



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 10, 2026
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 31-2-1

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC), Chair
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), *Acting Deputy Chair

Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)**
Getson, Shane C., Lac St. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Lundy, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
Sawyer, Tara, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)

* substitution for Nicole Goehring

** substitution for Peter Singh

Also in Attendance

Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Law Clerk
Vani Govindarajan	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Rachel McGraw	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Amanda LeBlanc	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services

Hon. Jason Nixon, Minister

Jenn Anderson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Preventive Community Services

Marika Giesen, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Financial Services

9 a.m.

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

**Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Well, good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the main estimates of the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table when we come to your turn. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of the committee. We'll start to my right, please.

Mr. Getson: Sure. MLA Shane Getson for the beautiful constituency of Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, better known as God's country.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you. Jennifer Johnson, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Sawyer: Tara Sawyer, MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Lundy: Good morning, everyone. Brandon Lundy, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont.

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

Mr. Nixon: Good morning, everybody. Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, where all your constituents come on vacation, and the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services. To my far left is Marika Giesen, who is the acting assistant deputy minister of employment financial services. Directly to my left is Dennis Cooley, who is my deputy minister. On my right is Sonya Johnston, who is an assistant deputy minister and our senior financial officer of our department. And on the far right is David Williams, who is the assistant deputy minister of housing. Behind me is our entire executive team ready to help you today, Madam Chair.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Member Irwin: Good morning. Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Sigurdson: Good morning. Lori Sigurdson, Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Pancholi: Good morning. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud.

The Chair: All right. I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record. Ms Sigurdson is substituting for Ms Goehring as deputy chair. Mr. Bouchard will be substituting for Mr. Singh from 11 to 11:30.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meetings can be accessed via the

Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn on your camera. Today we have no participants remotely. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

After some recent confusion I'd like to take a moment to clarify for all members about the substitution process outlined in Standing Order 56. Committee members wishing to have an official substitute may file a notice of substitution with both the Clerk of the Assembly and the chair of the committee. It's appreciated if you would also advise the committee clerk. Substitutions sent by e-mail must be sent directly from the member and not their constituency office or by caucus staff. Written notices of substitution must be signed by the original committee member. Substitution for the chair and deputy chair require 24 hours' notice while other committee members may submit their notices prior to the scheduled start time of the meeting. If the substitution is for the chair or deputy chair role, please make it clear if your substitute is – members, please listen; I'm reviewing it because we've had some confusion here.

Let me start again on this one paragraph. If the substitution is for the chair or deputy chair role, please make it clear if your substitute is going to be filling in as chair or deputy chair or if you are appointing an existing committee member to that role. In the case of a Monday meeting a chair or deputy chair substitution notice must be filed before 4:30 p.m. on Friday, and the original committee member is responsible for ensuring their substitute is prepared to participate in the committee meeting.

For today's meeting it was agreed that some irregular notices would be accepted. However, going forward, it is expected that the rules regarding substitution notices will be followed. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the committee clerks before your notice of substitution is due.

Last, with regard to ASL interpretation, as committee members are aware, our request was made to have American sign language interpretation services available for this meeting. These services, as you can appreciate, are in high demand, and unfortunately we have not been able to secure ASL interpretation services for our meeting this morning, but we anticipate it will be available this afternoon.

All right. Now I'll address speaking rotation and time limits. Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services shall be considered for six hours; therefore, this is the first of two three-hour meetings. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined but only if the minister and the member speaking agree. If debate is exhausted prior to six hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the allotted time in the main estimate schedule and the committee will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the meeting clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having a break today? All right. We'll have a break.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus

staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the block for speaking times and the overall meeting 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.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both the questions and the answers without interruption during estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, please, members, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I'd now invite the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services to begin with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to your committee for having us here today. I'm pleased to be here today to present the Assisted Living and Social Services budget. I'm joined today by my deputy minister, first of all, and all of my assistant deputy ministers, the ones that I've already introduced to the table and the rest behind us.

Budget 2026 is focused on what matters. It reflects the reality of a challenging fiscal environment while making disciplined choices to protect essential services for Albertans who need them most. It delivers on the priorities of the day while ensuring the long-term sustainability of our social programs. This budget provides \$12.2 billion for Assisted Living and Social Services, an increase of more than \$935 million from Budget 2025. This record investment will allow us to strengthen programs and services that vulnerable Albertans rely on every day, and it's a clear demonstration of Alberta's government's unwavering commitment to supporting Albertans.

A top priority of this ministry is ensuring that Albertans receive the right care in the right place at the right time. In September 2025 Assisted Living Alberta, the province's provincial health agency for assisted living and continuing care, became operational. Assisted Living Alberta provides a comprehensive system of care, including continuing care services, home care, community care, and wraparound medical and nonmedical supports, supporting seniors, people with disabilities, and vulnerable Albertans to live with dignity and independence in the environment that best meets their needs.

To support this work, through Budget 2026 Alberta's government is investing more than \$5.9 billion into assisted living and continuing care; \$5.3 billion of that is allocated to Assisted Living Alberta, a year-over-year increase of \$670 million, or 15 per cent. It will come as no surprise to anybody who has watched the file this past year that since Assisted Living Alberta became operational in September, there has been a concentrated effort to ensure that patients in hospitals who no longer require acute care are being transitioned to the care that they need in community. I'm pleased to say that we've already seen a significant difference.

Historically 1 in 5 hospital beds in Alberta has been occupied by Albertans who no longer require acute care but who remain in hospital because they are waiting for placement in continuing care facilities or home care or some other support to transition safely out of the hospital into the care that they need in their community. In the span of just six months Assisted Living Alberta's focused efforts have reduced the number of Albertans in hospital who no longer require acute care by 30 per cent. The results of these efforts are even more prominent in the province's 14 largest hospitals, with more than a 35 per cent reduction in the number of patients in

hospital who no longer require acute care. It's important to remember that these aren't just numbers; these are family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours who are receiving the care that they need in their community as a direct result of these efforts.

Through the recent announcement of our assisted living framework Alberta's government is driving the largest continuing care expansion in Alberta's history, investing billions over the next 10 years to create 15,000 more continuing care spaces across the province, meeting the needs of Albertans today and into the future. With this budget alone \$400 million is being invested in that space.

9:10

Supporting Alberta seniors is another priority of our ministry. Alberta's seniors population is growing at an unprecedented pace. Currently Alberta has more than 865,000 seniors, but our seniors population is projected to exceed a million by 2035, and within 20 years 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior. Alberta's government is balancing fiscal responsibility with the need to protect programs that seniors rely on. Through Budget 2026 Alberta's government is investing a record \$6.6 billion to support Alberta seniors this year, which includes \$553.3 million for the Alberta senior benefit, an increase of approximately \$13 million from last year.

