



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature  
Fourth Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Seniors and Housing  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, April 4, 2018  
9 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 29th Legislature  
Fourth Session**

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Chair  
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP), Deputy Chair

Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)\*  
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)  
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP)\*\*  
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\* substitution for Karen McPherson

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## **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Seniors and Housing

Hon. Lori Sigurdson, Minister

Kim Armstrong, Deputy Minister

Darren Baptista, Executive Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Neil McDonald, Executive Director, Seniors Program Delivery

John Thomson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Housing



9 a.m.

Wednesday, April 4, 2018

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Ministry of Seniors and Housing  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Chair:** Good morning. I would like to call this meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Seniors and Housing for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table this morning. I'm Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the chair of this committee. We will continue to my right.

**Mr. Smith:** Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon, vice-chair.

**Mr. Yao:** Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Richard Gotfried, Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Mr. Gill:** Good morning, everybody. Prab Gill, MLA, Calgary-Greenway.

**Mr. Orr:** Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Clark:** Good morning. Greg Clark, MLA, Calgary-Elbow.

**Dr. Starke:** Good morning. Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Good morning, everyone. I have with me John Thomson, my ADM for housing. Darren Baptista is the senior financial officer. I'm Lori Sigurdson. To my right is Kim Armstrong, who's the Deputy Minister of Seniors and Housing.

**Ms McKittrick:** Bonjour. Annie McKittrick, Sherwood Park.

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

**Drever:** Good morning. Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

**Ms Miller:** Good morning. Barb Miller, MLA, Red Deer-South.

**Mr. Horne:** Good morning. Trevor Horne, MLA for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Good morning. David Shepherd, MLA, Edmonton-Centre.

**Mr. Hinkley:** Good morning. Bruce Hinkley, MLA, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Ms Luff:** Robyn Luff, MLA for Calgary-East.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Gill for Mr. Ellis and Mr. Clark for Member McPherson.

Please note that the microphones are being operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates, including 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 and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes 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 rotation that follows of speaking times of up to five minutes, a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a total of 10 minutes. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding the speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either the chair of the committee or the committee clerk about this process.

A total of three hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having this break? Thank you.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate; however, only a committee member or an official substitute may introduce an amendment during a committee's review of the estimates.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Ministry officials are reminded to introduce themselves prior to responding to a question or questions. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery should not approach the table. Members' staff may be present and seated along the committee room wall. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority for 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 the committee will adjourn. The scheduled end time for today's committee is at 12 o'clock.

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 and any amendments is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 19, 2018. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I now invite the Minister of Seniors and Housing to begin with her opening remarks.

You have 10 minutes.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to be here today to present the 2018-19 estimates for the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. It has been my great privilege to serve as the minister for more than two years now. We're working hard every day to make life better both for seniors and for Albertans who require safe, affordable housing.

First, a few details about the ministry. We have an annual operating budget just shy of \$690 million and about 281 staff. My ministry includes the department, the office of the Seniors Advocate, and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. The department has three divisions: seniors' services, housing, and strategic corporate services. Our broad range of programs and services supports Alberta's 570,000 seniors and Albertans in need of affordable housing.

It is essential that we protect these vital public services for seniors and Albertans in need of affordable housing. We do so, mindful of our government's investment in the future of Alberta, building the schools, hospitals, and infrastructure we need now and diversifying the economy. We must also remain on the path to a balanced budget. We supported Albertans with low income through a recession, and we continue to support Albertans through the economic recovery. We will do so as careful stewards of government spending.

In Budget 2018 we are maintaining stable funding for seniors with low income. Budget 2018 continues to exercise restraint while ensuring that seniors get the financial assistance they may require. We are helping seniors remain in their homes so they can age in their communities, we are helping affordable housing providers address maintenance deficiencies at their properties and properties they manage for us, and we are investing in indigenous affordable housing projects.

My ministry's budget is responsible and prudent. This government understands that cuts hurt Albertans, and that's why we're maintaining stable funding for our programs. We're choosing to protect the programs and services that Albertans count on.

We continue with the implementation of Alberta's first-ever provincial affordable housing strategy. We continue to invest in a sustainable, affordable housing system, and service levels across all programs are holding steady. Some, like the Alberta seniors' benefit, will increase.

I will now get into a few specifics about my ministry's estimates. All seniors' benefits were maintained in Budget 2018, and funding increases in some of the programs ensure that all eligible seniors who apply will be accommodated. My ministry will spend over \$400 million to provide financial benefits to seniors with low incomes and to offer grants for community-based initiatives. These initiatives help seniors to be independent and, if they choose, remain in their own communities.

We're allotting more money, \$3.5 million, or 1.3 per cent, to the Alberta seniors' benefit. We recognize that for almost 1 in every 3 seniors in Alberta the federal benefit programs are not enough. These include old age security, CPP, the guaranteed annual income. The Alberta seniors' benefit supplements the monthly income of about 155,000 seniors in Alberta. We want to ensure that all seniors with low income who are eligible for the Alberta seniors' benefit receive that benefit. As part of the Alberta seniors' benefit program, we offer a supplementary accommodation benefit for seniors living in long-term care or designated supportive living. We're adding almost 7 per cent to the supplementary accommodation benefit budget. This benefit ensures that seniors retain at least \$315 in discretionary income each month after paying their accommodation charges.

Our special needs assistance program will continue to make available funding to about 30,000 seniors who may need help with

essential needs. By this I mean items such as appliance replacements along with some personal and health supports like diabetic supplies.

Last year we enhanced our medical trip benefit to support seniors who have to travel great distances from remote and rural communities to specialist medical appointments.

#### 9:10

We've also set aside \$2.2 million in funding for two loan programs that support older persons to stay in their homes and communities: the seniors' home adaptation repair program and the seniors' property tax deferral loan program. The programs support seniors to make needed repairs and adaptations to their homes that will help them to stay at home. We know that many seniors want to remain in their own homes, in their own communities, close to their family and friends.

Our seniors' community grants are provided to stakeholders that support seniors to live independently, to age in their communities, and to live with dignity and safety. Some of those stakeholders are part of our Seniors Advisory Forum. Government experts and stakeholders come together to seek input and ideas about the needs of seniors in an aging population that is increasingly diverse.

My ministry will continue to work with our community partners to enhance efforts that prevent and raise awareness of elder abuse and address ageism.

I will now take a few moments to talk about my ministry's work to provide housing supports for Albertans, including seniors, and I'd like to point out that about 11 per cent of households in Alberta are in core housing need. This means that they must pay more than 30 per cent of their household income to afford a suitable home. Every Albertan deserves a safe and affordable home regardless of their income. We continue to implement our provincial affordable housing strategy to give direction for an effective and sustainable affordable housing system. We continue the \$1.2 billion capital plan to address affordable housing needs. Implementation of our strategy has created 2,230 jobs and sustained thousands more.

We reviewed and updated the Alberta Housing Act regulations. The changes will benefit Albertans of low income to hold more assets and improve their likelihood of transitioning to market housing or home ownership. Other changes establish a new standard that will support Albertans, including those who were homeless, to transition into affordable housing. Our housing programs serve more than 110,000 people here in Alberta, with 70,000 housing units owned and supported by our government. About \$117 million of our housing operating budget is directed to the 102 housing management bodies that operate government-owned and -supported housing units, and we have provided an additional \$11.2 million in operating funds to our housing providers in Budget 2018 to support operations and help them catch up on their maintenance deficits.

As I said, we're pleased to follow through with our government's commitment to invest \$1.2 billion in affordable housing, an investment that will benefit more than 4,100 Alberta families. This year we plan to add 400 new additional spaces towards our goal. This commitment not only provides more housing for Albertans with low income, but it will also create approximately 9,600 person-years of employment.

In Budget 2018 the Alberta Social Housing Corporation is allocated \$267 million: \$235 million in capital investment and \$32 million for capital grants. This money will support the development and sustainability of affordable housing, new indigenous housing, and the affordable housing energy efficiency plan. That \$267 million includes \$8 million for the affordable housing energy efficiency plan to support our government's climate leadership plan, \$1 million in

capital grants for indigenous affordable housing projects, \$144 million for seniors' housing development and renewal, \$45 million for family community housing development and renewal, \$18 million for affordable and specialized housing and new housing supply, and \$51 million for planning and capital maintenance renewal.

The \$1 million is the first allotment of what will be a \$120 million commitment for indigenous housing projects. We are committed to supporting the implementation of the principles in the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We'll also be accepting proposals for indigenous affordable housing projects for consideration in capital plan 2019.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to present the estimates for the Ministry of Seniors and Housing. As I've outlined, the majority of my ministry's budget provides financial or housing support for seniors with low income and Albertans who may need or require affordable housing. We supported vulnerable Albertans through the recession and continue to support them through our economic recovery.

I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

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

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Mr. Gill, would you like the timer set for 20-minute intervals so that you're aware of the time, or would you prefer to let the full hour flow without interruption?

**Mr. Gill:** Twenty minutes should be fine, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time, and discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined.

Mr. Gill, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Gill:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Minister?

**Ms Sigurdson:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Gill.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister and to your staff, for being here with us. Let's start with a question on affordable housing. Key strategy 2.1 under outcome 2 on page 126 of the business plan is to continue working with the housing providers, the other orders of government, and stakeholders to advance the actions of a provincial affordable housing strategy. The strategy released in June 2017 includes, as you mentioned earlier, an investment of \$1.2 billion over five years to build 4,100 new and regenerated affordable housing units. My question is: does the whole \$1.2 billion fall under Seniors and Housing?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. The investment of \$1.2 billion is in our capital plan, and currently we have over 60 projects on the go. It's a significant investment we've made to create much greater capacity in our province. We know there's a significant need, so that certainly is capital funding that comes through our ministry.

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

Is this the investment for 2018-2019?

**Ms Sigurdson:** The \$1.2 billion?

**Mr. Gill:** No, no. Sorry. What is the number for 2018-2019 in the Seniors and Housing budget?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Just one second here. We'll get the exact number.

**Mr. Gill:** And if you can please tell me, like, where it is reflected and which line item.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. It's \$267,307,000. It's in the capital plan details. It's in the capital plan. It's there.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. That's fine.

**Ms Sigurdson:** It's page 63.

**Mr. Gill:** Page 63. Okay. Wonderful. Thank you.

Now, let's look at the investment of \$1.2 billion for 4,100 units. That's, like, approximately \$300,000 per unit. According to your information provided, not every unit is new. As we all know, for the ASLI program, the public-private partnership that the NDP abandoned, the average cost was approximately \$65,000 per unit, and those were all brand new units. Why would these units cost, like, five times that? And not all of these units are even new. Why is there a big discrepancy in the cost per unit? If you could please touch base on that.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. The ASLI program, you know, is a program that actually Health was involved in, so it was oftentimes for more significant levels of health care – right? – for the long-term care or further down the continuing care. In the Ministry of Seniors and Housing we're talking specifically about, you know, seniors in independent living, the lodge program, and on that scale we talk about level 1, 2, or seniors' self-contained. Certainly, our government is committed to investing in the public delivery of affordable housing, and certainly when we became government, there was a significant deficit in the investment that had gone on, so we are wanting to support our 102 housing management bodies across our province to make sure that those affordable housing units are available all across our province. That is our focus.

**Mr. Gill:** I understand. I mean, this is the challenge we're having with the government. I think it's Albertans, the hard-working men and women of this fine province, who are all actually paying all of our salaries. They need to know why there is a discrepancy between the costs, that have gone up five times. We are getting into this, like, the whole debate about: no; this falls under Health, AHS; this falls under Seniors. Minister, they are still taking care of seniors, so you should have some knowledge about that.

**9:20**

**Ms Sigurdson:** I do, and I just explained quite a bit about that, but certainly we have different responsibilities. When significant levels of care are needed, then Health is the lead ministry. Minister Hoffman, I know, would be pleased to speak to you later about ASLI. You know, we are absolutely investing and committed. There's been a significant – you know, it's four times more than the previous government's investment in the capital plan, so we're very proud of what our government is doing to support seniors who are living independently across our province.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Right now what's the target for the number of new affordable units in 2018-2019?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Four hundred. We have 400 new units coming online. As I said, we have over 60 projects, and that's from planning to the construction phase, so there's a lot of activity.

**Mr. Gill:** Yeah. That's wonderful. How many of these new units are dedicated to seniors out of the 400?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We're just getting that information for you. Of the 400, 120 are for seniors.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. How many of the new units will add to the complement of units available to the seniors' lodges?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I didn't quite hear that word.

**Mr. Gill:** Out of these 120, are any of these units going into the lodge program?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, they're all for seniors' self-contained or the lodge program. That's what the focus is, for sure. It's seniors living in levels 1 and 2.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. If I'm correct, Minister, Alberta currently has 4,700 lodge units.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We're just looking for that.

**Mr. Gill:** That's okay. I'm just wondering, like, how much this capital plan will add to those existing.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. Here is some clarity on the number of lodge units. We have 10,300 units.

**Mr. Gill:** Sorry. Can you repeat the number, please?

**Ms Sigurdson:** It was 10,300.

**Mr. Gill:** That's the total of lodge units?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Those are the seniors' lodges, and then in the seniors' self-contained there are 14,250.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. And how many will this capital plan add?

**Ms Sigurdson:** It's 1,364.

**Mr. Gill:** These are new, I'm assuming.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. And regenerated units?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. Here we have the numbers: seniors' regenerated or renovated units, 1,434; new construction units, 1,085; for a total of 2,519.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Can you please tell me: what is the dollar amount invested in this year's budget for regenerated units?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Just for seniors you want?

