I say that we are moving towards prevention and the signs of safety practice framework, all those efforts are geared towards leaving the children within their communities. Every effort is made to keep children within . . .

Mr. Cooper: I couldn't agree more, but is there a set number of reunification attempts prior to moving towards permanent guardianship?

Mr. Sabir: No. There is no set number, but every effort is made to make sure that children in care stay . . .

Mr. Cooper: So a child in care could go from mom and dad to a foster family, to mom and dad, to a different foster family, to mom and dad, to a foster family, to mom and dad an unlimited number of times?

Mr. Sabir: No. That's not the case, and that's not desirable either.

Mr. Cooper: For sure not.

Mr. Sabir: That's why I'm saying that we are working with the families at the front end, on the prevention side, so we can stop the kids from coming into care in the first place.

Mr. Cooper: I totally agree.

Mr. Sabir: When they do come into care for whatever reasons, the priority is that they should find a permanent home, a loving parent like you as soon as possible so that they don't have to go back and forth in different family homes and foster homes.

Mr. Cooper: Do you know, Minister – sorry. That sounded accusational.

The Chair: Member, I just want to clarify: can you somehow relate this back to the business plan, please?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. It's speaking specifically about keeping families together in 1.6.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: The total cost of the foster or kinship care program: I assume that's in the child intervention line. Do you know if there is a specific cost allocated to that?

Mr. Sabir: It's line 3.4 that allocates funding to foster care and kinship care.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. That's fine. I'll get the number later. It's not that big of a deal.

With respect to the cancellation of the foster-to-adopt program, I recognize that there has been a cancellation, and we've spoken separately, outside of this meeting, about that being a change in name only and not in the delivery of service. My question for you today is: how many families were directly affected by the cancellation of that program in that they were only engaged in the foster program through the foster-to-adopt program?

11:30

Mr. Sabir: First, I would say that there was no cancellation of that program whatsoever. The program was named "foster to adopt." There were some concerns about the terminology, so there was merely a change in terminology. We will not use that term, "foster to adopt," which implies that maybe the parents or families lose every hope when a kid gets into foster care. There was the concern,

and that use of terminology was reinforcing their concerns, so there was only a change in the terminology. There has been no change in that program.

Mr. Cooper: Right.

Mr. Sabir: There were 25 families with no impact.

Mr. Cooper: I guess the last question that I have is with respect to a change in philosophy. I'm getting reports from folks who claim to have had a foster-to-adopt placement and children that hadn't had contact as directed by the department. Now there's been a change in the direction from the department. I'm curious to see if that is a significant change in direction or perhaps just on a local level.

But because I only have less than 30 seconds left, I will just maybe say that I appreciate the efforts that you're making in child care, particularly for folks who need child care the most. I think that is a very laudable goal, and I thank you for that. It's critically important for our province.

I just would like to add that there is a cost to child care for every Alberta family that has children. Sometimes I'm not sure that that cost is recognized. My wife is about a hundred times smarter than me and way more employable than me. She could be outearning me left, right, and centre, so our costs of child care are in the thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars. I think that that's an important thing to remember.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move into the 10-minute rotation for the third-party opposition. Ms Jansen, are you starting again?

Ms Jansen: Yes. Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. Thank you, Minister, for your patience this morning. Three hours is a bit of a long haul.

I want to go back to a desired outcome in the business plan. Under desired outcome 1 you talk about, at 1.7:

Prevent and address family violence, sexual violence and bullying by creating additional women's shelter spaces, collaborating with communities and other ministries to address root causes and promoting healthy relationships across the lifespan.

In there – and I've looked through this business plan – I haven't seen LGBTQ issues addressed specifically anywhere. Traditionally they've always been in that area. I know that in the past we certainly produced a number of things related to LGBTQ initiatives. I'm wondering about the transphobic, homophobic bullying fact sheets, material for schools and universities, and I'm wondering if you have a plan that is just not included in here.

Mr. Sabir: Nothing substantive has been changed. The supports for LGBTQ are present there. Our government caucus has three LGBTQ, very passionate advocates for that community, and they would not let that happen. That's another thing.

But Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary is providing supports to them like housing services. There are other peer support services available to them. We are working with the University of Alberta Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services and the altView Foundation for Gender Variant and Sexual Minorities. We are supporting the youth outreach projects and McMan Youth, Family and Community Services, supporting the Colour Me Free project, so there are supports available to all Albertans, including LGBTQ, regardless of their sexual preferences.