Our government also invests in services that support independence and enable seniors to age well in their homes and in their communities, including partnering with community organizations to provide nonmedical supports such as \$8.5 million for transportation programs for seniors and those with mobility challenges, ensuring access to appointments, essential services, and social connections, and nearly \$28 million over four years for home and community supports such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, yard maintenance, and social and wellness activities. These investments help ensure our growing senior population can age with dignity in their communities that they helped build and not go unnecessarily to the hospital.

My ministry is also responsible for delivering comprehensive disability supports for the hundreds of thousands of Albertans living with disabilities. Alberta has the highest provincial disability benefit rates and the most robust disability programs in Canada, and we continue to expand and improve those supports. Through Budget 2026 our government is investing an unprecedented \$3.7 billion to support Albertans with disabilities, a year-over-year increase of almost \$100 million. In fact, underneath the UCP government, Madam Chair, disability funding has increased by more than \$1 billion since 2019. That's an increase of more than 38 per cent. In the last two years alone our government has increased funding for persons with disabilities by nearly a quarter billion dollars.

This funding ensures that all eligible Albertans will continue to receive fully funded and indexed disability benefits to programs like the assured income for the severely handicapped program, or AISH program, and the Alberta disability assistance program, also known as ADAP. When the program launches in July 2026, ADAP will empower Albertans with disabilities to pursue fulfilling jobs while continuing to receive supports that they need and will expand access to disability income supports to thousands of Albertans who need assistance but who may not be eligible under the current one-size-fits-all approach of AISH.

Assisted Living and Social Services is also the ministry responsible for Albertans experiencing homelessness. This is another area in which Budget 2026 offers record levels of support, investing an unprecedented \$227 million to combat homelessness. In addition to supporting thousands of 24-hours-a-day, seven-day-a-week day and night shelter spaces across the province and providing funding for programs aimed at getting people off the

street, this funding also supports the province's navigation and support centres located in Edmonton and Calgary. The navigation and support centres help vulnerable Albertans access critical supports and services all under one roof. Since opening in 2024 the navigation centres have helped more than 19,000 unique individuals and made more than 117,700 connections to critical supports, including ID services, housing, recovery services, health care, financial aid, and much more.

As Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services I'm also the minister responsible for housing, and I'm proud to say that Alberta leads the country when it comes to housing. In fact, we lead across several categories. Alberta has led the country in housing starts per capita for two consecutive years. Despite making up less than 12 per cent of Canada's population, last year Alberta built nearly a quarter of all housing starts in the country and more than 80 per cent of all housing starts in the prairies.

This increase in housing supply is driving rent down across the province. In 2025, Madam Chair, rents in Alberta decreased nearly twice the national average, with the average asking rent in Alberta approximately \$400 per month below the national average. Alberta is home to six of the 10 most affordable small to midsize Canadian cities for rent, including the top four spots.

Investment in Budget 2026 will further support housing affordability with \$1.2 billion allocated to build affordable housing over the next three years. This investment will support more than 8,000 new households through our new affordable housing units and rent assistance and will help us meet our stronger foundation affordable housing targets, supporting a total of 82,000 households by 2031, an increase of more than 40 per cent since 2021.

Budget 2026 also provides capital maintenance and renewal funding of more than \$150 million over three years, an increase of \$26 million from last year. In 2026 alone this will support the maintenance and renewal of 4,500 affordable housing units across the province, ensuring that these homes are made safe, habitable, and available for those who need them most.

Finally, ensuring all Albertans have the opportunity to succeed in the workforce is a key priority of the government. That's why through Budget 2026 Alberta's government is investing an unprecedented nearly quarter billion dollars to help Albertans gain and retain meaningful employment. Last year Alberta's government launched WorkFirst Alberta, the most ambitious steps our province has ever taken to connect Albertans to jobs and employers to job seekers, including enhanced supports for Albertans facing barriers to employment. I'm pleased to report that as of January approximately 437,000 Albertans have attended career and employment resource centres, workshops, and labour market delivery events. By supporting workforce participation, we're not only helping individuals achieve independence but also contributing to the long-term economic stability of our province.

In conclusion, Budget 2026 is a responsible plan that's focused on what matters. It invests \$12.2 billion dollars to ensure the safety and well-being of seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and vulnerable Albertans. The Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services will continue to work closely with our partners and service providers to ensure that every dollar counts.

Thank you again, Madam Chair, for having us, and I look forward to the questions of your committee.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We'll now begin the question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the

minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block in the committee room on Microsoft Teams.

Would you like to combine your time or share?

Mr. Nixon: We'll go block.

The Chair: Block?

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Block time.

The Chair: Sorry. Did I say that wrong?

Ms Sigurdson: You said it the same.

The Chair: It's block. I said it the same.

So we're going to go with block. Okay. Let's proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to be here today for this important meeting. I want to first start by acknowledging that we're on Treaty 6 territory and also recognize the Métis people of Alberta, who share a deep connection with this land.

I just also want to acknowledge that, you know, it's a very important aspect of democracy that the Official Opposition has the opportunity to ask the minister and public servants questions, and I really am grateful for this opportunity. I think it helps Albertans understand more deeply what the budget actually means. Thank you to the minister and his staff for all the work they do to serve seniors in Alberta.

I have in my notes that over 800,000 seniors call Alberta home, but the minister just let us know it's 865,000. I also have: making up 16 per cent of the Alberta population. One in 5 seniors, the minister said in 20 years; I have 2031. And I'm among them. I just turned 65 last month, and I received a letter last July from the ministry letting me know of seniors programs and the quick facts sheet. I brought it along just to have it as an exhibit. So I really appreciate the public servants letting me know about what programs and keeping Albertans well informed about what's available to them or rather us.

I'm going to start on page 84 of the fiscal plan. I just want to remind people a little bit about the speech about the budget that was delivered by the Finance minister on February 26. He made some general comments, and I just want to highlight them here, Madam Chair.

We're not making massive program cuts . . . We are choosing to take the hit on [the] books rather than put that strain on Alberta's households . . . We're choosing to protect the services families rely on every day . . . Alberta continues to make record investments in core services to meet the challenges of today . . . We focused on maintaining the projects and programs that truly serve Albertans.

So, Madam Chair, imagine my surprise when the income threshold for seniors program eligibility was cut massively – massively – by 9 per cent. This threshold has always been set around the poverty line. Seniors impacted are very low income, and if you look at the market-basket measure, the official and generally accepted best measure of poverty in Canada, the ministry's income threshold is only slightly above this measure. The base measure was revamped in 2023 to keep up with inflation, so that means that the more recent inflation which has caused an affordability crisis in our province has not yet been factored in. Why is the minister excluding seniors from the supposed promise of the budget, protecting services for Albertans? It's frankly insulting to seniors who built this province not to be included. The UCP says they're focused on what matters. How come seniors do not matter to the UCP?