**Mr. Gill:** Yes, please.

**Ms Sigurdson:** It's \$280 million.

**Mr. Gill:** Still under outcome 2 on page 126, you said that the government prefers government-owned and -operated units. Do you have any plans to partner with the private or nonprofit sectors to construct cost-efficient affordable housing, or is the government's direction to move purely to a public model?

**Ms Sigurdson:** With our 102 housing management bodies across the province, which is the public delivery of affordable housing, there is and has been, due to the neglect of the previous government,

a significant, you know, backlog of maintenance and repairs needing to be done. Let's face it. Some of the facilities were built in the '70s, so they need to be completely replaced. We've really focused pretty significantly on the public sector, making sure that those facilities are there for the long term.

We are working also with the nonprofit sector because sometimes the nonprofit sector has specialized housing that serves a certain population, like people with developmental disabilities, or sometimes people focus on newcomers. We have many partnerships with the nonprofit sector. You know, our focus on the public and nonprofit sectors is really important because of, as I said, the serious neglect because of the previous governments.

**Mr. Gill:** I understand, but, like, I mean, the public model is 10 times the partnership model, so that's . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, the thing about the public model is that it's there for the long term. You know, there were some grants given out before. If those models go back to market, oftentimes they're only 10 per cent below market. That's not often serving the population that really needs the support, rent geared to income. That is why we want to focus, to make sure that Albertans who are vulnerable have the supports they need.

**Mr. Gill:** So you're saying that in the public model the care is going to increase and that the level of care and everything is going to get better.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We know that the long-term commitment of public delivery is a significant factor in why we want to make sure that we're investing in and supporting that. To be frank, it's been neglected significantly in our province if you talk to any of the housing management body boards across our province. Our government's stepping up to invest has made a big difference. We'll be able to sustain and expand what already is existing. We know that those units will be there for Albertans in 50 years, 100 years whereas with the previous models, when you're giving grants to the private sector, they had agreements to go back to the private market. That's not good for Albertans. We're giving millions of dollars away that don't support Albertans in the long term.

**Mr. Gill:** I think we're giving 10 times Albertans' money away with the same level of care unless you can prove me wrong, that the public model will provide better care than the care that had been provided previously by the partnership model. I think you're giving away Albertans' money 10 times more than it should have been unless you can prove me wrong, Minister.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I know that we're investing for the long term to support Albertans to make sure that they have the housing they need for many years.

**Mr. Gill:** No. I understand. I heard that three times, Minister. I'm just saying that, like you're saying, it's long term, but at the same it's costing Albertans 10 times more. These are the industry stakeholders that are telling us. I'm not making up this number.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I think that we could probably debate for a very long time whether it's a good investment when those units aren't for the long term supporting vulnerable Albertans. That's certainly the model that we inherited, that those units went back to the private sector. That's wasting money. That's throwing millions of dollars away. So I absolutely think the investment in public and nonprofit is the right way to go.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. We'll get back to this later on, I guess.

In response to a question in Public Accounts in December department officials indicated that new lodges will, where appropriate, include health care services. As per our previous conversation will these lodges, then, fall under Health rather than Seniors and Housing?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'm not clear. This is estimates. It's not Public Accounts. I don't know. Is there a line item that you can refer me to here?

**Mr. Gill:** No. I understand, Minister, but I'm just trying to see. Like, all these lodges will be built. Six months down the road or next year down the road if somebody is sitting in my seat and asking the government the same question, are they still going to be blocked by the same thing, that these lodges fall under Health now and not under Seniors and Housing? I'm just kind of anticipating that thing. I think it does fall under . . .

9:30

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'm happy to talk to you a little bit about the continuing care system. We have independent living – that's seniors self-contained in the lodge program – which is considered levels 1 and 2. That is absolutely under the portfolio of Seniors and Housing, what I'm responsible for as minister. When we move up into 3, 4, dementia care and long-term care, that is Health. So that is the demarcation line, sort of, that it is 3 and up that Health is responsible for. That is how the system is set up.

**Mr. Gill:** Again let's talk a bit about the national housing strategy . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Provincial.

**Mr. Gill:** I'm talking to the minister.

. . . a 10-year plan from the federal government, a \$40 billion investment in a national housing strategy. I think that on a per capita basis – I think we have that even in question period, so I thought I'd take this opportunity and ask you this again – our province should receive \$4 billion. How much money have we received, or commitment, from the federal government on this, Minister, please?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, certainly, the federal government did release their national housing strategy back in November. We are continuing to work with them. Each province has an agreement that they negotiate with them. It's bilateral. We have not completed negotiations – it probably won't be till late fall – so that is ongoing. They've only given us big, global numbers, so of course each province needs to negotiate for their particular province. Absolutely, we're working hard on that file and want to make sure that, you know, Alberta gets the supports it needs, but those decisions have not been made yet.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. I talked to a few of the stakeholders in Calgary, and they were feeling a bit nervous about it. They're saying that the number – they went through the line item, this national housing strategy, and they were saying that our province is only going to get approximately \$561 million, in the neighbourhood of that. These stakeholders would like to see the number averaged with the major cities. I thought, like, maybe if you have any comments on that or any comments on, like, if we're going to address affordable housing for indigenous communities or population coming from that national housing strategy, if you can please let me know.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Well, I just will say again that, you know, there have been no decisions made yet. We're just speculating, or

perhaps the folks that you've been talking to are speculating. I mean, obviously, we will negotiate in the best interests of Alberta, and we are certainly prepared to leverage. A lot of times if there are matching dollars that provinces need to put forward, we are committed to making sure that Alberta maximizes what the federal government is willing to give, and we'll negotiate hard for the best deal for Alberta. But it's all in the future. We don't know what that is yet. Certainly, the ministry and the federal counterparts are going to be working on that. We won't know exactly the details of that until later in the fall. But, certainly, we want to make sure that Alberta has all the leverage that it can to access as much funding as possible.

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

Now, if I'm correct, in 2015 or before 2015 2,600 beds were announced by the previous government, and this government is on track to deliver 2,000 long-term care beds. Out of that, 1,600 beds are going to be completed in the ASLI program. If my math is correct, does it mean that this government has cut 600 beds?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Of course, long-term care is – you know, I explained a little earlier – under the Ministry of Health, so please direct your questions to Minister Hoffman.

**Mr. Gill:** No. I'm just asking – maybe we should have Minister Hoffman here, too, because we're, like . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, you're asking about a responsibility of the Health ministry, so it is just appropriate that you ask those questions directly to Minister Hoffman.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. All right.

Now, the business plan on page 124 notes: "the implementation of the Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy." Key strategy 2.1, on page 126, talks about the importance of working with the housing providers, among others, to advance the actions of the strategy. How many housing management partners does your department work with, Minister?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, we have 102 housing management bodies across the province, you know, from one end to the other – I certainly visited with many of them – from High Level to Medicine Hat. We have really committed folks across the province serving vulnerable Albertans.

**Mr. Gill:** Awesome. Thank you.

Did these affordable housing management bodies warn you that if they didn't receive funding for the carbon tax, that your government introduced in 2017 and increased again in 2018, they couldn't absorb a boost in their heating bills? Was there any warning from these management bodies?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. I work very closely with the housing management bodies across the province, and there certainly are other organizations like the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association, known as ASCHA – these are umbrella organizations – that I meet with on a regular basis and hear, you know, the concerns that they have. Of course, our ministry is dedicated to making sure that housing providers have the supports they need. We know that they've been very grateful for the significant increase in investment in maintenance and renewal. That's helping them very much in terms of energy efficiency initiatives, which, then, do cut their costs. We are looking for ways to support them further to do that, but we've had a significant increase in investment to support them to be able to do those kinds

of renovations. We work closely with them and will continue to make sure that they have the supports they need.

**Mr. Gill:** They were thrilled, I take it, right?

Let's look at 2018-19 fiscal year. Has your ministry provided management bodies with any sort of extra funding to cover the cost of the carbon tax?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We've increased, certainly, the budget for community housing by \$11.2 million this year, which is almost a 26 per cent increase, to support operating pressures on our housing providers. This increase is not targeted to pay for the carbon levy because a price on carbon presents an incentive for everyone, from individual households to large industry emitters, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But our energy savings plan is already under way and will be available to help housing providers significantly reduce emissions. We've also invested in grants for energy audits, so housing management bodies are assessing: what's the best way to cut the costs? Do they need a new furnace, triple-pane windows, those kinds of things? We're certainly investing in all of those projects.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you, Minister.

Did you need to provide any additional funding for previous years to cover the carbon tax or not, or is this just this year and going forward, this \$11.2 million?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, in previous years we've certainly increased the operating budget. You know, the housing management providers hadn't had their budget increased for many years. We have supported them as well as increased capital investment in renewal because a lot of times the units had not been repaired. Whenever a unit turns over, sometimes there are significant costs for that, so that comes out of capital maintenance. Housing management providers have received a significant increase in funding since we became government.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Outcome 1 of the business plan refers to seniors having access to programs, services, and supports that help them live independently, and the Alberta seniors' benefit is a key program for addressing this outcome. How many seniors are receiving, Minister, if you can please tell me, support from the Alberta seniors' benefit program today?

9:40

**Ms Sigurdson:** About 155,000 seniors receive a benefit of up to \$280 a month. Of course, this is like a top-up program for Alberta, and it's quite unique to Alberta because the significant funding for seniors does come from the federal government. Old age security, guaranteed annual income, CPP: those are the main sources. But for, you know, extremely low-income seniors we do provide the Alberta seniors' benefit income support program to certainly help them and give them a top-up of up to \$280 a month.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Are you anticipating that the numbers of seniors will increase in this program or decrease next year, like any . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, we know that it's already increased. There's more need. A lot of it had to do with the economic downturn. Sometimes seniors will have investments, but because of the downturn in the economy they may not have access to as much income through that, so they have already gone up. We know that our population of seniors is increasing. Alberta still has one of the youngest populations nation-wide, but people are just living longer, healthier lives. Seniors are vital members of their community, contributing significantly. I think, you know, that over about 20

years it's going to about double, the number of seniors. We have now about 570,000 seniors in our province. The population is absolutely increasing, yes.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. The number, the figure supplied by your department for the average processing time for a senior seeking assessment for the benefit was seven weeks, approximately, in 2015-16, and in 2016-17 it grew to nine weeks. Can you please tell me: what's the average for 2017-18?

**Ms Sigurdson:** There are several different benefits, right? You know, there's special needs assistance, the Alberta seniors' benefit. Overall, it is 16 weeks, but if someone calls and they're in an emergency situation or it is extreme financial hardship, we do prioritize those. We are assessing them all the time. We don't want to have people having more difficult situations. In some cases, like with special needs assistance, if it's a straightforward request, then it is only two weeks. But sometimes there are complex needs. There are many factors that have to be assessed. Certainly, that's very important to our government, to make sure that people are supported quickly. Yeah. The special needs assistance is usually only about two weeks. There are different levels for them.

**Mr. Gill:** Do you anticipate that the wait time would increase or decrease in the future, or is it hard to kind of predict?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, we're always working to decrease it, you know, so we're trying to improve efficiencies and make sure that if for some reason there's an uptick and there's more demand in that area, we reallocate staff resources to that particular area that needs more support. We're always shifting and assessing all the time. We're always managing that.

**Mr. Gill:** All right. At the end of 2017 your department indicated that almost 2,700 Albertans were waiting for assessment for seniors' financial assistance. Do you think that number is acceptable?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, we want to process that as quickly as possible. As I've just explained, we're working very hard to make sure we manage things, and if people are in, you know, a very difficult or dire situation, we do prioritize those ones. We are working hard to make sure that people do receive services as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Is there any benchmark or a target, Minister, that your department has for seniors' wait times?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Generally we try to make sure that people are, you know, able to receive the benefit in a four-week period.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Thank you.

I mean, that's a very important part of the whole ministry, but it's not mentioned anywhere in the key strategies in the 2018-19 business plan. Can you please tell me why it's not mentioned to meet that target of four weeks, and if it's mentioned, can you please tell me where it is?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. In outcome 1, key strategy 1.1, it does say, "Provide individual and community-based programs and services that support seniors to fully participate in their chosen communities," so it is there. I mean, the ministry does have a whole raft of particular measures, and certainly we are wanting to make sure that seniors are supported in their communities. I can go through, you know, other items if you'd like to just note each of them.

**Mr. Gill:** No. If you're saying that it's in outcome 1, then that's fine.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. It's in outcome 1.

**Mr. Gill:** Yeah. That's fine.

Since we're in outcome 1, let's talk about page 124 of the business plan: to ensure that seniors have access to programs, services, and supports that help them live independently. The AG's 2017 report, once again, questioned the lack of action on the recommendation to assess the effectiveness of the seniors' lodge program and to review the minimum disposable income for residents and review that amount every year. Does this budget reflect any of the progress for fulfilling the AG's recommendation?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. In terms of the AG's request for us to do further work on this area, there are really three components to this recommendation.

- Improve the measures it uses to assess the effectiveness of the Seniors Lodge Program and obtain sufficient information periodically to set the minimum disposable income of seniors used as a basis for seniors lodge rent charges [and]
- improve its processes for identifying the increasing care needs of lodge residents and consider this information in its plans for the Seniors Lodge Program.

We have a working group. The department staff and a working group are right now working to develop this plan. We certainly take the Auditor General's recommendations very seriously and want to make sure that the lodge program is effective and, certainly, serving the needs of seniors throughout our province. This will be complemented with collaborative analysis under way with Alberta Health and Alberta Community and Social Services regarding the identification of increasing care needs of tenants in the seniors' lodge program.