Ms Jansen: It seems like, you know, the more we have these discussions, the more we see avenues where that funding can be put to really good use, particularly when it comes to bullying because we know that LGBTQ youth have substantially higher amounts of bullying in their ranks, higher numbers of young people who attempt suicide. You mentioned ISMSS, the institute for sexual and minority studies at the University of Alberta. We worked very closely with Dr. Kris Wells, and they do some excellent work out of that area. Is this an area where you could potentially look at increasing funding? These groups do some very important and targeted work.

Mr. Sabir: These groups certainly do very important work. Although the chair indicated that suggestions for increased funding were off limits, I will still address it.

Ms Jansen: I'm keeping it very broad.

Mr. Sabir: We have increased funding such as for family and community support programs. We do have solid representation from the LGBT community, and we will, I guess, be consulting with them and knowing from them what the needs are out there. In any future programming you will see that we'll have input from those members and from that community. They are, as I mentioned, very passionate about those issues, and they are very capable members of our caucus.

Ms Jansen: For a group like the Boys & Girls Clubs – they have really been ramping up their efforts. I know that they have some LGBTQ homeless initiatives as well and are really doing some fantastic work. Is it possible to look at those groups and maybe from a crossministerial perspective say that there are a number of ministries you can pull on to support them in a little bit more profound way?

Mr. Sabir: Certainly, there is always room for improvement, and with co-ordinated supports, with more collaboration we can achieve better results. I have seen, like, collaborative practice models in other settings such as if I want to talk about the Sheldon Kennedy centre in Calgary, the Zebra centre. When you look at the integrated practice model, you can really see how they are finding efficiencies, how they are effective in what they are doing. So I would agree with you that with collaboration we can certainly do better.

Ms Jansen: Actually, that was the next point on my list. It was integrated services and how important it is to look at the organizations who are doing that work on so many different levels. The Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre and the Zebra centre are two organizations that are really doing that well. Do you work that into your business plan, where you make a special effort with the groups who are providing multilevel support?

Mr. Sabir: I think that in all of our services the idea is that we are moving towards more citizen-centred and integrated services. Those groups, although focused on one particular issue – at a government level that collaboration may look a bit different than that. But certainly that's the priority, that we should move towards more integration of services, one, so that we can find efficiencies. Two, Albertans should be able to navigate and access those services more easily, more readily. That's something which is a priority for the department. We will certainly be improving our services by integrating them, by finding opportunities for more collaboration within the department, within the GOA, and within our partners in the communities.

Ms Jansen: When I look at a lot of the issues on these lists, there is so much overlap with women's issues. I'm wondering what that looks like in terms of staffing and overlap. From a budget perspective have you seconded people from Human Services over to Status of Women? Has that happened so far, and is that reflected in the line items?

11:40

Mr. Sabir: Yes. We have seconded some people to set up that ministry. As you indicated, there was some work that overlaps with my ministry. There were people who were working within our ministry specifically on those issues, and those individuals had the expertise and credentials that were needed to support the new ministry to address women's issues. So, yes, we have seconded some, and we have transferred some into that ministry.

Ms Jansen: So the budget for those particular people stays in Human Services, but they just work in Status of Women. Is that how it works?

Mr. Sabir: For those who have been seconded, that will be the case. But for those who have been transferred, that will not be coming out of Human Services.

Ms Jansen: So you have two different situations there, some staff who have gone there permanently and some who are going to work there for a particular period of time.

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. For those who are permanent, Human Services will not be budgeting for their pay, but we will be responsible for those who were just seconded.

Ms Jansen: How does that work on an issue like, say, women's shelters, for example? Obviously, examining how women's shelters, you know, work and how much more multifunctional they can be with additional funding would be something that Status of Women could really look at, yet the entire budget for women's shelters falls within Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: The budget for women's shelters is more for their temporary housing needs. That falls within Human Services. Certainly, there are opportunities for the new ministry, Status of Women, to look into those issues as well.

Ms Jansen: So they could potentially come in with additional funding from Status of Women to offer services out of women's shelters that would sort of increase the benefit. For instance, if a woman goes to a shelter, you know, there's an opportunity for her while at the shelter to get counselling, to get employment information, all those sorts of things.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Sabir: At this point I can finish really quickly. We are collaborating with them . . .

The Chair: No, Minister. Your time is up. Sorry. We're moving on. We're trying to be fair to everybody.

Moving on now to the government caucus, a 10-minute rotation, please. Ms Payne.

Ms Payne: I will also go back and forth.