9:20

According to budget documents the consumer price index increased 2 per cent in 2025, and our population grew 2.5 per cent. We know the seniors demographic is growing faster than others, so this is assuredly a low estimate of growth. Thus, the 9 per cent decrease in income thresholds is exacerbated by the consumer price index and population growth combined at 4.5 per cent. It's like a 13.5 per cent reduction in supports. Again, why is the minister targeting seniors by underfunding their programs? This is a cruel decision aimed at seniors who built this province and who should be supported to live in dignity.

Other programs like the Alberta seniors benefit: we know that about, I think, 210,000 seniors currently receive this benefit, so that's a significant number of seniors in our province, and perhaps the minister has a more up-to-date number than that. How many seniors are eligible before the 9 per cent cut, and how many after? With the lowering of the income threshold, how is the UCP going to provide support for seniors who no longer qualify for the benefit? Why is affordability for low-income seniors not a priority for this government?

I want to move on to special needs assistance. Special needs assistance grants are funds that support seniors to age in community, and seniors overwhelmingly want to remain in their community. We know this, and we know that this government has also said that it's very important that seniors are able to age in community. We know that with the right supports mental health and general health are higher when seniors age in their own community. However, without these supports seniors may experience social isolation, which leads to negative mental health and general health outcomes. You know, this is very concerning. Since the UCP was elected back in 2019, almost \$9 million has been cut from the special needs assistance budget. Now, today, with this budget's 9 per cent cut in the income threshold, that's going to go even lower.

Things that used to be available to seniors. Support for lift chairs: eliminated. Support for personal response devices: you know, say they fall or they're in some kind of emergency and they're living in their own home and no one else is around. There's no installation fee that's covered. That used to always be covered. Foot orthotics are not covered anymore. Those were always covered previously. Also, sometimes in facilities it costs, of course, to pay for laundry. That used to be covered. The UCP cut those things. With the income threshold 9 per cent reduction many seniors will not receive the support they need. Millions in cuts, and now even more. Why is the program being cut so drastically? That's my question to the minister.

I guess I'd like to move on to page 66 of the estimates and the seniors' home adaptation and repair program. This is an important program that, again, helps seniors age in their communities. It was a program that was created by the NDP when I was a minister, and it supports seniors to be able to renovate their homes. You know, maybe they have rugs. Of course, as we age, those could be a tripping hazard. People have walkers. So all these things create some difficulty. This program helps people renovate their homes so that they can stay in those communities, but the funds have remained stagnant for several years now. The UCP has said certainly that they wish to support seniors to age in community, so why is this program really stagnating? Why is it not being promoted? Will the cutting of the income thresholds mean fewer seniors are now even eligible? How come these programs are not accessible, considering they support aging in the community, which is a value of the UCP that I understand?

The seniors property tax deferral program, page 67 of the estimates. Again, this is helping seniors to stay in their homes

because sometimes, you know, property taxes can be quite high, and seniors are feeling that it's difficult for them to be able to pay for that. This program supports them to defer them, and that helps a lot. I'm just wondering: are seniors denied this program if the allocated funds are exceeded? Can the minister tell us about that?

On page 189 of the estimates, the dental and optical assistance for seniors. There's a line item for that. We know that the copay increased this year for prescriptions, causing further hardship. I guess it was over last year; it's been a year. It's as of April 2026. That means that seniors will pay the copay, \$10 for each prescription. That adds up if you have more than one prescription, obviously. Sadly, some seniors have to choose between groceries and needed prescription drugs, and that should not be anybody's choice. Seniors should be able to live in dignity and have the medication and food they need to live well. So why is the UCP further burdening seniors with this significant increase? Does the income threshold reduction apply to this program? How much more will seniors have to pay out of pocket for dental and optical?

Page 55 of the annual report talks about seniors' sense of belonging in local communities. These numbers have gone down significantly since the UCP became government, so I'm just wondering if the minister could speak to that and explain why that's happening.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We'll move over to the minister for his response.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. We'll start with the special needs assistance grants questions. First, to clarify for the record, there have not been changes to the programs that are available through that program, so I'm not following the member's question specifically on what would be removed because there hasn't been anything removed from the services. In a follow-up block maybe she can highlight that, and I can get a little bit more specific on it.

The special needs assistance grant is based on uptake, so anybody who is accessing it will receive it. The numbers that are in Budget 2026 reflect the uptake of the program. The department remains committed to the program, fully funding the program, and the estimates that are provided through this budget process are based on who is uptaking the program. If it did increase, which it hasn't, then the department would keep up with it the same way.

Let's talk about the Alberta seniors' benefit, which I think is where the member started, Madam Chair. The comments from the Official Opposition about the government not caring for seniors are quite shocking when you go and look at the investment that the taxpayer is about to make inside Budget 2026. When you're talking about a \$6.6 billion investment that the Alberta government is making in caring for our seniors in the province, that's a pretty big number, a lot of money, and I think reflects the commitment that Alberta and Alberta taxpayers have to caring for our parents and our grandparents as they age in the province.

Only the NDP, Madam Chair, would imply that \$6.6 billion is not a significant investment, larger than most other ministries in government just on that item alone. We will continue to see that type of commitment going forward in the future, including through the Alberta seniors' benefit; \$553.3 million will go through the Alberta seniors' benefit this year, which is an increase, not a decrease, in the amount that will be invested through that line item of about \$13 million from Budget 2025.

Now, the member is right. The threshold is being adjusted to be brought in line closer to the rest of the country. It will still remain the highest threshold in the country by a lot and something that we're committed to doing, but it is being realigned to fit with the

Canadian context and to make sure that we continue to have the highest benefits and the highest process for our seniors but also remain in line with the rest of the provinces. For example, the differential between the province to the west of us and us when it comes to the benefit is a \$20,740 difference. Pretty significant. In Ontario the differential is \$18,551; Saskatchewan, \$18,460; Manitoba, \$13,274. So nothing could be further from the truth. Alberta considers this a priority. You know, case in point, Madam Chair, is the investment of over a half a billion dollars inside the senior benefit and maintaining the highest income thresholds inside the country, something that we're proud of.

9:30

Now, the senior home adaptation and repair, property tax deferral, and loans remain in place. I'm not sure what the member is referring to as far as changes. Again, in a follow-up block if she could provide a little bit more specifics, we will certainly answer, but the program is in place. In fact, we have repurposed some money internally from other programs that aren't seeing as much uptake as that program, which will result in an increase this year of \$1.95 million coming internally over into that program to make sure that we can continue to maintain it for Albertans that need it.