I know that certainly throughout Alberta more and more we're working very closely with Health in terms of campuses of care, for example, so that someone who, you know, may have lived independently, 1 and 2, can have also people colocated with 3 and 4 dementia care in the same facility. One example is in Sundre. That's a joint project that we're working with Health on.

Certainly, we're continuing to work to make sure that we fulfill on the Auditor General's recommendations. That work is continuing and should be ready in the summer of 2018.

**Mr. Gill:** Sundre. Okay.

Minister, can you please tell me a little bit about what is going on with the Edmonton Buddhist Research Institute, the golden age castle keep? I believe it was announced that it was for 106 units.

**Ms Sigurdson:** It's the Buddhist – what is it?

**Mr. Gill:** Buddhist Research Institute. It was announced under ASLI for 106 units.

**Ms Sigurdson:** For when?

**Mr. Gill:** May 2014, actually.

**Ms Sigurdson:** For 2014.

**Mr. Gill:** Yeah.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I think I'll have to get back to you on that.

9:50

**Mr. Gill:** Yes. Apparently, we're hearing – and correct me if I'm wrong – that the government is suing them, and they are in litigation

with the Buddhist Research Institute. My question is: how many other litigations are going on with the government?

**The Chair:** Hon. member, can you please point to a line item that this question is related to? And please focus on the estimates and the business plan.

**Mr. Gill:** It is, Madam Chair. It is pertaining to the Seniors and Housing budget estimates.

**The Chair:** Can you point to the line item, please, Member?

**Mr. Gill:** No, I can't. Let me draw your attention to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, section 953, page 261. If you want, I can read it, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Gill:** "The whole management of a department may be discussed in a general way when the committee is considering the first item of the Estimates of that department." Madam Chair, this is to say: the administration of the department.

Furthermore, I'd like to turn your attention to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009, chapter 20, Committees. Here it states under the heading Estimates and the subheading Consideration in Committee: "The questions and discussions at these meetings are generally wide-ranging, although the rule of relevance does apply."

I would also draw your attention to chapter 18, Financial Procedures, under the heading The Business of Supply and the subheadings Legislative Phase and Consideration of Estimates in Committee. It says, "Chairs have generally exercised considerable latitude in the nature of the questioning permitted on estimates."

So, Madam Chair, I strongly believe the subject matter is extremely relevant to the budget estimates as these projects were announced previously, and on behalf of Albertans I just want to know what's going on. Where do these projects fit in the line item? That's exactly what I'm trying to ask the minister.

Please, Minister, tell me what is going on with the Edmonton Buddhist research centre. If you're not aware of it, my understanding is that it's in a lawsuit, a legal fight with the government. How many other service providers, private partnerships are in a legal battle with this government?

**Ms Sigurdson:** MLA Gill, again, this is an ASLI program, so it is the Department of Health. Your question is better focused to Minister Hoffman.

**Mr. Gill:** Yes. The capital funding for this one at that time did come from Seniors and Housing.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Health is responsible.

**Mr. Gill:** You should know a little bit.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, as you said in your quote about what it is, it's about the department. You can talk with Health further about that.

**Mr. Gill:** All right. Let me ask a question again on the AG's report. He repeatedly recommended that the government improve ways to identify increased care needs of lodge residents. Can you please tell me: what is the department doing to complete his recommendation, and where is it reflected in the budget?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We have a working group of stakeholders in the community, and they are working to address those three aspects that, you know, I already read into the record regarding what the

Auditor General said. We want to make sure that we're doing that right, so of course we want to work with people who are working in that area and providing those services, and the department staff is committed to addressing that. Certainly, we want to make sure that we fulfill those recommendations. That process is ongoing. It will be the summer of 2018 before we have any more specifics for you, but that work is in progress.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. So it's in process.

In last year's estimates the minister indicated the department was starting a listening tour to further this initiative. When I say "this initiative," this is to implement affordable housing options for off-reserve indigenous populations. Is that tour finished?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes, that tour is finished, and certainly we did allocate a significant amount of time last year because we really wanted to make sure that indigenous people across our province had the opportunity to talk about what kind of housing system they needed, what kind of, you know, programs they needed. We certainly didn't want to ... [A timer sounded] What does that mean?

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We certainly didn't want to be imposing that on them but, rather, really hearing from the indigenous population what's best for them. Indigenous organizations highlighted the importance of indigenous design, ownership, and operation of facilities to uphold the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Of course, we adjusted our program. I mean, there were certainly, you know, some suggestions that we came with, and we heard their concerns and ...

**Mr. Gill:** So the tour was successful?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Gill:** The tour was successful. You got a lot of, like, feedback. Okay. That's good. Thank you, Minister.

Last year your government committed \$90 million over the next four years to increase the supply of affordable housing for indigenous Albertans living off-reserve. How much money was spent last year, and what is the allotment for this year? If you can please indicate a line item.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Last year our focus was about the creation of the program, so that's why we did the listening tour. There was no allocation of funding for that. It was just within the regular ministry operations. So now that we have that, in this fiscal year we are having a call for proposals. We have an allocation of \$1 million, and that will be planning funding for the upcoming projects that will be in the capital plan of next year. That's being rolled out very shortly.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Thank you.

How many housing units do you think that will create under this program?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, because of the unique aspects as to exactly how – I mean, we haven't even gotten the proposals yet, so we just would be completely speculating. Certainly, I know it's going to create a significant amount of capacity, but we don't have that specific number.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. No. That's fine.

**Ms Sigurdson:** You know, it's a bit of give-and-take, but we think a little bit under 500.

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

On line item 2.3 on page 230 there is an operating expense of \$2 million, the same as last year, and line item 2.3 at the bottom of the page is for \$11.5 million. As I understand, the first one is for the low-interest grants, and the \$11.5 million is for the loans. Is that correct?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. Yeah, that's correct.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. What was the uptake on the \$2 million in grants for the previous two years?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We're just getting the specific number for you, but we do have \$2 million for people who don't qualify for the loan. They may not have 25 per cent equity in their home. They still may own their home, but to qualify for the grant, they have to have 25 per cent equity.

We had 200 grants. About \$500,000 of the \$2 million was allocated for grants.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We still have greater capacity for folks.

**Mr. Gill:** It's only \$500,000, so why are we going to continue with a \$2 million budget each year when we have only \$500,000?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I mean, the program is still fairly new. It was just announced in 2016. Each year there's greater capacity, more information – you know, people talk, word of mouth, and things happen – so we want to make sure that the capacity is there. We are going to continue to allocate that for people who are, you know, more vulnerable and cannot qualify. A lot of people can qualify for the loan program, so the uptake on that has been significant. It's been a huge success. So many people are receiving up to \$40,000. We call it the SHARP program, and 91 per cent of seniors said that the program helps them remain in their homes longer.

10:00

There's a couple that I met out in Sherwood Park. The wife has MS. You know, they had a four-level split, and they put in a chairlift, walk-in tub. It's just a new lease on life for them. They thought they'd have to move. That would have been very heartbreaking for them because they, of course, love their home and their yard and their community.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you, Minister. That's important.

I just want to talk about elder abuse. Performance indicator 1(a) on page 125 relates to elder abuse. There have been sharp drops in the awareness of elder abuse indicators from when the program was first introduced, in 2013-2014. A key strategy in last year's business plan has been dropped this year. Is there a reason why this important program has been allowed to just slide?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, it's a funny indicator. If I can remember correctly here, we had a strategy to go out and do some education with people across the province and sort of train the trainers and things like that. So that indicator, you know, has been fulfilled. We've completed that project. The awareness of people across the province has significantly increased in terms of indicators of elder abuse and things like that, so it is no longer on there.

**Mr. Gill:** So you're basically saying that because of the awareness elder abuse has dropped.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We still have the performance indicator under outcome 1 related to elder abuse awareness to capture the ministry's ongoing commitment to elder abuse training sessions, but the strategy is no longer there. That has been rolled out and is complete.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. What's the funding for the elder abuse program and awareness for 2018-2019? Is there any line item?

**Ms Sigurdson:** It comes under the community grants line item. There is \$300,000 in total, but they have not been allocated specifically yet, and that is something we will do throughout.

**Mr. Gill:** So this is under community grants, Minister. Please help me understand how an individual senior would benefit from the community grant if they're going through abuse. Like, is there a liaison program, or how does that work? If you can please explain.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. You know, each community is unique. The grants don't go to individuals directly. They oftentimes go to family and community support services, organizations like that in communities. They work on training for front-line service providers in communities. Different municipalities have different supports. The grants go to the municipalities. Of course, then they promote to make sure that service providers in that community know about it, so if there is someone that they become aware of who needs that support, they can reach out.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Thank you.  
What was the number last year for these grants?

**Ms Sigurdson:** One point five million dollars.

**Mr. Gill:** Sorry; \$1.5 million?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah.

**Mr. Gill:** So you're saying, Minister – like, if I'm understanding you correctly – the number dropped from \$1.5 million to \$300,000? Am I understanding you correctly?

**Ms Sigurdson:** This is a three-year program, right? The government of Alberta implemented a three-year, \$3.6 million co-ordinated community response program to address elder abuse. So that was divided up amongst three years.

**Mr. Gill:** I know. I understand.

**Ms Sigurdson:** You know, certainly, the community organizations that deliver this understood that it was a three-year grant program and have been working in terms of the transition.

**Mr. Gill:** I understand, Minister. I'm going to run out of time, so that's why I just want to ask a question. Last year the amount was \$300,000?

**Ms Sigurdson:** No; this year.

**Mr. Gill:** Sorry; this year is \$300,000. What was the amount allocated for last year for this program?

**Ms Sigurdson:** One point five million dollars.

**Mr. Gill:** So now from \$1.5 million we have dropped to \$300,000.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, a lot of this was that it was a three-year grant program, right? It was about getting the community co-ordinated, so there were, you know, front-end costs.

**Mr. Gill:** We're talking about the yearly allocated.

**The Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt; however, I would request that questions come through the chair . . .

**Mr. Gill:** I understand.

**The Chair:** . . . and responses come through the chair to avoid the cross-interruption.

**Mr. Gill:** No, no. I understand. I just want to . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. member, if questions could come through the chair.

**Mr. Gill:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Gill:** Yes, Madam Chair. If you can ask the minister why there's a discrepancy, why the amount yearly allocated last year for elder abuse was \$1.5 million and this year it's at \$300,000. Can you please explain why there is a decline in funding for elder abuse of \$1.2 million?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Go ahead, Minister.

**Ms Sigurdson:** There was a three-year program, and certainly to start it up, there were significant costs in the first two years. There was always a plan that this program would only be three years in duration. We have an evaluation under way right now, and we'll be assessing what we'll do next, but the money needed to be up front to help it, you know, get off the ground because they needed that support initially. There was a significant amount allocated in the first two years and less in the third.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you. If the minister can please tell us: what's the plan for addressing more training and awareness? Is that part of this three-year planning for elder abuse, or is it somewhere else in the budget?

**Ms Sigurdson:** To date I just want you to know that 1,400 service providers throughout Alberta have been trained to recognize, refer, respond to, and reconnect with people impacted by elder abuse. The taking action against elder abuse co-ordinated community response grant program had been introduced previously. As I said before, it's \$3.6 million. In terms of going forward, we're currently doing an evaluation of that program to see what is needed. That's ongoing, and we'll have more to say about that in the future.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you, Minister.

Minister, you've heard from many seniors' centres in communities throughout Alberta struggling to pay their extra heating costs due to repeated increases in your government's carbon tax. Does this line item include any kind of funding for seniors' centres?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, seniors' centres. Again, with family and community support services, which is something that is allocated through the Department of Community and Social Services, communities make their own distinct decisions about where they allocate resources, whether it be just seniors or youth or, you know, different disability groups, those kinds of things. Really, that is sort

of where the support is, and it's up to each individual community to decide on how they will support seniors.

**Mr. Gill:** That's fine. Thank you very much.

Line item 2.4 on page 230 indicates \$1.8 million for seniors' community grants. My question was, through the chair: does this line item include any kind of funding for seniors' centres to help them pay a portion of the carbon tax?

**Ms Sigurdson:** This is for, for example, the Kerby Centre. You might be familiar with it in Calgary. They get a grant that helps them with the provision of services for seniors, including assistance and referrals on provincial programs and services. This also is supporting the Grey Matters Conference, which is an annual conference that, you know, supports state-of-the-art information about supporting seniors across the province. It brings people together. We also have Seniors' Week as part of that grant program. Seniors are honoured in communities all across Alberta. We have other initiatives like the transportation tool kit, supporting dementia-friendly communities.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you, Minister.

The community grant funding has remained the same for the past two years. Again, Minister, if you can please tell us: how do you expect these centres to absorb the carbon tax when we have seen the carbon tax increase two times but the funding has remained the same? If you can please give us some of your thoughts on that.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, as mentioned before with seniors' centres, that is something that an individual municipality decides, where to allocate the funding for that, so that would be FCSS.

10:10

**Mr. Gill:** The seniors' centre will have to absorb that, I'm assuming.

**Ms Sigurdson:** The family and community support services decide in each community how they allocate the funding, whether they support seniors' centres, whether they support youth. It's all up to the individual municipalities. Seniors' centres are supported that way.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Thank you.

Now, in family and community is there any separate line item that goes towards a carbon tax allocation for these centres?