Handily, I was going to ask about women's shelters, so I was going to request if the minister could finish his thought.

Mr. Sabir: Well, women's shelters fall within the purview of Human Services. The purpose of that line item is that we should

have funds available for those families and children who are fleeing from violence or who are affected by violence. Primarily that funding provides them with shelter, but with increased funding what we have done – ideally we should not be just providing them with a bed. Rather, we should work with them and provide all wraparound and needed supports for them to move on and start all over again.

Thank you.

Ms Payne: Speaking specifically around additional beds, I mean, we know that many women's shelters in Alberta are at capacity and have turned away many more women and their children due to a lack of space. In line 9.4 of the budget we see an increase in funding for women's shelters, which I think is a move that many around this table would applaud. I would be curious to know how many additional beds will be provided with the increase in this budget and how the funding is allocated.

Mr. Sabir: This new funding will be investing in 120 second-stage shelter units. Those units never received funding before. These individual apartment units are for women and children who require more intensive skill and long-term supports, usually after they have received emergency supports from the shelter.

That said, we realize that supporting women and children leaving family violence is about more than a shelter, as I indicated earlier. This additional money will help us fund 84 new outreach workers to provide supports in emergency shelters and communities where women need that support and 40 child trauma counsellors to help break the cycle of family violence and help them understand family violence and help them heal after being exposed to family violence. We've invested in offsetting the rising operational costs of women's emergency shelters, including increases to the per diem rate paid to the reserve shelters.

This funding will primarily be directed to these initiatives. This response was developed in consultation with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and its member shelters. We will be continually working with them to address the growing needs and address the emerging needs.

Ms Payne: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'd like to cede the rest of my time to my colleague from Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Minister. I just have a few questions, that I think are particularly relevant to the constituents in my riding. I just want to talk a little bit about people with developmental disabilities, so the PDD stuff. I've had several people into my office who have either children under 18 with developmental disabilities or adult children with developmental disabilities, and they tell me that they have difficulty accessing services. They may have been approved for services, but they have difficulty accessing the respite care or other programs in the community that provide the services.

I do see in the budget on line 6.3 that we've increased the funding to community supports. Maybe you could just tell me what these community supports look like and if that money will be going to organizations to help provide increased capacity, perhaps, or how that money is being . . .

Mr. Sabir: And it's in relation to budget line item . . .

Ms Luff: Line 6.3 on page 152.

Mr. Sabir: We have increased the funding, as you can see, in this budget line item. These are individuals which are among the most vulnerable in Alberta, and that was the reason that the funding was

increased. This increase in funding will help us address issues such as the one you raised here today in order to provide the needed supports. We will be working with our community partners and agencies to make sure that these families and these individuals get the supports when they need and where they need them.

Ms Luff: Well, that's great. I think my families will be happy to hear that, absolutely.

I think I'm just going to ask a more broad question. Again, this is something that affects people in my area. I think we can all agree that a lot of the cost pressure on this and one of the root causes for a lot of things in this ministry is poverty in general. Poverty in general results in people needing to access more services, and it actually ends up costing us more money. I find that in my riding I have a lot of people coming into my office who seem to fall into a bit of a gap, where they're poor but they're not poor enough to receive the necessary services. Perhaps you could speak a little bit more broadly to how the Human Services budget supports reduction of poverty overall.

Mr. Sabir: That's a very important question, which I have answered, I think, before.

Ms Luff: I apologize if I was not paying close enough attention.

11:50

Mr. Sabir: Seeing that it's important for Albertans, I will certainly provide an answer to that. Human Services is basically working on a comprehensive approach to address and prevent poverty and help all Albertans, in particular low-income families, so that everyone in Alberta can live up to their full potential. With that backdrop, we have reversed the proposed cuts and actual cuts made to this budget previously, and we have tried to stabilize funding for these key initiatives that Albertans depend on.

We have also made new investments that will help Albertans make ends meet. For instance, the Alberta child tax benefit will support families with the rising costs of raising their children. That benefit will be available to all Albertans, including those who are on other support programs such as income support and AISH, so there will be no clawback of their income. This benefit will be above and beyond what they are already making, and that's quite substantial as well. A family making less than \$42,000 will be eligible for that, and the benefit for one child is approximately \$1,100; for two it's 1,600-some dollars; for three, \$2,100; and for four, up to a maximum of \$2,750. That's a tax-free amount, so that's a substantial amount.