Now, that I think answered the main topics that the hon. member raised. Let's talk about other things that are happening with seniors inside the province. The number one issue that you will see with our aging rates, Madam Chair, is the pressure that we see on the acute-care system. Unfortunately, Alberta Health Services made a decision over repeated governments, including when the NDP was in government, to not invest the money that was provided to them in multiple budgets inside continuing care spaces. This has created one of the most significant challenges for our seniors in the province as they age.

To be very clear on this, Madam Chair, the PC governments, the NDP government, and the United Conservative governments have all increased spending in the health budget specifically to go to be invested in continuing care. Alberta Health Services did not invest it in continuing care, so you start to see quite a gap grow between what we will need for seniors long term and what was being told to be built. That results in what we saw across the province, which is people now living inside acute-care facilities sometimes for years, not months, not weeks, years.

By refocusing that purpose, taking that process away from Alberta Health Services, who is not investing that money adequately, we now put ourselves in a spot where we're seeing great results. For example, a reduction in ALCs, alternate level of care patients, by 30 per cent in just six months. To be clear, what that means, Madam Chair, is that grandparents and parents that were not supposed to be in acute-care hospitals, that, depending on studies, could be deteriorating by 15 per cent a day when they're in the wrong space, are being able to leave acute care and go into an appropriate continuing care setting to receive the care that they need in their community.

Our government was proud to announce just recently, just before Christmas that in Budget 2026 we're going to commit to 15,000 more continuing care spaces in this province, over 1,500 a year to be able to make sure that we can keep up with that process. Assisted Living Alberta and the team in Assisted Living Alberta and social services and the department are going to make sure that money that the Legislature passes is actually invested in that space, to be able to make sure that we can keep up with it long term. Again, a historic investment to care for our seniors, showing that the government considers this to be amongst its highest priorities. I certainly hope that the Official Opposition, though they did not vote for it last year,

will consider voting for it and not voting against our seniors receiving that level of benefits going forward.

The other area I would like to highlight when it comes to caring for seniors is the work that we do with Healthy Aging Alberta, which is a critical partner. We invest significantly in the province to be able to make sure that we provide supports to get help, keep people in their homes as long as they can, and to keep them in the community that they want to remain in. That's stuff like our rent programs, renovations to some of these houses that they may need for washroom facilities, lawn maintenance, helping people get groceries.

Madam Chair, in rural constituencies like ours, you know, that transportation problem is compounded even more. I mean, getting from Caroline to your doctor's appointment is a lot different than getting in Calgary or Edmonton to your doctor's appointment, because of the distance in those communities. Our investments in that space – Drive Happiness is an example – make sure that we can continue to support our parents and grandparents as they age in place.

The last thing I'd like to emphasize is the work, as the member knows – she was the minister in this area – in traditional seniors' housing, which is in affordable housing in the senior space. Alberta is the only place that has a lodge program of our kind. No other province has that. Alberta invests in both rent supplements and in capital partnerships to care for seniors through our housing authorities in partnership with our municipalities. This budget commits to continuing to increase that investment in affordable housing for seniors, for others as well, but for our fixed-income seniors that need places like lodge spaces. Each year we continue to invest an unprecedented amount in expanding that lodge space, and that's something that we're proud of in this province and something that no other province enjoys, again, reflecting the commitment of the Alberta government to caring for our seniors and those who built this province.

I'll finish where I started, Madam Chair: \$6.6 billion is being invested to support seniors in Alberta. Nothing else could clearly articulate the commitment of the Alberta government and the Alberta taxpayer to keep care of our seniors. It's \$6.6 billion, and we're going to continue to do it. We're going to continue to be amongst the highest benefit rates, the best thresholds, and things like our lodge program and our investments inside continuing care and assisted living in Alberta to make sure that we continue to lead the country in caring for our seniors and that we continue to be not only the best place to live and raise a family but the best place also to retire.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back over to the Official Opposition.

Member Irwin: All right. Thank you, and thanks to everyone joining us here on Treaty 6 territory. Thanks to all the ministry staff in this room. A shout-out to my wonderful office team behind me, Katie and Shalene, and our fabulous caucus staff, Annie and Sammi, and all our colleagues here. Women power, I would say. I would also like to give thanks to all the front-line workers who are working in housing and outreach and harm reduction and doing all the good work on the ground.

I would like to start out, as I have in past years, too, with an issue that's quite pressing and quite close to my heart as well, and that's homelessness. We know that homelessness or houselessness is not getting any better in Alberta. We've got numerous data points, including increased shelter usage, deaths, frostbite amputations, that are telling us that this issue continues to worsen, yet Budget 2026 cuts homelessness supports.

As we see on page 84 of the fiscal plan, the ministry is forecast to spend \$238 million on homelessness and housing supports this year but has only budgeted \$227 million for next year. If we break that down further, we can see in line item 5.2 of budget estimates – that’s on page 65 – that at a time when homeless shelters are regularly over or at capacity and we’re also seeing skyrocketing amputations from frostbite, shelter funding is being cut from \$125 million to \$119 million.

Line item 5.3 on the same page indicates that homeless housing supports – and those are the critical services that help those experiencing homelessness find and maintain housing – are being cut from \$104 million to \$98 million. When we take that all together, that amounts to a \$12.4 million cut. If we adjust that to population and inflation, that’s really a \$20.9 million cut. That’s unacceptable, and that’s reprehensible.

If we dig into this a little bit more specifically, we’ve got health data that shows that frostbite amputations among Alberta’s houseless population are spiking. In Edmonton frostbite amputations have increased for the second straight year, and we now hold the incredibly heartbreaking title of frostbite capital of the world. In the winter of 2024-2025 there were 1,307 diagnoses of frostbite, and that’s a 46 per cent increase from the year previous. That led to over 100 amputations in Edmonton alone, a fivefold increase since 2019. This data, of course, is all available online.

Calgary’s numbers are a little bit lower, but frostbite cases there also continue to rise with a sharp increase to the number of amputations correlated to homelessness. It is also important to be aware that those statistics don’t include digits, so like fingertips and toes that have fallen off prior to a surgical intervention taking place. That’s something that we hear from those on the front lines is happening all too often. I want to remind the folks in this room, as I do every year it seems, that, you know, when I share these numbers, when I share this data, those aren’t just numbers, right? Those are real people, folks that we all represent, and those numbers represent real lives, irreversibly and devastatingly changed.

9:40

One local organization described the freezing injuries that they’ve seen. They note them as bone exposed to open air, skin sloughing off like a wet paper, fingers blood blistered to twice their normal size, feet turn black with necrosis. When this data was released, the ministry, Assisted Living and Social Services, actually issued an honestly shocking statement that advised that these numbers were actually an indication of progress, stating that the increase in both frostbite diagnoses and amputations are a direct result of co-ordinated concerted efforts to increase awareness and early intervention of frostbite and cold exposure, improving outcomes for vulnerable Albertans. It’s incredibly alarming that the ministry responsible to budget for homelessness references skyrocketing amputation statistics as improved outcomes. So it’s alarming that in Budget 2026 this minister has cut support for homelessness, when, clearly, people are losing lives, people are losing limbs as a result of inaction.