**Ms Sigurdson:** As I've said a few times now, family and community support services does fund seniors' centres, and they make their individual decisions based on that municipality.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Have you advocated on behalf of seniors to your colleagues to say that because of the increase in carbon tax your department needs a little bit more help?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I advocate for seniors to all my ministry counterparts for various reasons. Certainly, seniors are a vital part of our community, and we want to make sure that they're supported to live in the community and close to their family and friends, where we know they want to be. Certainly, I've gone to many centres across the province and have seen the tremendous work they're doing.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

As you will know, when an AISH recipient turns 65 and officially becomes a senior, their monthly income support actually drops. Outcome 1, that seniors have access to supports, on page 124 of the

business plan: is there any funding in the budget that addresses that issue?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, we know that there is sort of a different constellation of how AISH is given before you're 65, and then afterwards you do transfer into seniors' benefits. There is a committee right now that is working on making it a smooth transition. Certainly, because there are sort of different pockets, different envelopes of funding available, it's not just simply clear. We're working on that transition. My deputy minister has a few more things to say about that.

**Ms Armstrong:** Kim Armstrong. As the minister indicated, there is a crossdepartment committee, including folks from Community and Social Services, Health, and our department, considering the transition for folks on AISH moving on to seniors' benefits and other benefits programs. That work is ongoing, and we will be moving forward with recommendations to ministers as soon as we're able.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you, Kim.

To address this issue in the future, you guys are going to have some sort of plan to address this thing. Am I hearing correctly?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes, absolutely. We want to make a smooth transition, and that was something that we noticed when we were looking at that, and we want to make sure that that's a fair transition. It is something that we're working on, and we'll have more to say about that.

**Mr. Gill:** Thank you.

I think I have maybe one minute left. Will there be extra funding provided for this kind of transition for these seniors?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, this all needs to be determined. As I said and as my deputy has said, we're working on a crossministerial task force right now just to understand what's the best way to deal with this. So we'll have more to say on that.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Can you please let us know the timing of that, like, a six-month plan, one year, two years?

**Ms Armstrong:** Well, we certainly hope to have recommendations to our ministers within this fiscal year, and we're working on it as quickly as we can. It's definitely a priority for the departments involved.

**Mr. Gill:** Depending on the recommendation, how long will it take? I mean, these are all hypothetical questions right now, but I still would like to know. How long will it take after the recommendations?

**Ms Armstrong:** I would have absolutely no ability to answer that because it would depend entirely on the recommendations.

**Mr. Gill:** That's what I thought. Thank you very much for your answer.

Performance measure 1(a) on page 122 relates to fire and safety upgrades. All indicators past 2016 are targets rather than the actuals. Minister, after the December Public Accounts meeting the department informed the UCP that as of December 2017 2,267 of government-owned and -supported lodges have had sprinkler upgrades. That's less than half of the lodge units that needed them. Can you please update us? What's the total now?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. I'm happy to do that. All of government-owned and -supported lodges and continuing care facilities that required sprinklers are completed or will be completed this year, 2018.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay.

**Ms Sigurdson:** There were 93 government-owned or -supported lodges . . .

**The Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time allotted for this part of the rotation has expired.

I would now like to invite Mr. Clark from the third-party opposition to speak for the next 20 minutes with the minister. Are you wanting to combine your time?

**Mr. Clark:** I'd like to go back and forth if we may, please. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Minister, is that acceptable?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

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

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Clark.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the minister and to your staff for being here today. I've got lots of questions, so I'll just dive right in.

[Mr. Smith in the chair]

Looking at the ministry business plan on page 126, pretty much the entire page but really the first four key strategies, what I see when I read these key strategies are words like "continue to work with housing providers, other orders of government," et cetera, "invest in a sustainable housing system through regeneration, renewal" of supportable housing, "collaboration with other levels of government and housing providers." The words "housing providers" are listed throughout, and that's certainly something just to be on the record in terms of my perspective on that. Those housing management bodies you talked about – there's a tremendous amount of work that goes on through the not-for-profit community, through government partnerships, and that granting model which, in my opinion, has actually worked very well for a number of years.

But then I look at page 27 of the fiscal plan, and I also reflect on some of the words that you have said this morning. We've seen a shift in direction from this government to previous approaches. About the middle of page 27 of the fiscal plan Budget 2018 has \$256 million delivered through Alberta Social Housing Corporation. Then there's a bit of a breakdown there. I'd just appreciate some commentary from you, Minister, on the disconnect, which appears to be going in two different directions. On the one hand, in the business plan we talk about collaborating with housing bodies and housing providers, but there seems to be in the fiscal plan and some other signals you've sent a government-first approach, more of an investment model than a granting model. Can you perhaps offer some commentary as to how you square those two seemingly conflicting approaches?

**Ms Sigurdson:** MLA Clark, can you just refer to what you mean in the fiscal plan? I don't see what you're concerned about.

**Mr. Clark:** Right in the very middle of page 27, "Budget 2018 has \$256 million, delivered through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation," which I believe is under your ministry.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

**Mr. Clark:** I'm just curious if that delivery through Alberta Social Housing Corporation represents a shift in approach from previous approaches. I'd just appreciate some comments from you on that.

**Ms Sigurdson:** No. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation has been, you know, sort of the standard mechanism we use to allocate funding. It's not only for public, but it's also for that nonprofit sector, so I don't really understand the discrepancy you seem to be identifying. Certainly, we know that a lot of nonprofits are providing very specialized housing care. We do work with them to support them, but we also work with our public system in terms of delivery.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. There seems to be either some confusion or perhaps just a lack of details around the \$1.2 billion provincial housing strategy. There seem to be more questions than answers at this stage, so perhaps you can help me break that down. Of that \$1.2 billion, have you allocated a certain portion that will be handled through government investment? How much will be handled through grant funding? How much is through new builds? How much is for maintenance and capital stock renewal?

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, you know, our government has had a focus on investment as opposed to grants. We do still do some granting, but we are concerned that when we were granting, then we didn't have an equity share and that those housing units would then go back to the market and not provide affordable housing. That was a concern that we had when we were looking at how the system had been set up before.

10:20

Certainly, we still have investment. I mean, in the indigenous housing strategy it's certainly going to be grants because that makes more sense to support the indigenous community. They talk to us very much about ownership, so there's not a one-size-fits-all. We are being responsive to the community, so we do have a mix of investment and grants.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. I just want to follow up on your comment. You said that, you know, in the past the grants have resulted in those going back into the market, or words to that effect. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I heard something like that. Do you have some data that you can share with us on the specifics of that, if there are certain numbers of doors on certain projects which have not met your expectation in terms of outcomes?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, these expectations were set previously. I mean, the previous government set expectations regarding their housing program, so they're not our expectations. But one of the expectations was just 10 per cent below market, which for a lot of the vulnerable Albertans that we're serving is not enough. That was not really reaching the vulnerable Albertans we wanted to. That was all that was required by the previous expectations, the previous agreements. Certainly, also there would be a limit on how long they would be available at, like, 10 per cent below market. Then it would be back; it would be completely at market.

**Mr. Clark:** What percentage of the total dollars that are spent by Seniors and Housing does that reflect? I'm not suggesting for one second that what you're saying isn't true. I'm sure it is absolutely true. I would just appreciate some context. Is it .5 per cent? Is it a small, little portion? Is it 95 per cent? I mean, I'd just appreciate some scale in terms of it.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. I mean, that's something where, as the agreements do expire, we can give you more data on that. We'll have to go back.

**Mr. Clark:** Yeah. I'd really appreciate it if you could table that information in the House at your earliest convenience. I'd just appreciate that. If we're going to be making broad, sweeping changes to investment models – and I use the term “investment models” very generally – then I think that knowing that we're doing that from a position of good data is obviously pretty darn important.

I think that perhaps what I'll do, then, is move on. One of the concerns I have when I think about these changes that are coming or are in the works is just a lack of clarity in terms of information being put out to the sector itself. I'm concerned that perhaps they don't have all the information they need to be making their decisions. I'm also concerned that in the investment model as I understand it – and you can confirm this for me – the housing management bodies are still in the mix as the managers of these facilities. Is that correct, even if it's a government investment model?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Oh, absolutely. The housing management bodies manage the facilities across the province.

**Mr. Clark:** Is there any concern, then, that they may change their model and that there may be some unintended consequences here because there would be a risk that those contracts could be revoked, perhaps, at short notice, that the risk is now being downloaded to those bodies, that they may choose simply not to participate in certain cases, and that we may in fact not achieve what we're trying to achieve here?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, housing management bodies are created by ministerial order. Certainly, we've set out the parameters on how they function. You know, they work under those directions, so they can't just end a contract like that. It's a different system than that. It's a ministerial order.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. There's a lot of money that's been attracted in Calgary in particular by the Resolve campaign. Is there any concern on your part that some or any of that money would perhaps be revoked if the province moves more to an investment model than a granting model? I mean, that money was raised under certain expectations by the donors. Is there a concern or do you feel there's any risk that any of the projects that will be funded by Resolve campaign dollars would be at risk based on changes from a granting to an investment model?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Resolve is a very unique situation in Calgary. You know, I just want to give accolades because it's a unique model. Private industry along with nonprofits have really come together to look for a solution in their city. We have met with Resolve many times, and our government has funded this year. We gave them \$30 million for – sorry. Last year it was \$30 million in investment for their projects. You know, as I said, like, there's not a one-size-fits-all, so we can be flexible. Certainly, Resolve is a unique situation, and we just did commit to \$30 million last year to support that project.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you.

Are there any concerns on your part, going forward, that any other – is that something that you anticipate continuing to support going forward? That \$30 million: was that it?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, the Resolve campaign is over. I mean, it finished at the end of March. You know, that campaign is over. It remains to be determined if there are going to be future steps on that. We're certainly happy to talk with the stakeholders in the community about initiatives, but that project is complete.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. Does your ministry work with Community and Social Services or other departments to support the 10-year plan to end homelessness and its successors? Are you in support of the housing first model?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, actually, because there's overlap not only with Community and Social Services but also with Health, you know, in terms of housing needs, we do have a collaborative table of department staff and ministers making decisions about some of those that fit in sort of both or all three areas. Certainly, our new provincial affordable housing strategy, that I announced last year, has created a ladder process from homelessness into affordable housing. That was something that was very important to us because before this was created, there was kind of a drop-off point from housing first that didn't give people access, really, to the affordable housing sector.

Affordable housing is really sort of defined as housing that is more about income, not having the income. It's not so much about homelessness, like the wraparound supports that people need to be able to be well housed because of vulnerabilities like mental health, addiction issues, those kinds of things. That is something that I work with Minister Sabir about. Certainly, the housing first model has been shown to be important, you know, across North America to support people to be well housed.

**Mr. Clark:** Just to that point, I mean, obviously all ministries touch each other in different ways, and there are overlaps. It seems, though, especially true of Seniors and Housing. You talked about a crossministry table. Can you just tell me a little more about that and if that's something that can potentially be plugged into by stakeholders within the sector? Some of the things that I've heard: there are some challenges both from just Albertans themselves but also stakeholders never quite sure which group to talk with on certain topics. Is this feedback that you've heard? If so, is it something that you could plug them into, or is there something that can be done to help stakeholders and Albertans navigate what is a fairly complex system?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, certainly, you know, at the level we're talking about, when the ministers meet, then the projects that are being asked to go forward have already probably had several meetings with individual ministers at that point. So it's not really at that level. On the provincial affordable housing strategy we have stakeholder involvement in all the steering groups that that is involved with. I meet regularly with stakeholders regarding projects that they want to go forward, as I know Minister Hoffman and Minister Sabir do, so at that level I would say that that's not the appropriate place.

But if people are having trouble navigating the system, certainly with the department staff, you know, I would be happy to help people understand that if there is some difficulty. Sometimes also, because, as you said, things aren't discrete, there is a little bit of overlap, and if they need some access with health or something, we can facilitate that. I mean, we absolutely want to be supporting

stakeholders to be able to access it and not be wasting their time. I'm happy to further assist with that.

**10:30**

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. I'm going to dive into some numbers here. On page 128 of the business plan, we look at capital investment under Alberta Social Housing Corporation. The budget in '17-18 was \$258 million roughly, but the forecast is a spend substantially less, only \$172.6 million, but, of course, now the estimate in this year. It looks like there is some investment that was intended in last year that has shifted into this year. Can you tell us why that is? What specifically has not happened as a result of that? Are certain specific projects delayed?

**Ms Sigurdson:** It is because we did convert some of the investment into grants, \$30 million.

**Mr. Clark:** So \$30 million makes up not quite half of that number.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. And there were some delays. You know, that sometimes does happen. I mean, these are complex projects, and things don't always go completely ahead. There was \$55 million carried forward into the next fiscal year.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. So most of it was carried forward.

I'd like to spend my next chunk of time here trying to unpack where the \$1.2 billion investment actually is within the budget numbers. I'm having a hard time counting the \$1.2 billion, but that's perhaps just me. Let's start on page 63 of the fiscal plan, in the capital plan. We have \$144 million for seniors' housing development and renewal, and family, social supports, and housing is adding up to \$524 million over five years. I'm just curious whether that full \$524 million is part of the \$1.2 billion, if all of that factors into the \$1.2 billion.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. So we're about halfway there. Where can we find the rest of the \$1.2 billion through the budget?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'm just going to let my senior financial officer explain the details on this.

**Mr. Clark:** Sure. Thank you.

**Mr. Baptista:** In Budget 2016 the \$1.2 billion was the allocation over five years. Over the past two years most of that money has been spent. This particular plan that you see on page 63 is just the family, social supports, and housing. Also, on page 62 there's \$247 million for capital maintenance and renewal. There's that aspect. And then there's a small amount also in the climate leadership plan on a further page, and the plan has been extended a little bit. The \$1.2 billion is over seven years.