We have also invested additionally in FCSS programs. The neat thing about this program is that this program allows the communities flexibility to develop and come up with their own solutions. They can do an environmental scan of the issues in their communities, and then they can come up with their homemade solution of what they think works for them. Government has increased funding for that one, so that will certainly help.

Along the same lines, in order to . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

The Chair: For the last seven minutes we will have Mrs. Pitt go back and forth again.

Mrs. Pitt: Wonderful. Thank you.

Line 9.4, women's shelters. What are the number of beds in Alberta right now? Is this new funding increasing or adding any additional beds to that number?

Mr. Sabir: I do have facts around that. Just one moment. Bear with me.

Mrs. Pitt: No worries. While you find them, do those shelters have a mandate to serve a specific area or community, or is it sort of really needs based? I know a lot of them will collaborate and work together to fill those needs, but is that the mandate?

Mr. Sabir: First, back to your first question, there are 740 beds across the province, and government funds 710 of those.

Mrs. Pitt: Are you increasing any of those beds?

Mr. Sabir: That increased funding is basically going towards more wraparound supports.

Mrs. Pitt: No, that's okay. I'm just specifically wondering about additional beds. Okay. And the mandate for service?

Mr. Sabir: The mandate is to serve families, women in need.

Mrs. Pitt: Are there boundaries?

Mr. Sabir: No, no boundaries, but, I guess, in part it's hoped that that funding will help us address family violence and those other issues as well, but there are . . .

Mrs. Pitt: That's such a political answer. Thank you. You did answer my question.

Your government has publicly made a commitment to take in Syrian refugees. I don't see any line items in this budget that would assist in that effort. Would that be part of your department? Where's the money?

Mr. Sabir: I thought we were talking about the line items in the estimates.

Mrs. Pitt: I'm talking about the line item missing. My assumption is that Human Services – like, the 2013 Alberta floods tend to appear in every single ministry, so my assumption is that the Syrian refugees would be a line item in every single ministry.

Mr. Sabir: That's something under discussion, and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour is taking the lead on that initiative. Once decisions are finalized, we will assess what impacts it will have on our services. We will certainly welcome those who end up in Alberta, Alberta being a welcoming place.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. So for now Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour is working on that initial plan, and I assume there will be some crosscollaboration down the road.

My understanding is that some stakeholders within PDD, more specifically brain injury, are still waiting on contracts from this budget. Are you aware of this?

Mr. Sabir: We have extended existing contracts to the end of the year, and we will be reviewing those as they come up for extension. We will be working towards consolidation of those contracts to find ways to better improve the services and be able to deliver the services more efficiently.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay.

Mr. Sabir: If I could also speak to one question, that you asked me earlier, about FASD births, there are no stats in Canada or Alberta, but research says that 9 in every 1,000 births have those

symptoms. In Alberta the estimate is that there are 500 babies every year.

In regard to your question on wait-lists for PDD individuals the wait-list at this point is approximately 360 individuals.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. What are you doing to address the wait-list?

Mr. Sabir: We are taking steps to make sure that they get the services for which they are waiting. We will be assessing their files, and we will be providing them services as soon as practicable.

Mrs. Pitt: I'm assuming that that's more funding as well.

Mr. Sabir: We have increased funding to address caseload growth, and certainly that will help us address this wait-list issue as well.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Line 1.7 of the business plan reads:

Prevent and address family violence, sexual violence and bullying by creating additional women's shelter spaces, collaborating with communities and other ministries to address root causes and promoting healthy relationships across the lifespan.

Yet in the budget, prevention of family violence, line 12.1, is cut by over \$2 million, and sexual violence prevention services are cut by \$137,000. While the funding for women's shelters has increased a substantial amount, which is wonderful, and bullying prevention has seen a small increase, how do you find the efficiencies in the other two areas?

Mr. Sabir: With respect to 12.1 there were . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Line 12.1 was cut by over \$2 million, and sexual violence prevention services were cut by \$137,000. Where did you find efficiencies?

Mr. Sabir: Through cost-containment strategies such as reductions in supply and services, contracts, and manpower savings primarily through managed staffing practices – that's where our main savings come from – and also prioritization of the family violence plan implementation. There are other supports like women's shelter spending, FCSS spending, so we are hoping that those prevention efforts also help us reduce the pressure in these areas.

Mrs. Pitt: What was your total staffing change for the department? Do you know? You've just mentioned a few times that you've been able to be efficient in certain areas of staffing while, I must say, probably not . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business is now concluded.

This meeting concludes the committee's consideration of the 2015-2016 main estimates. Thank you to everyone who has participated during this process.

The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