On page 33 of the business plan, outcome 1 states that “Albertans have timely and consistent access to supports and services to help meet basic needs and maximize their independence,” further stating that “supporting vulnerable Albertans with financial benefits, health benefits, access to housing supports and emergency benefits ensures that all Albertans can meet their basic needs.” Yet I’m truly concerned that the ministry’s stated goals aren’t in any way connected to the actual outcomes we are seeing on the streets. Given that frostbite injuries lead to permanent disabilities, decreased independence, increased poverty, and the need for even more government supports, and given that, as I noted earlier, shelters are

regularly at or over capacity, we are gravely worried that this government is not even close to meeting the needs of vulnerable and unhoused Albertans. My question to the chair simply would be: you know, why on earth, with all this data, with all this evidence, with all the reports from folks on the front lines, would this ministry cut shelter and housing supports?

Let’s talk a little bit more about shelters because there are significant cuts to homeless shelters in Budget 2026. Let’s look at the data a little bit more. Over the past three years utilization of emergency shelters has increased by 60 per cent according to the government’s own shelter data. In Alberta, as I noted earlier, especially in Edmonton, shelters are regularly at or over capacity, yet that funding is being cut. We’ve never had more shelter spaces in this province, yet we’re repeatedly going over capacity. The need to fund more and more shelter spaces should not be considered an achievement by this ministry and this government. It’s indicative of a significant policy failure to effectively move folks out of homelessness.

Of course, and I say this with the caveat that I often repeat in this role as the housing shadow minister: we know that shelters are a Band-Aid. We know that until we have the investments in permanent supportive housing and affordable housing, these are supports that should still be bolstered and not cut.

It’s interesting that this government used to provide regularly updated, detailed shelter utilization data, but a detailed breakdown of the numbers hasn’t been provided since June of 2025. Even looking through the data from about this time last year, in March 2025, you could see that several shelters are over capacity. Calgary’s Salvation Army Centre of Hope was over capacity for many days in March. Enoch shelter was over capacity as well. Niginan, too.

Through the chair to the minister regarding shelter data, I want to just be very specific, and I hope that I can get some specific answers from this minister. Why has detailed shelter data stopped being reported to the public about the shelter spaces? When reporting daily shelter usage percentage, is the ministry reporting on the building capacity or the operational spaces, spaces that are actually open with staffing and so on? When those shelters do run over capacity, do they still have to adhere to the ministry’s own shelter accommodation expectations? If yes, how do they achieve those standards in such crowded environments? Who is it that is overseeing compliance? Is it the ministry?

Page 31 of the business plan indicates that all “shelters in Alberta are funded to operate 24/7.” However, me and my office team frequently hear about shelters that are not operating in this fashion, and we know that overflow beds are not required to remain open during the day. Therefore, when a shelter is overcapacity, folks are routinely being discharged during the early hours of the morning into the cold. Other than some increases that we’ve seen in day spaces, has this government made any additional plans to address this concern, as we’ve regularly been seeing shelters running overcapacity?

I must quote the minister here. Actually, a year ago he stated in a press conference, and I quote: if I started to see large population increases inside our emergency shelter system, I would start to be concerned that we’re not providing enough services. Well, Minister, it’s been a year, through the chair, and you are seeing those increases. To that minister through the chair: along with cuts to shelters we’re seeing cuts to housing supports, the very services that move folks beyond shelters out of homelessness and into housing. Again, I must ask: what is the rationale for these cuts? What service reductions are going to happen on the ground as a result of a \$5 million cut to shelters? Will there be shelter space reductions?

Given that we regularly saw shelter capacity under strain throughout the province, why on earth would this ministry budget less for shelters in this coming year? Again, I really would like to implore this minister to dig a little bit into that data. You know, if I'm wrong, I'd love to hear it, but I'd love to hear it supported with facts and evidence.

Thank you again to the folks working on the ground. We see you and we appreciate you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Over to the minister.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. The member never ceases to amaze me how good she is at getting her facts wrong. Let's correct some of the record right off the bat. First off, there are no cuts to homeless shelters. The hon. member is referring to reductions in outlying years from federal money that flows through the provincial government, which we could talk about in more detail. But the shelter program itself remains fully funded in the province.

Now, the member quoted the capacity challenges in the shelter system, which is just not true. The numbers are tracked. They're put out on a website so that the public can see it, Madam Chair. I do have the averages of all of our shelter systems right here in front of me for this last fiscal year. I'm happy to go through it. Calgary's average was 83 per cent. Edmonton was 80 per cent. Fort McMurray was 52 per cent. Grande Prairie was 93 per cent. Lethbridge was 66 per cent. Lloydminster was 86 per cent. Medicine Hat was 94 per cent. Red Deer was 65 per cent. Wetaskiwin, 98 per cent, the only one getting close. Canmore, 80 per cent. Cold Lake, 66 per cent. Drayton Valley, 32 per cent. Edson, 53 per cent. Hinton, 54 per cent. Lac La Biche, 78 per cent. Peace River, 69 per cent. Rocky Mountain House, 39 per cent. Spruce Grove, 45 per cent. Strathmore was 47 per cent. And the average for Alberta, 79 per cent.

It's rich coming from the Official Opposition, Madam Chair, whose plan for this issue, as we expanded homeless shelters, was to tell us not to expand homeless shelters but instead to keep people out of the homeless shelters and go with tents and encampments in Alberta as the most appropriate place to provide emergency shelter at a time where we were seeing explosions and fires that were killing people, not to mention the gangs that were abusing people inside that tent system, the human trafficking that was being encountered inside that tent system. The Alberta government chose to go a different way, which was to invest in unprecedented amounts of shelter spaces, build our new navigation program in our largest cities, which are now being expanded in different ways to smaller cities, something that's being copied by other provinces because of how well it works. We're going to continue to fund it.

There are very rare moments where one-off shelters occasionally become close to that maximum capacity. We have the ability as a department with our providers to be able to surge that capacity – it's often on the coldest nights of the year – and nobody is turned away from the shelters. I want to really stress that, Madam Chair, because I think it's dangerous when the Official Opposition and others try to make it sound like there's no capacity. If one person hears that and chooses not to go to a shelter on a cold night and loses their life, that's extremely unfortunate. It needs to be very clear that our shelter partners and the department have adequate spaces, and anybody who needs to be cared for in cold weather or warm weather that is living on the streets should go to those shelters. They will be kept care of, and they will never be turned away. And I want to really, really stress that.