**Mr. Clark:** It's over seven, not over five?

**Mr. Baptista:** Yeah.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. That's obviously a very important detail.

**Mr. Baptista:** Yeah. We've also completed about 1,343 units in that time frame.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. And how much has been spent to date of the \$1.2 billion?

**Mr. Baptista:** The fiscal year hasn't completed yet for '17-18, so we'll have more information when the annual report comes out in June.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. A sneaky way of asking the same question a different way: how much is yet to be spent?

**Ms Sigurdson:** There is \$755 million over five years going forward still left to be spent.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. We have \$755 million left to be spent, but that's over five years, including this fiscal go-forward. The \$1.2 billion, which was to be spent over five years, is actually going to be spent over seven years. So what I hear is \$755 million from this fiscal through the next five years inclusive of fiscal '18-19, yes?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'm just clarifying with my SFO here, but the \$755 million is over five years.

**Mr. Clark:** Starting in '18-19?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

**Mr. Clark:** Five forward from this fiscal.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

**Mr. Clark:** Then that means you've spent \$445 million in fiscal '17-18 and '16-17.

**Mr. Baptista:** In 2016-17 we did spend \$141 million in investment. There were also capital grants included in that, which I don't have right on me. We can get back to you with that one. In '17-18, the year just closing, there was \$258 million of investment allocated. Of course, as you mentioned, the \$173 million was the adjusted investment figure. And there was about \$78 million in capital grants in '17-18 also allocated. Yeah. Those two numbers combined.

**Mr. Clark:** But the \$1.2 billion was announced in summer of 2017, is that right?

**Ms Sigurdson:** In 2016.

**Mr. Clark:** In 2016. Okay.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. It was in 2016.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. Good. That's helpful.

When we go back to page 63 in the capital plan – maybe we'll have to come back to this when I get a little more time here – I couldn't help but notice that as we go five years out, '22-23, most of the money goes to zero. So on seniors' housing development and renewal we'll spend zero dollars in '22-23. Are we going to do no seniors' housing development and renewal in four years' time?

**Ms Sigurdson:** John Thomson is going to respond.

**Mr. Thomson:** John Thomson, ADM, housing. The reason for that is because in the investment model you must select the projects first, so it's not like a grant program. In a grant program . . .

**The Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time allotted for this portion of the rotation has expired.

At this point I would like to now call a five-minute break. We will be resuming committee at 10:41 promptly. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:36 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'd like to call this meeting back to order.

At this time I would like to invite Dr. Starke from the Progressive Conservative Party and the minister to speak for the next 20 minutes. Dr. Starke, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Dr. Starke:** Yes, please, if that's okay with the minister.

**The Chair:** Minister?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. That's fine.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, good morning, Minister. Thank you for being here today. Having sat where you sit now, I know that there's a great deal of preparation that goes into estimates amongst your staff, and it's good to see some familiar faces at the table with you that I know are very skilled and ably support you in the work that you do. I have a few questions that may seem a little bit unconnected, but when you're speaking in the order that you're in, a lot of the topics have been covered by others.

But I do want to talk a little bit on the theme of metrics. Earlier in the discussion you had talked about, for example, the seniors' medical travel benefit program, which I think is great. The issue or the challenge of seniors travelling, especially to medical appointments, was identified in the rural health review that I chaired a few years ago. It also went largely ignored by your government. Nonetheless, I'm curious to know the metrics. What is the number of seniors using that program? What are the dollars spent on that program? And are community organizations that operate those services eligible to receive funding through that program, or do those funds flow only to seniors using the specific benefit?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. Thank you. So you're asking about the number of people using the medical trip transportation?

**Dr. Starke:** Correct.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Of the total for the special needs assistance, 4 per cent. Twenty-three million is the total budget, so 4 per cent is allocated. That is not people; that is a percentage of the budget.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. No. But I am curious to know: how many individual seniors benefited from the program?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. I'm just looking here to see. We might have to get you that number.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. I'd appreciate that. I mean, I think it's important that we keep track of things like that.

Then my other question: community organizations. We have a community organization, for example, in Lloydminster that offers a service that they provide to seniors on a pay-if-you-can basis. Seniors who can't afford to pay don't pay anything. It's run by volunteers, but obviously there are expenses involved in operating that service. I'm just curious to know: would they be eligible to receive funding through your ministry for the operation of that program?

**Ms Sigurdson:** If we could go back just to the previous question that you had.

**Dr. Starke:** Sure. Yeah. Absolutely.

**Ms Sigurdson:** In the 2017-18 fiscal year 30,275 Alberta seniors accessed the special needs assistance program, and of that, 4 per cent was for transportation.

**Dr. Starke:** So roughly 1,200.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. And those numbers are going to continue to be tracked going forward?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. Do we separate the dollars spent specifically on the transportation component, or is that all just lumped in with everything else?

**Ms Sigurdson:** No. It's 4 per cent.

**Dr. Starke:** Oh, so it's 4 per cent of the number as well as 4 per cent of the expenditure?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, we have 4 per cent. That was the total of the people, you know.

**Dr. Starke:** Sure. Yeah.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'm solid on the percentage of the total expenditure of \$23 million is 4 per cent. I don't have that particular breakdown of the individuals.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. If I could get that, that would be great.

Let's move to another program that I actually think is a really great program – I'm curious to know where it stands right now – the seniors' property tax deferral program, which was introduced I want to say in 2013-14, somewhere around there. It was so successful that it was adopted by several Saskatchewan municipalities that found that it would be a useful thing for their seniors. I'm curious to know: what is the number of seniors that are enrolled in this program, what are the number of properties, and what is the total dollar value of the properties that are enrolled?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. More than 200,000 seniors are notified of the program each year. We have approximately 9,000 loans, totalling \$28.1 million, issued since, actually, 2013 – so you're right; it was 2013 when that came into being – with more than 2,100 loans issued in 2017 alone.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. So it's a program that's still being promoted by the department?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Starke:** I think it's a great program. Anecdotally, I will tell you that in the city of Lloydminster the city council immediately implemented a parallel program for the Saskatchewan side residents, who obviously weren't eligible to apply under it, and we had seniors saying: wait a minute; it sucks to live in Saskatchewan because of this program. I suppose that's on the record now. *Hansard* is forever. But because of that, the city council moved very quickly to make sure that it was available to the Saskatchewan side residents of Lloydminster.

Let's move on with metrics. You mentioned earlier today the various initiatives to encourage housing management bodies to engage in greenhouse gas reduction measures and the various initiatives that your ministry is helping support for those housing management bodies. I'm curious to know: what's the current level of greenhouse gas emissions on facilities managed by our 103 housing management bodies? Do we have a number?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We are currently doing energy audits across the province. We don't have a number now, but that is something that we are working on. Certainly, we are committed to supporting housing management bodies to make those good choices in whatever energy efficiency initiatives they need to undertake to cut those costs. So we're working closely with them to determine that.

**Dr. Starke:** And I think all of that is fabulous, but I'm just, like I say – so we don't have a number right now. We hope to have some estimate once these audits are complete. So we don't really know where we're starting. But the targets for reduction: what are the targets in terms of the reduction for this number that we don't know what it is to start with?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I think the energy audits, obviously, will give us an awareness of that number to start with, and certainly we'll work closely with those housing management bodies. I think that that is something that we can assess as we go along, you know, what's reasonable, what we can do when we know more.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. But as of right now there's no target for the actual reduction?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, we have such diversity of facilities across our province that it's very difficult to do that without really knowing what we're dealing with, so really we need that baseline. As you suggest also, we need to know where we're starting.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. Will that be broken down by housing management body so that each one can sort of keep track of how their facilities are doing and maybe even measure up against other housing management bodies across the province?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah, for sure. Each housing management body manages their own diverse portfolio, so those energy audits will be assessed for that envelope, for that housing management body envelope.

**Dr. Starke:** Yeah. And I'm very familiar with how the housing management bodies work because I used to chair one in the '80s, when I was on city council in Lloydminster. So that's great. I certainly agree with your comments with regard to the dedication of the housing management bodies.

I'm going to turn now, a little bit of a shift, to metrics on page 126 of the business plan, outcome 2, that Albertans have access to appropriate housing and integrated housing supports, and under the performance measures of the housing facilities, the physical conditions, which are measured, of course, by the facility condition index.

You know, Minister, you've been very vocal in your criticism of the level of maintenance and the level of upkeep of the facilities over the past, and I suppose that's a criticism that is fair. But I guess my question is: clearly, this is a priority of your government, so why, then, are your targets that are listed in your business plan going up to 2021 so anemic? These targets are really a marginal, incremental improvement. Your percentage in poor condition drops only from 4 to 3 per cent and in good condition only goes from 33 to 36 per cent. If this is a target of your government, which you've stated it is, and if it's something you're investing in, which you've stated you have, those numbers should be a whole lot better than what they are. I'm just puzzled as to why they aren't.

10:50

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, first of all, I just want to say that a lot of our housing portfolio is quite aged. Like, honestly, we still have – you know, I think Piper Creek in Red Deer has a lodge program there that

was built in 1954. That's just one example. We have aged facilities across the province. Of course, we want to make sure that they're in good condition for Albertans across the province, but there is a significant amount that are not at a high level. So we're being realistic about these targets. Certainly, we are working very closely with housing management bodies across the province to make sure that they have some support, but there is a significant backlog.

You know, we inherited a billion dollars of maintenance needing to be done, and certainly we're digging in and doing what we can in a very difficult fiscal time. That's why they're not more bold, I guess.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. Well, Chair, I'd like to talk a little bit about the lodge program. You know, you mentioned the Piper Creek facility. Minister, I know you're familiar with the Vermilion Valley Lodge. We visited it together. I actually thought it was the oldest lodge in Alberta, but it clearly is not. It was built in 1960. The Pioneer Lodge in Lloydminster was also in the early '60s. These are facilities that are now pushing 60 years of age.

Earlier in our session here you mentioned that some of the units were built in the 1970s and that they needed to be replaced. I would agree that some of these units – and it's not for want of maintenance. It's not for want of upkeep or care by the housing management bodies. These facilities are still, actually, in pretty good shape. But the reality of it is that when people were moving into lodges in the 1960s, they were often leaving rural homes that had dirt floors and outdoor plumbing and now are moving into facilities where there's indoor plumbing and, in fact, solid floors. Clearly, over 50 years expectations of people have changed, and a small room with a single bed, with 200 square feet, with, you know, a very tiny bathroom is not an upgrade from what people are used to.

I guess my question is: you mentioned that the units that are being built today – and correct me if I'm quoting you incorrectly – will last 50 to 100 years. Earlier you said that the units in the 1970s needed to be replaced, yet units built today will last 50 to 100 years. So how is it that the new units built today are expected to have a lifespan that is two to three times longer than that of the units built in the 1970s? Are we able to be prescient in terms of what the needs of seniors are going to be long after all of us have departed our earthly journeys here?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I don't want to suggest that I know how long these facilities will be here. I did say before, when we were talking about the granting program, that I had some concerns that they were going back to the market, so that's when I was talking about that. I wasn't really talking about the longevity of new ones being built, just for me to clarify that.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay.

**Ms Sigurdson:** But, I mean, I agree with much of what you're saying in terms of just expectations in the community. People don't want to live in those tiny little lodge rooms. Nobody wants to move into them. And, you know, today's expectations, having private washrooms, larger rooms: absolutely, that is something that we're looking at and certainly wanting to address and make sure that people have more of what's realistic.

**Dr. Starke:** And where that is happening – and, I mean, certainly, we have examples in both Vermilion, that you're very familiar with, and the Pioneer home that opened in Lloydminster last year under the ASLI program. Both of those addressed some of those issues. I think that's great.

On the topic of lodges you had a discussion with my colleague Mr. Clark here about the equity versus grants. Now, in the last couple of years I know officials from Seniors and Housing have asked various

housing management bodies to sign over their facilities to the government of Alberta. I'm curious to know how that whole initiative is going and what number of lodges have in fact been turned over to the government and what is that asset value. I'm not an accountant. Perhaps Mr. Baptista can clue me in on how that transfer of assets affects the overall governmental balance sheet.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. I will let my assistant deputy minister, John Thomson, take this.

**Mr. Thomson:** Thank you. I don't have with me the dollar value. The housing management bodies were not, to my knowledge, asked to hand it over. It was an option that they were given. Where housing management bodies are not interested in handing over the asset, we enter into co-ownership agreements with them, so we own an equity portion in the land and the building. Those will be settled once construction is complete and the value of the land and the asset and the money that's been put in by the government are determined.

**Dr. Starke:** Okay. Well, that's interesting. I mean, I guess the interpretation of the housing management bodies that I've spoken to is certainly very different in terms of an offer. They sort of said – well, I won't go into all of that because it's not really relevant to our discussion today.

I want to go on to a statement that was made on page 125 of the business plan. Minister, you're talking about the SHARP program and that the SHARP program allowed elders to stay in their houses longer, and I would agree. Improvements that seniors can make to their homes – I know that for my mother, before she passed away, it was a simple matter of putting a second handrail on a flight of stairs, to go down to the basement, so that she could grab on with both hands. That cost, you know, maybe a couple of hundred bucks, and it was fabulous. She talked every time I visited her, before she passed, about this second handrail. I would certainly hope that – you know, the metric that you have on page 125, that 90 per cent: I'm actually surprised it's not 99 per cent of seniors who expect to be able to stay in their homes longer.

But I want to talk about a factor that is affecting seniors in rural Alberta – and I'm pretty sure you'll be aware of this – and that is that we have seniors in rural Alberta who no longer feel safe in their own homes because of the increase in rural crime. We even have the very sad situation in some cases where if one partner passes away, especially if it happens to be the husband, children are now moving grandma into town rather than having her stay out in the farmhouse, where she lived for maybe 50 or 60 years with grandpa, because they no longer feel that grandma is safe living in that home alone. I think you'll agree that that, to me, is a tragedy.

I guess my question is: is enhanced home security – for example, cameras, security systems, bolstered gates, that sort of thing – eligible under the SHARP program, and if so, what is being done to make people aware of that eligibility so that that at least is an option for people?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We're going to get someone to answer. Neil McDonald.

**Mr. McDonald:** In regard to your question, MLA Starke, about the SHARP program and enhanced security, if it's part of the physical piece of the building, if you want to put in, you know, a stronger door or put in a security system, you would. The program wouldn't cover the monitoring fees, but it would cover any physical enhancements to the dwelling.

**Dr. Starke:** What about something like a gate? You know, it's not part of the actual house, but like a big, strong gate.

**Mr. McDonald:** Yes, that would be covered.

**Dr. Starke:** That would be covered as well. Okay. If those things are covered, can I just suggest, Minister, that you let people know. I swear to God this is not an exaggeration. People are moving out of their homes. If the goal of SHARP is to keep people in their homes – and I think that's a laudable goal. I think that's something that if you ask most seniors, they want to stay in their home. I know my mom wanted to stay in her home, and she did until the day she died. That's something that seniors want. But if the goal of SHARP is – one of the things that helps seniors stay in their homes is to feel secure in their homes. So even if that means a stronger door, more deadbolts, you know, a camera system, you name it, I think all of that stuff should be eligible and you should let seniors know.

A final thing. This is a bit of a bugbear with me, going back to my time in tourism, but I had to notice under the performance measures on page 125 that you've got two performance measures, one on seniors' life satisfaction and another on seniors' volunteer rate. No surprise whatsoever that Alberta seniors volunteer at a rate that is higher than the national average. That's fantastic. I'm not surprised at all. I suspect that's true for our nonsenior population as well.

What really frustrates me is that the last statistics we have for this are four years old, and that's thanks to Statistics Canada. Now, I know that when I was tourism minister, Statistics Canada gave us lousy data that was two years old, and the tourism ministers got together on a regular basis to complain about that. Are you and your counterparts, the seniors' ministers, across Canada also saying: "StatsCan, this isn't good enough. How are we supposed to do reasonable planning when we're dealing with data that is only updated every five years?"

11:00

**Ms Sigurdson:** And it is this year.

**Dr. Starke:** Yes. Well, we're waiting with bated breath, Minister, aren't we?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. Certainly, we are using Stats Canada data . . .

**Dr. Starke:** And it's crappy.

**Ms Sigurdson:** . . . as you did when you did. That is what we're using, so that is the status.

**Dr. Starke:** Is that parliamentary? It's of dodgy quality. How's that?

Okay. Finally, Minister, I just want to say that you described earlier today that the supports that are provided once people become seniors are a constellation. I think that's an interesting choice of terms because, to me – and this is a bit of an homage to Stephen Hawking – a constellation is a series of scattered points of light that are connected only by the imagination of the observer. I would describe our seniors' supports as being very much in keeping with your description of a constellation, and it's something that certainly, in my view, needs to have a higher level of co-ordination.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt; however, the allotted time for this portion of the meeting has expired.

For the next 20 minutes I would like to invite Ms Renaud from government caucus and the minister to speak. Ms Renaud, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms Renaud:** Well, thank you. Thank you, all, for being here today. I'm going to focus a little bit on housing. Under outcome 2 on page 126 of the business plan it talks about the provincial affordable housing strategy. I know this was announced last year, with a goal to create and renovate more than 4,000 units, and you touched on earlier the progress that's been made. I'd like you to elaborate for us, focusing specifically on job creation and job creation that it will create in 2018.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. Thank you. Of course, it's really important that every Albertan has a safe and affordable home regardless of their income, and our government developed the provincial affordable housing strategy, the first of its kind in Alberta, to address this. We have a \$1.2 billion investment that will make life better for 4,100 Alberta families. To date, we have 29 projects under way that will add over 2,300 units, and nine additional projects and 400 units will be added as part of Budget 2018. This means that there will be a total of 38 projects completed or in progress in 2018, representing over 2,700 affordable housing units. While details of these new projects will be announced shortly, I can tell you now that these projects will be spread all across the province, including Calgary, Whitecourt, Medicine Hat, Slave Lake, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, and Lethbridge. We're well on our way to the commitment to reach 4,100 affordable housing units, and our capital investment will ensure that provincially owned properties receive the repairs they required.

This investment also provides jobs for hard-working Albertans. We continue the commitment we made in the 2016 Alberta jobs plan to invest in modern, efficient infrastructure to help stimulate the economy and keep people working. This investment in affordable housing capital needs will also support approximately 2,200 jobs per season of employment while implementing major capital and capital maintenance and renewal projects.

**Ms Renaud:** Wow. Thank you.

On page 128 of the business plan, under the statement of operations there's a line about the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. Can you explain what the relationship is between your ministry and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Sure. The Ministry of Seniors and Housing consists of both the Department of Seniors and Housing and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. The corporation is an entity of the Crown and operates under the authority of the Alberta Housing Act. Its role is to facilitate the provision of affordable housing options to low-income Albertans and those with special needs through community-based housing management bodies and not-for-profit housing providers. The corporation also owns and administers the Crown's multibillion-dollar portfolio of housing assets. The government of Alberta both funds and owns nonmarket housing through the corporation, with ownership of over 40 per cent of the nonmarket housing units.

The corporation also facilitates the provision of funding and administers the new social housing agreement signed with the federal government in June 2016. In addition to providing annual funding to the corporation, the agreement allows the Alberta Social Housing Corporation greater flexibility to adapt its housing programs to meet the needs of Albertans. Last year under the social housing agreement the federal government transferred full ownership of 15 social housing projects, worth over \$75 million, to the corporation. These projects can now be used for future redevelopment or program enhancements. Additionally, this agreement allowed the government of Alberta to form meaningful

working relationships with housing providers from all sectors in the province, including private, nonprofit, and urban indigenous housing.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you.

Before I go to my next question, I just wanted to make a comment about that. I'm not sure what the other member was talking about when he was questioning about nonprofit or public organizations costing 10 times more than private. But I do know that the nonprofit sector provides incredibly valuable supports, particularly if we think about seniors that happen to have a disability or developmental disability and want to age in place, in their community, just like everybody else. It's tough to get those kinds of supports in the private sector because there really isn't a huge demand. I just wanted to make that point. It's essential housing.

On page 128 of the business plan it shows a significant increase in the capital funding of the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. Can you tell us specifically what this is being used for?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We've already spoken about today the \$1.2 billion investment in affordable housing to upgrade and increase the availability of affordable housing across our province. The funding increase to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation is to support the government's capital plan. On page 63 of the government of Alberta's capital plan it all lays out the investment under the family, social supports, and housing category. It includes \$486 million for affordable housing. That breaks down into \$86 million for family and community housing development and renewal, \$280 million for seniors' housing development and renewal, \$40 million for affordable and specialized housing, \$72 million for the indigenous housing capital program, and \$8 million for planning for affordable housing projects. In addition to those investments, my ministry will also invest \$245 million for capital maintenance and renewal in affordable housing across the province.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you.

Done? Can we continue?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay.

**Ms Renaud:** I know that housing management bodies run and operate government's affordable housing units. In St. Albert we're very fortunate to have that and to have the expansion at North Ridge. It's much needed there. But can you point out to us, in the business plan on page 128, where they fit specifically into the expense picture? Under housing it shows a line item which has had a very small increase in budget over the last years. Is this where the housing management bodies sit, and if so, how is your ministry funding these bodies to ensure there are no shortfalls?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Of course, our housing management bodies operate most of the housing programming across the province, and they've identified a need for a significant increase in operational and capital maintenance funding, or affordable housing units will be at risk of closing. We certainly have heard them. Our housing management bodies provide three-year business plans, that identify the operating costs, pressures, themes, including rising utility costs and deferred maintenance throughout the portfolio, which are creating safety issues, delaying the turnover of units, and forcing unit closures.

In Budget 2018 this government recognizes that the housing management body budgets were severely underfunded and approved an additional \$11.2 million – that's a 27 per cent increase – in family community housing. This additional funding for housing management bodies' operations will allow them to address maintenance, chipping away at the multimillion-dollar maintenance

deficit left by the previous government. Certainly, we're working with the housing management bodies to most appropriately target and allocate this critical funding. It's on page 237, under family community housing specifically.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you. The maintenance deficit that was created over many years is certainly very, very visible in this sort of portfolio of housing. That's for sure.

On page 4 of the capital plan the budget line for 2018 funding for the indigenous housing capital program is only \$1 million this year. Can you explain why this program funding is so low this year and will increase so drastically in the following years?

**11:10**

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, the indigenous capital housing program was announced to support the implementation of the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We know it's important to inform the implementation of this program and the provincial affordable housing strategy. The ministry went on a tour to listen to indigenous organizations and indigenous housing providers. During the listening tour, indigenous organizations highlighted the importance of designs specific to indigenous people, ownership, and operations of facilities to uphold the principles of the United Nations declaration. As a result, our government adjusted the program to encourage indigenous design and ownership.

The \$1 million allocated in 2018-19 is planning funds to ensure that we uphold those principles I mentioned. As we move through the planning phase, the funding will increase to \$17 million in 2019-20 and \$18 million in the following years. The full \$120 million commitment: \$72 million over the next five years has been converted from capital investment funds to capital grants. This significant change will allow the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to work with indigenous organizations to develop housing which is designed, owned, and controlled by indigenous peoples.

**Ms Renaud:** That's good news.

I understand that your department has been working to do fire and safety upgrades in lodges, as you mentioned earlier. Is this work captured under the health and safety line item in the capital plan?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. It is under capital maintenance and renewal.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Can you tell us what progress has been made specifically in this area?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. I'm certainly pleased to let you know that the government-owned and -supported lodges and continuing care facilities that required sprinklers are complete or near completion. There were 93 government-owned or -supported lodges and continuing care facilities, consisting of approximately 6,100 units, that required sprinklers. Sixty-three of the 93 system installations are complete or near completion. The other 30 of the 93 will become part of the major lodge redevelopment project. This consists of 1,796 lodge units that are being redeveloped to become part of those larger projects. Yes. It'll be complete this year.

**Ms Renaud:** Great. Thank you. That has some serious job creation there as well, it sounds like.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah.

**Ms Renaud:** There is nothing budgeted for upcoming years, but will there still be money needed to keep fire and safety items up to code as time goes by, you know, whether that's the testing that

happens annually or the inspection processes, recommendations that come from there?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Well, you know, fire and safety systems, sprinkler systems are just an integral part, certainly, going forward. A lot of this had to be done because, as we talked about earlier, some of the lodges are so old that that wasn't part of code. Now, as part of code, that is just a standard feature and is built into any lodge facility or other kind of facility.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. That's all, Madam Chairman. I'd pass my time to MLA Drever.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Member Drever.

**Drever:** Thank you, Chair. Moving on to the seniors portion, according to strategic initiatives 1.1 and 1.2 on page 124 the ministry is committed to supporting seniors in their communities and exploring how to continue to do that as the senior population changes, something, you know – in my riding of Calgary-Bow I have a lot of seniors, as you know. You've been there and met with the constituents, and I thank you for that. In fact, we just held a town hall on fraud prevention, and over 100 seniors showed up, so it was quite a successful event. I'm really proud of the work that our government is doing to really help seniors and make their lives better.

Going back to the question, I guess, it says that the Seniors Advisory Council was disbanded. At the time, the minister promised that there would still be mechanisms in place for seniors to be heard. Last year your ministry held two seniors advisory forums to get feedback on various initiatives. I was just wondering if you can point out where the funding or continued consultation with seniors is as it is part of Budget 2018.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. You're absolutely right. We continue to hear from forum participants. It's really important that, you know, we hear from stakeholders so that we make sure we're understanding the needs in the community. Last year we had two, June 2017 and a second forum held in November. Representatives from seniors-serving organizations, researchers, policy-makers, and advocates came together to discuss issues important to seniors and provide information and feedback to inform government decision-making and policy development.

The first seniors forum provided an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss current and future priorities to address the needs of an aging population, and then the second forum focused on priorities identified through the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum, which includes aging, aging in community, ageism, and labour force participation of older workers. Feedback from participants has been very positive overall. Participants indicated how much they appreciate the opportunity to provide direct input to government and that their opinions and feedback are heard and valued. Certainly, planning is under way for the third forum.

The costs of the forums are very minimal. It is about \$5,000. It includes basic refreshments and travel costs. Where applicable, we do cover the travel costs for more than 40 forum participants. We want to ensure, you know, that it's not going to be a barrier for them to be able to have their input and support. This is really a relatively low cost for the value that's gained from these sessions. We always continue to evaluate the forums to see what's the best way to move forward with them. Certainly, currently it's a very valuable input from the community that we are pleased to facilitate.

**Drever:** Okay. Well, it sounds like it's been quite successful for you to get feedback from these forums. I was just wondering if you

can give us some more details on how these forums are making life better for seniors.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I think focusing on certain areas like ageism and also focusing on, you know, the older worker and also aging in community certainly supports our initiatives that are under way, certainly our provincial affordable housing strategy. That's a key part of it to support seniors. I mean, as you know from your community and as I know from travelling the province and having lived in a small town in the Peace River country when I was a kid, people don't want to move to bigger centres. They want to be able to age in their communities, so that's why we have such a significant investment in our capital plan and why we're providing a range of services to support seniors to stay in their community.