9:50

Now on frostbite, what the hon. member is referring to, Madam Chair, is the fact that new protocols have been brought in place. It's very unfortunate that anybody finds himself with frostbite. The impacts to them could be extremely significant. I think we would all agree on that. But one of the things is that there is a direct result. If you get into early intervention, which is what we're pushing when it comes to frostbite, it means that there are less invasive processes that would have to take place so that you don't end up with as dire consequences. By putting in that frostbite protocol, which are the comments that she's referring to, we've seen people get to the hospital and receive more frostbite control. That's a good thing. It's not good that they got frostbite, but it's good that we're able to see quicker intervention from the medical community and less invasive impacts as a result of that.

We also are investing with our friends and our partners over at Hope, who are building a medical shelter with us to help us deal with some of these issues on the streets. It's pretty extraordinary that work that's taking place there. I'm actually going to ask Assistant Deputy Minister Jenn Anderson, who's responsible for preventive services, including homelessness, to come up and take the committee through a couple of the things that we're working on when it comes to that medical shelter, which continues to have a direct impact on these issues. With your permission, of course, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Ms Anderson: Good morning. Jenn Anderson, assistant deputy minister for preventive community services division. Thank you for the question, and thank you, Minister.

To the chair: we're quite proud of the Hope medical program. One of the benefits of supporting the Hope Mission in their medical model, which we're calling Hope medical, is that it creates a place where individuals can get the medical support that they need in a place where they're comfortable with the workers that they're familiar with. Hope Mission did have a small medical program that was funded. The funding provided through this model allows them to have nursing 24/7 as well as a physician on-site, which has been truly helpful to not only accept additional individuals from a hospital and who don't have urgent care needs and are diverted from the emergency room as well as to get them the support in community so that they aren't seeing their health needs escalate and finding themselves in the emergency room.

This program began this current fiscal and will continue into next fiscal. It relies on good partnerships with other communities as well as the community health centres that are funded through primary and preventive health services. An important part of this is also ensuring that individuals who don't have access to transportation from the emergency room or to hospital have that transportation to the operators that they're familiar with, whether it's their housing provider, a shelter of their choice, or to detox or other programs funded through other ministries. It's a robust sort of community collaborative model that's funded through the Hope Mission that's doing some really great work to help meet people's medical needs in community from the population.

Member Irwin: Is that just in Edmonton?

Mr. Nixon: You're welcome, Madam Chair, to ask some questions afterwards in the next block.

To finish up, I want to address the 24-hour, seven-days-a-week situation that keeps being pushed by the member and others. Our shelters are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Period.

Whether or not surge capacity is taking place or just the beds, nobody is turned away from the shelters in the day. Our shelters are 24 hours a day, seven days a week, something the Official Opposition when they were government did not do, unfortunately. This is something that Edmonton and Calgary asked us to do, and we have done it with our providers, and nobody is turned away.

Again, we need to stop saying that because people need to know the safe place that they can go and should not think for a moment that they would be turned away from it because they would not be. We do forecast the numbers as best we can with our providers. But again, we have the ability in the budget to surge if we need to. We do not need to yet to date. The shelters have kept care.

Circling back to where we started, homeless shelters actually are increasing in the budget. Spending on homeless shelters is going to go from about \$5.2 million to \$5.8 million overall. I'm talking about the line item. We are increasing that line item for our investment by increasing transitional family shelters by \$1.8 million and \$3 million going through our navigation centres and then holding our investment inside homeless shelters.

The numbers that changed in outlying years are three federal programs that we saw funding, that flows through us, that the feds have decided not to continue inside this space. That is the adjustment inside the outlying years. But to be very clear, we're going to remain investing the amount of money that we are inside this important space. Again, it's important to be clear what the investment is. It's important to be clear that it remains open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Then lastly, Madam Chair, the ongoing, from my perspective, attack on the hundreds of providers that we count on inside this space, to imply their buildings are dirty, that they don't care for people, that there's some sort of a challenge with that space – as somebody who used to work in this space, I find it offensive. We do have . . .

Ms Pancholi: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under 23(i) and (h) and (j), actually, the minister is suggesting that the member has made some allegations which were not made here today and is imputing false motives to this member right now by making allegations that she has somehow maligned the state of the providers of homeless shelters. That did not happen. It's likely to cause disorder in this room. The member asked her questions incredibly respectfully. I'd ask the minister to do the same.

The Chair: Member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. This is clearly not a point of order. This is a matter of debate in direct response to a line of questioning that the member opposite had brought forward. The minister was providing his critical information on this topic and, frankly, was providing some really helpful information to all Albertans. Again, clearly, this would be fully outside of the scope of a point of order. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Well, thank you, members. I do appreciate the dialogue back and forth. I do not find this a point of order at the moment. The minister, I find, is simply answering the question. Minister, if you'd please proceed. You have 50 seconds left.

Mr. Nixon: Our shelter providers are critical to the work that we do as a province. It is not easy work. They're working front-line work in very tough circumstances and continuing to see implications that

somehow the facilities that they provide are not adequate and are dirty or these type of comments. I think it's just totally inappropriate. But to be clear, there are standards. We do monitor for those standards, and we expect all of our shelter providers to meet those standards. We will continue to do that, and that will include even in moments where you are providing surge capacity because of cold weather and increased populations on those shelters. They provide, Madam Chair, certainly a lot better plan than the NDP's plan, which is to put everybody inside encampments. So I want to say through you to them that we're very, very proud of the work that our shelter providers do and we'll keep being their partner.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister. That's your time. Back over to the Official Opposition.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to respond to some of the minister's comments when he responded to mine. He talked about the special needs assistance program, saying there has been no changes. Well, since 2019 almost \$9 million has been taken out of that program in addition to this current budget, which is lowering the income threshold for seniors who can access the program. That means many individual seniors will not be in the program. Perhaps the aggregate number is bigger, but the population is growing, and that's why. That doesn't mean that this program isn't being cut for individual seniors, to help him understand that.

He did not respond to the optical and the dental program. I asked if the eligibility for seniors changed due to the 9 per cent income threshold reductions.

I'll just go back to my final question, when I ran out of time. Page 55 of the annual report talks about the performance metric 3(b) and refers to seniors' sense of belonging to local communities. In 2019 when we were government, the percentage of seniors reporting a strong sense of belonging to their local community was 76 per cent. The last statistics reported a significant decrease down to 70 per cent. It's clear that social isolation and ageism are worsening in Alberta. What actions is the minister taking to improve seniors' sense of belonging?

10:00

Also, in the most recent annual report the minister said the following. "Rising living costs continue to put financial pressure on many vulnerable Albertans, including our seniors. We invested in several programs to support seniors so they can age with dignity and remain independent." Despite these reassuring words, again, the UCP cut programs for seniors. The Alberta caregivers tax credit will no longer include caring for someone who's aging. This cut impacts 35,000 Albertans. The justification for this by the Finance minister and the Premier is that Alberta's programs are too generous and people are moving to Alberta to exploit them. I remember a time when Alberta was proud to be a leader in Canada serving seniors. Now we have a race to the bottom, and seniors are left out in the cold.