Some of the services for seniors, as we know, aren't necessarily in my department, like home care, for example. There's been a significant increase in home care, \$2 billion annually, and \$2 million more was last year allocated. That really facilitates the opportunity for people to actually age in their communities, as does the seniors' home adaptation and repair program, that we spoke about, whether it's the loan program or the grant program. You know, there are various programs.

The input from the forum participants just enhances, helps us make better decisions about going forward, so we're very appreciative of the time and the commitment of those community members who come to the forums regularly.

**Drever:** Thank you, Minister.

I think that's all for me. I'm going to pass the rest of my time to MLA Miller.

**Ms Miller:** Okay. Thank you. Minister, I've got a follow-up on MLA Drever's question. In regard to the Seniors Advisory Council are they doing anything for the LGBTQ, two spirit community? I know that in Red Deer we've had instances where we've had people from the community having to go back into the closet when they go into care.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, MLA Miller. Certainly, that's one of the things that we have heard in the community. As they age, people may have lived openly, and then if they move into a lodge facility, it feels like they're not going to be in a safe surrounding, so they want to make sure that they don't have to go back into the closet. We certainly have representation from the LGBTQ community on the forum, and it's important for us to hear about them. We certainly collaborate across departments on the delivery of housing options and supports for specialized populations. Again, that's important.

**11:20**

I was part of an event for Ashbourne here in Edmonton. It's an affirming community for LGBTQ people. It's a lodge-type facility where, you know, they sort of have an open declaration so that people know that this is a safe community for LGBTQ. There are other projects across the province that we're looking at. It is something where we want to make sure that this kind of specialized population is welcomed and well served in the lodge system, in any kind of affordable housing system.

**Ms Miller:** Okay. Thank you.

Moving on, in the main estimates for the ministry on page 230, item 3.3, the budget shows an increase to the supplementary accommodations benefit. Can you explain what this benefit is and how many people it supports?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. Certainly, the supplementary accommodations benefit ensures that seniors living in long-term care and designated supportive living facilities have at least \$315 in monthly disposable income. This is the amount of money left in a senior's pocket each month after the accommodation charges. In addition, the accommodation charges themselves include room, meals, and housekeeping. There are about 12,600 seniors who receive the benefit. When, say, for example, Health increases the costs to funding for long-term care beds, the supplementary accommodations benefit must also increase to ensure that seniors continue to have that \$315 in their pockets.

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

At this point for the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Smith from the Official Opposition and the minister to speak. Mr. Smith, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Mr. Smith:** That would be great if she's willing to.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Smith:** Good morning, Madam Minister. I want to go back to some conversations that happened earlier in the morning here. Earlier in the morning you were talking about an investment of \$1.2 billion to produce 4,100 units if I understood that correctly. The Official Opposition critic suggested that that came out to about \$300,000 per unit, yet at the same time in a public-private partnership model each unit was on average about \$65,000 a unit. I guess the question that came to my mind as I was listening to your conversation was: why is there such a discrepancy? Why under the system that you are putting together is each unit \$300,000, yet under the private-public partnership model it's \$65,000? Can you explain why there's a discrepancy there?

**Ms Sigurdson:** The \$1.2 billion investment in the capital plan is not only for new units, but it's also maintenance and renewal for existing units, so it is beyond, you know. Those are the new units that we're talking about, the 4,100, but in addition the \$1.2 billion also includes ongoing maintenance and renewal for the housing management bodies. As I said, we have an aged system out there. We have many facilities that are quite old, so the work that has to go with the ongoing maintenance – replacing roofs, new furnaces, things like that – is also included in the \$1.2 billion. It's not just for new.

**Mr. Smith:** What is the average cost, then, for a new unit?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I mean, again, there is quite a variance. You know, we have family and community housing. Sometimes we have three- or five-bedroom facilities; sometimes we have one- and two-bedroom. The lodge program: it's a room, and then they have communal dining. You're asking sort of for an overall average, and that's very difficult because of the distinct nature of the facilities all across the province and the needs that they fulfill.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, I'm sure that that's the case for private units as well and for the private-public model, yet they're able to come up with a \$65,000-per-unit cost, so I'm not sure why you can't as well.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I've just been offered \$200,000.

**Mr. Smith:** Approximately?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah.

**Mr. Smith:** Again, my question, then, comes down to: why such a discrepancy? If the private-public model can do it at \$65,000, why can't the model that you are pursuing?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, again, I mean – I don't know – this isn't really a line item in the estimates, and certainly I think I've articulated quite clearly the focus of our government, how important it is for us to support the 102 housing management bodies across the province and, additionally, to support the nonprofit community. So that is our focus.

**Mr. Smith:** Yeah. I appreciate that, and I think you've done a really good job this morning of explaining that you've made a decision to go with a public and nonprofit model rather than a public-private model. If I understood you correctly this morning, you suggested that the reason that you want to do that is that with the grants going to the private-public model, you believe you lose equity in it and that when they are sold, it's 10 per cent below the market value or that 10 per cent is not a good enough return. I guess the question that I've got is this. How many seniors' units have actually been lost under the public-private model due to their being sold back into the private market in 2017-18?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I just want to correct something that was said. The 10 per cent is the rent that's below market. It's not about selling it.

**Mr. Smith:** Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, you know, the Alberta Social Housing Corporation and the housing management bodies already partner with private developers in that it procures design/build services and construction services from private construction and development companies, so that is ongoing. It's not possible, really, to compare the costs of private developers versus not-for-profit and public development as the Alberta Social Housing Corporation does not have the actual construction costs of private developers. In addition, it's also not appropriate to compare the costs per door paid under the affordable housing grant programs versus recent construction as the affordable housing operations were designed to support and pay off construction financing and may have different standards.

**Mr. Smith:** Okay. Thank you for that answer because it does sort of speak to the previous question.

I guess the question that I've got right now is this. How many seniors' units have actually been lost under the private-public model due to their units being sold into the private market in 2017-18?

**Ms Sigurdson:** These agreements that were entered into by the previous government: some of them are still ongoing, you know, so they haven't been closed as of yet.

**Mr. Smith:** Okay. So your argument that you want to move away from a private-public model because we're losing units when they're sold and we're losing the equity in those units: you don't have any metrics to back that up that we can compare?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, I understand what an agreement is and when it is complete. You know, we're certainly committed to supporting Albertans to have the affordable housing they need for decades, so it is sort of having a vision, having a long-term focus, and that's what our government sees.

**Mr. Smith:** I guess the last question that I'll have before I move on to another issue that I've heard this morning: do you have any metrics that would show that the \$200,000 cost per unit that you've just given me here is better for Alberta taxpayers than the claim that

the Alberta government is losing equity through a private-public model?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I think I've, you know, articulated pretty clearly why we're focusing on the public delivery of affordable housing in our province.

**Mr. Smith:** Yeah, you have.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We inherited a system that was severely neglected, and these are affordable housing bodies across our province that needed a significant investment of support. That's been our focus in a very tough fiscal time. So that is where we're putting our dollars right now. We're certainly working with the nonprofit sector, and that's the focus.

**Mr. Smith:** I appreciate that, and I do not want to let anybody, by my line of questioning, believe that we're not supportive of the fact that some of the money should go through a public forum. It's a very valuable model for pursuing. But I guess the question I had and that I still have – I'll say it again, and then we can move on – is just that you've obviously come to a conclusion that the private-public model is not a valuable service for Albertans. It's probably one of the areas that we're going to disagree on. I'm wanting to know if there are any metrics that support your position that the private-public model is not a valuable service in comparison to the choice that you've made to go to public and nonprofit? I'm wanting to know what the metrics are. You've said that it's a \$200,000 cost today per unit under a public and nonprofit but that the private-public model can produce them for \$65,000. Again, I'm wondering: are there any metrics that show us that there's a benefit for Alberta taxpayers for the position that you've taken moving forward?

11:30

**Ms Sigurdson:** We have 102 housing management bodies that publicly deliver affordable housing across our province. These facilities have been severely neglected, so when we became government, we knew that there had to be a significant investment to ensure that these facilities continue to serve Albertans.

**Mr. Smith:** Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Yeah.

**Ms Sigurdson:** So that has been our focus, and we are continuing to support them.

**Mr. Smith:** You've said this a couple of times now.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. You've said the same thing a couple of times, too.

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

I guess the next question I've got goes back to the energy audits that you referred to this morning. The question that I've got is this. The energy audits that you say that you've put money towards and that you're pursuing: what measurables have you used for seeing if the energy audits have actually helped management bodies to save money? Have we got any measurables on that?

**Ms Sigurdson:** We put some grant funding into the largest four housing management bodies so they could do energy audits. Their portfolios are the largest in the province. Those were completed to assess what would be the best focus for dollars to create energy efficiencies and to support them. We began with that, as I had chatted with MLA Starke about.

**The Chair:** I apologize for the interruption; however, the allotted time for this portion of the meeting has expired.

I would now like to invite Mr. Clark and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Mr. Clark, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Mr. Clark:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Mr. Clark:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister. I'll pick up on some of the questions I was asking earlier. I was really taken aback to learn that the \$1.2 billion five-year plan to build affordable housing in Alberta is now, in fact, a seven-year plan. So what I'm very curious about is: what is the impact of pushing that out? What specifically does not get built in the in-years, and how many people will not be housed as a result of that shift?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, the two-year extension just means projects won't happen as quickly; there'll be a bit of a delay. Certainly, all of the capacity will still be there. It's just over a longer period of time. I mean, there is a tremendous amount of activity.

Housing management bodies, stakeholders across the province, you know, are very grateful for the government's investment. It's something they haven't seen in several years. So there's lots of activity, and many are very grateful for the investment thus far.

**Mr. Clark:** Well, I'm not saying they're not grateful; I'm sure they are. Albertans ultimately are the ones who ought to benefit from this. But I also know that there's a tremendous amount of confusion and lack of clarity within that sector. So what I'm very curious about is why. Why has this shift happened? You know, we're sort of 40 per cent extended here. That's really significant. I've just got to wonder: is the shift from the granting model to the government-first investment model the root cause behind why this has shifted out from five to seven years?

**Ms Sigurdson:** My assistant deputy minister, John Thomson, will answer.

**Mr. Thomson:** We can't quantify what the impact of the change from grant to investment was. I can tell you that we have a number of grant-funded projects that are not progressing any faster than the projects that are funded under investment. So we can't attribute the delay specifically to the funding type the government has committed to.

**Mr. Clark:** What can you attribute the delay to? I mean, it's a significant delay. You know, it's a concern I've had with this government for some time, that the capital projects seem to get announced because it's a nice headline, but once we actually get into the process of building it, things seem to really move out well into the future. So Albertans who are counting on these investments to come to fruition are left wanting. I'd like to dig into why you think it is that we've increased the timeline here by 40 per cent.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I mean, I guess I would like to challenge your comments that we're not fulfilling on what we've said we'd do. When we do announce investments or grants, I think that we are – I mean, these are complex projects, and sometimes they do have delays for a multiplicity of reasons, so I think that, you know, we have to sometimes be flexible. Things can't always happen on schedule, unfortunately. We want to have that, and certainly that's one of the things that I do as minister. I get quarterly updates regarding projects being on track, on budget, all those things. I know that our government is closely monitoring that. I appreciate the concern, but I just want to assure the member that we're

committed. We've made a significant investment at a very tough fiscal time, and we'll continue to support this investment in affordable housing.

**Mr. Clark:** Have you explored other models that may be able to deliver this more quickly? I mean, again, I have a concern that it just seems a little too – it seems suspicious that you're shifting, making a fundamental sea change in how you fund projects and, at the same time, your major initiative within your ministry is 40 per cent behind schedule. It seems unlikely that those two things are unrelated.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, I guess I just want to say that – you know, I've said this quite a few times this morning, and I'll just say it again – we have significant assets across the province that have been neglected by the previous government. So we are focusing in investing in our housing management bodies to make sure that they have the supports they need. We did announce the provincial affordable housing strategy last June, and one of the pieces in that, which is a newer model, is the mixed-income model. That is helping some projects in terms of being able to have people paying market rent as well as people paying rent geared to income so that that facility can be built. We are looking at other things, but we also are committed to supporting our public system.

**Mr. Clark:** I'm not suggesting that you're not investing and that this is not a focus of your government. It is, and it is long overdue. The question is: are you doing it effectively? In my opinion, based on what I see here before me in the budget and what I've heard today, I'm not convinced that you are doing it as effectively as you can. My job is to continue to push you to do that.

I would like to now just shift my focus in my last few minutes here back to page 63 of the fiscal plan, the capital plan. In the immediate years we have substantial investment, \$144 million in fiscal '18-19, but by fiscal '22-23 in the seniors' housing development and renewal you would spend zero dollars. I'll ask you again: are we not going to do any seniors' housing development or renewal in '22-23?

**Ms Sigurdson:** John Thomson, my assistant deputy minister of housing, is going to answer that one.

**Mr. Thomson:** Thank you, Minister. The capital plan 2018 reflects an investment model and capital expenditures, so the cash that is represented in the capital plan reflects projects that are approved and the progress that is expected on those projects. In a grant-funded budget you might expect money in each year which would be allocated as those years went forward. The lack of cash in the out-years does not mean projects will not be approved and funded in future years. It simply reflects the completion of the projects that are currently approved.

**Mr. Clark:** It sounds like a budget trick because you're telling me that we're looking here five years out – and this is presumably the five-year capital plan, and there's no money allocated in '22-23 – but what you're telling me is that in a couple of years' time, perhaps there could be some money put there. What this looks like to me is a trick to make the books look better rather than a true reflection of what the actual plan is. If you're telling me that at some point in the future money may be allocated here but isn't in this current budget, how can we believe anything that's in this budget for anything other than this year?