In addition, the Premier is espousing common myths. She provides no evidence of her claims that people are moving to Alberta just for the social programs. This rhetoric is disrespectful to seniors. Those receiving benefits should not be under attack by the government that is providing them. This is an old conservative tactic of spewing myths that have no basis in fact to justify cruel cuts to programs for vulnerable seniors. Why is the UCP continuing to put vulnerable seniors and their families at significant risk?

Okay. I'm going to go on to continuing care right now, and I'm looking at page 66 in the estimates and the annual report, page 62,

which talks about what the minister has referred to already, moving seniors out of an acute-care setting into the community. Unfortunately, the UCP seems to be doing this in a very poor manner.

As recently as February it was reported that 80 seniors were transferred from hospital to a continuing care facility in Calgary that would be closing in the spring. It's Glenmore AgeCare. Moving 80 seniors at one time is unheard of and is not taking into consideration the supports needed to make the transition smooth. Another move will need to be made again shortly as this facility is closing in April. Professional staff and families are deeply concerned about the haphazard way vulnerable seniors were treated. The doctor asked to help with this process shared her thoughts publicly.

From my point of view, it is a significant lack of foresight, and it's a political move . . . [They want] to look good opening up beds in the hospital, so they put pressure on another part of the system and pretend to fix the hospital problem. It's just shuffling the deck. It's not helping the root problems,

said Dr. Elumir-Tanner.

This recent move is reminiscent of motel medicine, when seniors in hospital were transferred to motels, fed fast food with few supports, and again the UCP is failing seniors and putting their health at risk. Why is the UCP not following appropriate transfer protocols from hospital to continuing care, and why are they moving 80 vulnerable seniors to a facility that is closing in a few weeks' time?

AUPE, the union that represents the workers, also spoke publicly about this.

"In an attempt to alleviate the crisis in our hospitals, there's a drive to push patients into continuing care, where lower levels of care are provided," says Sandra Azocar, president of AUPE . . . "However, every patient is different and these patients need to be at a facility where their specific needs can be met. That's not what our members are reporting."

She talks about the Glenmore AgeCare facility. Obviously, there are people in the community that are very concerned about this, as am I, as are the staff, families, and the residents themselves, so I'd like to have some comments from the minister regarding that.

I also want to bring up another issue which relates to sort of the very significant increase in founded complaints and concerns in continuing care facilities across Alberta and how, even though they're founded complaints and, you know, investigators report that, yes, indeed this is not okay, these things continue to be so. Some months ago – it was, like, early summer – management was contacted regarding a mice infestation in a continuing care facility. More recently this was reported in the media. It was here in Edmonton. Yet today there's still continuing to be a mice problem in that facility. Why is the government not addressing this issue? I mean, it's gone on for months and months and months. Does the minister feel that it is appropriate for seniors to live in rooms with mice droppings? Shouldn't seniors live in clean and dignified spaces?

Mr. Singh: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Singh: Madam Chair, the point of order is under Standing Order 23(b), the member speaks to matters other than the question under discussion. The committee has convened for the purpose of considering the ministry's '26-27 budget, including estimates, fiscal plan, and business plan, and the matter that has been raised by the member is not within the boundaries of the said topics. There hasn't been any reference to any line items for the last five minutes

here. We are here to discuss the minister's estimates, so I think the member should go with the estimates.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. The member clearly referenced page 62 of the annual report when talking about moving seniors into facilities. There was a clear reference immediately preceding this question, so unfortunately I believe that member is incorrect.

The Chair: All right. Well, I'll leave it to the minister. There have been so many questions, so we'll leave it to the minister to see how he's going to address that.

Let's proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. I'm going to continue to go on about concerns in the continuing care system. Recently the minister received a letter, and I received it also – it was February 1, 2026 – regarding issues in the continuing care system regarding communication between systems. This gal's mother said that critical medical information was sent because her mom's legs were swollen and they requested an assessment, and it was sent to some program called the SBAR system. It was in Wainwright. However, the doctor never saw it for over a week because he doesn't use SBAR. He uses the Connect Care system. So, fundamentally, seniors' health concerns aren't being communicated appropriately, and seniors are languishing in continuing care. I mean, what's going on in this particular facility – and I believe it's happening in others, too. The minister received a letter, so I'm sure he understands and will respond to why this is happening and how he's alleviating it.

I did say that the significant increase in founded complaints: there is nothing being done oftentimes to mitigate issues. We hear regularly from professionals. I hear regularly from professionals, residents, and family members. Why is the minister ignoring the problems in continuing care? You know, sometimes problems happen, but they need to be addressed and just not ignored.

Another thing in the continuing care funding model – this is in estimates page 66. It's certainly well accepted in the community that the funding model in continuing care is insufficient. More funding is needed, and I understand the ministry is undergoing a review of it. When will it be complete? It's been going on for some time now. Just wondering what is happening with that.

The Auditor General in 2022 described the staffing in Alberta's continuing care facilities as similar to a fast-food establishment. Workers are precarious, often part-time, with no benefits, disadvantaged workers. Facilities are chronically understaffed, and this has been made worse by the removal in legislation of minimum daily hours of care. Appropriate and sufficient staffing are fundamental to seniors receiving the care they deserve. What is the minister doing to ensure staff have full-time jobs with good salaries and benefits, appropriate training and support, and the appropriate resident-to-staff ratio?

I'd like the minister to tell me also: what's the turnover rate in these facilities? I've heard it's as high as 50 per cent annually because of all these, you know, disrespectful ways staff are being treated.

We know that on page 66 of estimates . . . [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired] I think that's my time.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

Back over to the final seven minutes for the minister.

Mr. Nixon: Okay. Well, a lot to unpack there. First off, I'll start with the dental and optical benefit question. We're here for the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services budget. That's not our budget. When you see our colleagues over in primary care, you should probably ask them some questions on that. Just to be clear, it's not in our budget. I will leave it at that.

10:10

I do want to address the mice issue. I mean, this is – you know, it's rich, Madam Chair, to hear a member who was a member of the NDP government who told Albertans who did not have a job to move to B.C. talk about wanting to make them feel welcome in their community.

Ms Pancholi: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), the minister just suggested that this member made those comments, which is factually incorrect, and it is designed to be abusive and insulting and to cause disorder in this committee chamber right now. I'd ask that the minister apologize and withdraw that statement.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Listening with note, the members opposite are taking quite a bit of latitude to get to some of their questions. I would expect we can see the same courtesy provided to our minister. I look forward to hearing his response to this question as he's done an excellent job of answering the questions that, again, maybe sometimes follow a little curvy path to get to. I look forward to hearing from the minister on this.