**Mr. Thomson:** Minister?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Go ahead, John.

**Mr. Thomson:** Actually, I think that there's another way of looking at it, which is that you can believe what's in the budget because the budget reflects what is approved as opposed to theoretical money that would be allocated to future projects.

The other consideration, I would say, is that, as mentioned earlier in this discussion, there is the funding for the national housing strategy that will be coming forward. The amount of that at this time is uncertain, and that will have to be reflected in future capital plans. In the out-years that funding and any cost matching that that the provincial government must make will have to be reflected in those out-years, and that is not included in capital plan 2018.

11:40

**Mr. Clark:** The same thing goes for the other line items in that table, then. The aboriginal business investment fund is \$5 million a year every year until '22-23. Does that program simply end?

**Ms Sigurdson:** That is not something that this department is responsible for, the aboriginal business investment fund.

**Mr. Clark:** Family, social supports, and housing: that's not within your area? Okay. It's in the capital plan.

New housing supply, affordable and specialized housing, goes to zero. Are we going to do no affordable and specialized housing in '22-23?

**Ms Sigurdson:** MLA Clark, I think that has been answered. You know, I hear your critique of it, and certainly I don't think that is how it is, but we've responded to you.

**Mr. Clark:** Okay. So I'd like to know, then: you'd said that in a grant model perhaps we would see some dollars in the budget allocated for potential future projects, but in an investment model we do it differently. That, I think, is part of the root of one of the concerns I've heard from the sector, uncertainty of what's going forward. So perhaps I'll ask, then: of that \$144 million in the 2018-19 estimates, are any of the projects on pages 67, 68, 69, that are unfunded capital projects, any of those dollars that we would see in any of the five years in this capital plan, contemplated in these numbers that we have here under the seniors' housing development and renewal line item?

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. This portion of the meeting has expired in the rotation.

I would now like to invite Ms Miller, from the government caucus, to share the next 10 minutes with the minister as there are no other members present. Ms Miller, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Ms Miller:** Please.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms Miller:** Thank you, Chair. Going back to my last question on the supplementary accommodation benefit, what instances would make it so that a senior needs to move from a lodge setting to a long-term setting?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, certainly, sometimes seniors may have increasing health needs. They may experience a fall or something, and then they'll need more assistance. That's not provided in an independent living centre, so those kinds of things. It has a lot to do with health oftentimes, where people need more support than is possible in a lodge facility. That is an example of some of the things that would cause that person to be needing to go to a higher level facility.

**Ms Miller:** Okay. Thank you.

In the main estimates for your ministry on page 230, item 2.2, the budget for the special needs assistance grants has stayed the same as last year, yet the population of Alberta, and in particular seniors, is increasing. Has funding kept pace with the population growth?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Certainly, the special needs assistance program for seniors provides financial assistance support to eligible seniors with low income for critical needs, including appliances and some personal and health supports. The program is a needs-based program, and as such, the take-up rate for the program can vary from year to year. As a regulated program all eligible seniors will be funded for their claim, you know, so if it's in the qualification for special needs assistance, then they will receive it. We monitor and assess all programs carefully to ensure that the needed funding is there. If the population increases, if the needs increase, then certainly we'll make sure that that senior gets that funding. Right now we are certainly able to manage within that budget allocation, that's been consistent. But all seniors who apply for that program and who are eligible receive the benefits.

**Ms Miller:** Thank you.

On page 124, as part of the strategic context for your business plan, you talk about a goal of raising awareness of elder abuse. What projects or initiatives have you budgeted for in 2018?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you. Certainly, my ministry works collaboratively with other ministries, all levels of government, and community partners to prevent and address elder abuse. Seniors and Housing has committed \$300,000 over three years to support the ongoing work of the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council and an additional \$50,000 to co-host the third provincial elder abuse conference on March 1 and 2 this year. We're committed to working with all Albertans to protect the safety and personal security of seniors in our community. You know, we celebrate World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, and a number of my government colleagues will participate in events to raise awareness of the important issue of elder abuse.

So there's ongoing work always in that area.

**Ms Miller:** Okay. Thank you.

On page 230 of the main estimates, line item 2.6 under loans and advances, the budget expense for the property tax deferral program is much lower than the other programs. Why is this?

**Ms Sigurdson:** You know, this program is a voluntary program. It's available for seniors who are interested in deferring property tax payments. This is one of a variety of programs my ministry provides to support seniors to stay in their homes and chosen communities. We write directly to about 200,000 seniors at least once a year to make sure that they know about the programs available to them, including this one. This program has made a difference to seniors who have accessed it by freeing up household funds each month and allowing them to use their funds for what the senior deems is a priority. I can tell you that we have helped several seniors who have found themselves with large property tax arrears and have supported them through possible municipal tax sale proceedings.

It is a voluntary program, so the uptake is, you know, up to Albertans and the community. But, certainly, we do advertise and speak to seniors about that across the province.

**Ms Miller:** Has the department thought about changing the way it advertises so that the program isn't so undersubscribed? I know in

Red Deer many of the seniors I talk to on a regular basis know nothing about this program.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, certainly, we work with seniors' centres across the province and, you know, FCSS and things like that to promote that. But we're always looking for ways to enhance our sharing of resources. On the ministry website – I mean, I know some seniors are not looking on websites and things like that, so that's why the seniors' centres. We certainly have stakeholders across the province that advise us about what some of the connection points are that we should be making.

We're certainly open to hearing more about that. If there's something specific in the Red Deer community that we're missing, we'd appreciate and be happy to connect with them and make sure that they have that information so that they can share it with the seniors locally.

**Ms Miller:** Okay. Thank you.

On page 230 of the estimates it shows that your department supports the Seniors Advocate office in the amount of \$981,000. We know that it's important for advocates to be independent. How is it that the Seniors Advocate can be both independent and supported by your ministry?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, MLA Miller. Certainly, the Seniors Advocate office does a great job to meet the demands and provide effective services for Alberta seniors. We're focusing on maintaining key programs and services to protect vulnerable Albertans. Government continues to listen to feedback to ensure we are maximizing the benefit of the advocate's role. It's important that the advocate maintains focus on the existing mandate of interacting with citizens, which will inform broader policy advice through the advocate's annual reports.

I also meet with Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who is the advocate, on a regular basis, and she provides me with feedback on the casework that they're receiving, the concerns that seniors are presenting. Certainly, I receive that as important information, and that does influence and impact just how we develop policy, our existing policies. So that is very valuable information for us.

**Ms Miller:** Thank you.

Also on page 230, line item 2.4, it shows that Seniors and Housing supports nonprofit groups and organizations with community grants. What kinds of programs are offered through these grants?

11:50

**Ms Sigurdson:** That's correct. My ministry does support nonprofit groups and organizations to celebrate seniors, to recognize the contributions that seniors make to our communities and to our province, to support research and development of promising practices, and to support the very important front-line service providers that help seniors to age well in their own communities.

Grants to organizations such as the Kerby Centre to provide information and referrals for seniors on housing and other programs and services is an example of that. SAGE here in Edmonton assists seniors to find appropriate housing to meet their needs. The Grey Matters Conference is another two-day conference that provides learning and networking opportunities for service providers to enable them to assist seniors in their own communities. Each year we have the provincial launch of Seniors' Week, which is the first week of June, and a grant is provided to the host city or town to support that event. The seniors' community grants program has also supported many other organizations such as the Brenda Strafford Foundation to develop the two dementia-friendly communities

demonstration projects and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council to develop a sustainable transportation service for seniors in the capital region, that will also be available to other communities.

So there's a wide variety of grants that are presented to community nonprofit groups.

**Ms Miller:** Thank you.

On page 235 of the main estimates what is the donations line in the change in capital assets section?

**Ms Sigurdson:** The \$88 million donations line was a result of the signing of the 2016 social housing agreement between Canada Mortgage and Housing and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation. That 2016 agreement replaced 17 cost-share agreements and transferred full ownership and control over social housing properties.

**The Chair:** I apologize for the interruption; however, the time allotted for this portion of the meeting has expired.

I would like to remind members that all discussion should flow through the chair as this is an extension of the Assembly, and I would like to remind members to keep their questions focused on the 2018 main estimates and to ask the minister and her staff to keep their responses concise.

For the remainder of this meeting I would invite the Official Opposition, I believe Mr. Orr . . .

**Mr. Orr:** Sure.

**The Chair:** . . . and the minister to speak. Mr. Orr, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Mr. Orr:** Sure, please, if that's fine.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Orr:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to address the business plan at page 123. The last line talks about promoting "age-friendly initiatives that support communities to develop approaches that are inclusive and welcoming."

There's been a great deal of discussion amongst many stakeholders with regard to the fact that in the 1960s, '70s when we built, basically, large institutional-type seniors' housing, that was sort of what was wanted. Today there's a much stronger desire for person-centred care, maybe smaller kinds of situations, because the institutional thing, quite frankly, can be traumatic. People get moved out of a home environment into an institution, essentially, where they are unfamiliar with procedures and processes, just the very physical change from what's a home to a massive place with long halls and people ending up in the wrong rooms and all kinds of things.

And then there's the fact that so often they're distant. People get sent into communities that they've never been in before. My own mother was sent to a community that she'd never been in in her life because that was the thing that first came open. There's the issue of divorce by nursing home because, again, they get funnelled into the system.

So on the one end of the spectrum we have this institutional model, which I think is quite outdated, and we really need something that's more person centred. On the other end of the spectrum we have the good effort of trying to keep people in their own homes, providing supports and changes to their home structure to keep them at home as long as possible. But I think there's a real gap there in between those two models, which are the primary two models.

I would like to suggest – there are a lot of people asking for things like this, and there are some in the province already, but there's a lot of confusion over it, and I just wonder where the ministry stands on it – something more like neighbourhood homes dedicated to seniors, probably much on the model that's been used for many, many years with persons with disabilities, group homes, basically, homes in neighbourhoods where people can choose their community, choose where they want to live.

You know, farther up on the same page it talks about: "supports access to housing options." I'd like to suggest that that's an option, that probably its time has come. I guess I'm a little bit concerned that there are a lot of seniors who feel like it's somewhat of a discrimination to them that they need to be sort of herded like cattle into this barn as somewhere for them to go. Maybe they can't stay in their own home, but I think there are options where it's much more friendly, much more in their own neighbourhood, much more in their own community. I just wonder if there's any kind of consideration of that kind of model in the future thinking of Seniors and Housing.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I think a few things are being, you know, brought together that maybe don't go together, so I just want to clarify. Certainly, in the Ministry of Seniors and Housing we're talking about independent living seniors, so we're talking about seniors' self-contained and seniors 1 and 2, so it isn't long-term care or, really, seniors who are requiring extensive care.

Our lodge program. You know, we have a very unique lodge program. It is unique to Alberta. We have about 140 lodges. If you go to a lodge in Alberta – and I'm sure you have; there are many across our province – they're like home. They're very . . .

**Mr. Orr:** There are many seniors who would not agree with that, who do not feel like they are lodges.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'm still talking.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I would ask that you speak through the chair.

**Mr. Orr:** Okay. Fair enough.

**Ms Sigurdson:** There are smaller facilities, certainly, in the town I grew up in, in Valleyview, the Red Willow Lodge . . .

**Mr. Orr:** Madam Chair, thank you. I don't need a rehearsal of the existing lodges. I understand that. I'm just asking if the department has any consideration at all of the growing request amongst many seniors for something that's much more homelike.

**Ms Sigurdson:** We have seniors' self-contained facilities across the province with smaller units. It depends, of course, on the housing management bodies. We work with the housing management bodies to determine the projects in their area. So as they bring forward initiatives, we assess them. It's . . .

**Mr. Orr:** That's good. Thank you. I've heard what I need to hear.

**The Chair:** Hon. member.

**Mr. Orr:** I'm done. I'm just saying that I'm done. I've heard what I need to hear.

**Mr. Gill:** Madam Chair, if I may. Thank you, Minister, once again. My question is: are you aware if any of the not-for-profit organizations have returned the grants to your ministry and if that grant has been allocated to the other not-for-profit organizations or care providers?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'd appreciate more specifics. I'm not sure what you're talking about.

**Mr. Gill:** For example, could you elaborate on whether the purchase of the Good Samaritan Society was part of the plan or was it part of the vision or the ideology of the government?

**Ms Sigurdson:** That is with the Ministry of Health.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. So you're suggesting that we should be asking that to . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** It's not in the Department of Seniors and Housing. This is about Seniors and Housing, so I'm happy to answer questions about Seniors and Housing.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. Are there any other plans to purchase any other organizations who provide senior care?

**Ms Sigurdson:** It's a pretty broad question. It depends. I mean, we're working with housing management bodies across the province, and they put forward proposals.

**Mr. Gill:** The rumour was – and correct me if I'm wrong – that it was a hostile takeover by the government. I don't know if you can shed some light on that, please.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Again, I believe it's relevant if you ask Minister Hoffman about this.

**Mr. Gill:** Okay. All right.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll pass whatever time I have left to Mr. Smith now.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you. Madam Minister, I've got a real quick question, a real easy one. Communities are struggling with trying to get seniors to medical appointments. There was a reference to a program – I believe you called it the special needs assistance program – and my question was: can the communities apply through the special needs assistance program for assistance in transporting seniors for medical needs and stuff like that?

**Ms Sigurdson:** The special needs assistance program is for individuals, so seniors themselves can . . .

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

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on Thursday, April 5, 2018, at 9 a.m. to continue our consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]