The Chair: Well, thank you so much, members. I do appreciate the dialogue back and forth. If we could just focus on the budget, our primary reason for being here.

Minister, you have only five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. Real quick on the mice issue that the hon. member brought up, again, that's managed by primary care through the public health agency who inspects, not the continuing care division. That facility itself, though, when complaints were received, has been inspected. The latest report back is that there is not a mouse issue taking place there and that it has been addressed. My understanding from our friends over in the other department is that they're watching it, and we'll make sure to also watch it on our end. That's their inspection process, and if you would like to ask questions specifically about that facility and how they're inspecting it for that specific issue, they're the best ones to ask.

I do want to spend most of the time I have left talking about the bizarre allegations about moving people that need continuing care space out of the hospital into buildings and that somehow being controversial. Madam Chair, we are actively working to get people out of the wrong spaces. This is a difference between us and the Official Opposition. The government is focused on making sure people are in the right spots. In the last block we talked about the different philosophies when it comes to caring for people who are experiencing homelessness. We believe that homeless shelters and housing supports make more sense than encampments. That's fine. We can have a difference of debate on it, but that's our view. We certainly believe that keeping our elders, seniors, our grandparents, our parents inside acute-care facilities, where we know that they are deteriorating by 10 to 15 per cent a day on things like muscle mass

because they're in the wrong spot, is what we want to do differently. We want to make sure those individuals are in continuing care.

Somehow that there would be an implication that the department, Assisted Living Alberta, moving people to continuing care, licensed continuing care facilities, is somehow controversial shows the difference. That's probably why, when we inherited this health care system, we found people that had been living in acute care for three, four, five, six years inside the wrong type of space, because that same dedication wasn't there, the same philosophy underneath the NDP government.

To be clear, Madam Chair, we are moving patients out of acute care that do not need to be in acute care into appropriate continuing care for two reasons. One is that it's better for those individuals to receive the care that they need in the community. Second, it's better for our emergency health care system to make sure those acute-care beds are available. We've reduced ALCs by almost 30 per cent since September. Those inside acute care that are working for continuing care, so on the waiting-list for continuing care in acute care, have been reduced by 65 per cent, and we're going to continue to do that unapologetically because it's absolutely critical to do it.

Now, anybody that has been moved has case managers that are part of the process. They are moved to a licensed facility, including the facility that was referred to by the member, and that facility is not shutting at the moment. It will certainly not be shutting while we have people in it. In fact, while the provider of that facility will be changing to a different facility, we will be having serious conversations on how we can use that important asset to continue to help with the ongoing continuing care challenge. That's the approach that is going to be taken.

If the NDP's approach, Madam Chair, is to keep these individuals inside acute care, they're wrong. That's probably why we saw underneath their watch things like affordable housing and senior housing wait-lists go up by 75 per cent and why we saw no net new seniors' lodges being built during their time in government. And we continue to see people waiting inside the health care system to get to appropriate community care, in the wrong spot, plugging up people who also need to get into acute care. You know, if that's what we want to bring up, we're happy about it, and I encourage Assisted Living Alberta to continue to move every person they can to the appropriate licensed continuing care facility to make sure that they are cared for and not to keep them inside acute care in deteriorating conditions, in the wrong spot, slowing up things like emergency care and surgery times.

This is an exciting thing that's taking place within the government of Alberta, to see that level of reduction. We're leading the country. We have the lowest ALCs in Canada by a long shot. We are well below the Canadian average because of the effort that's been taking place. And we are going to continue to invest in things like capital investments to continue to make sure that those spaces can increase, to make sure that individuals ultimately get to safety.

Just in closing, again, nobody has been moved to a facility where it's going to be closed while they're there. Their families have been involved. It's done through appropriate case management. It's licensed, and people are cared for, and the member is making assumptions if she thinks something is going to shut. No decisions have been made about that facility at the moment. But people need to be in the right space and cared for, not under the NDP's plan of keeping people in the wrong space, not being cared for in places like encampments, or continuing care patients being stuck in acute-care beds where they're deteriorating and not being cared for appropriately.

The Chair: All right. That's our time with the minister. We're going to move over to the government caucus. Is your preference block or shared time?

Mr. Nixon: I'm happy to share with you.

The Chair: Shared it is. Please proceed.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and his staff. In a \$12.2 billion budget it takes many hands, much expertise and knowledge to run this, and I appreciate everybody being here today to have this dialogue and to look a little bit deeper.

I am a little excited to look into a few different topics that we actually haven't addressed yet and that I think are super important for Albertans and for those that we love here in this province. I'm going to start, first, with employment supports for Albertans. On page 34 of the business plan outcome 2 outlines that ALSS is committed to ensuring that Albertans can access employment and fully participate in their community. Recognizing that employment is not only a source of income but also a key contributor to social inclusion, independence, and overall well-being, the ministry has made it a priority to provide enhanced employment supports, job matching with employers, and on-the-job assistance for Albertans experiencing underemployment and unemployment, including individuals with disabilities.

To support this work, page 34 of the business plan identifies \$246.8 million to be allocated to provide career and employment services for underemployed and unemployed Albertans, including Albertans with disabilities, as we said. This is more than a \$60 million increase from Budget 2025, and Budget 2025 was a significant increase from the year before that. So my first question to the minister, through you, Madam Chair, is: how does the ministry expect to achieve this outcome through Budget 2026? I'm going to add a couple more questions to that. Could the minister highlight if there is a specific type of support that is demonstrating success in attaching Albertans to this employment? And, lastly, can the minister provide an example of an Albertan who successfully received the support required to find and maintain employment, to let us know about their situation?

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you for the question, Madam Chair. The member is right. There's a significant amount of money in Budget 2026 going into this space to be able to help create employment, nearly a quarter billion dollars in Budget 2026, which is specifically \$247 million. That's an increase of \$60 million from last year. That's extraordinary in the fact that when you think about it, in Budget 2025 the \$185 million investment that was put in there was almost double that of Budget 2024, which shows the significance that, I think, we are putting on this important issue.

We've also launched WorkFirst Alberta, which is the most ambitious step that the province has ever taken to connect Albertans to jobs, and employers to job seekers, including those that are facing barriers. We're seeing some really cool results of that, particularly in partnership with our 170 employment service providers, that we're excited about.

As far as if we can highlight specific types of supports that demonstrate success, which is what the member was talking about, we are investing in things like simulated work sites. There are currently 16 simulated work sites that are operating across the province that really help to be able to make sure that people enter the process. As I said, we also launched WorkFirst Alberta in September 2025, making sure that Albertans have access to digital employment services via the online platform system.

10:20

I am going to actually go to the assistant deputy minister who has been leading it, who is at the table with us, Marika. If she would like to share with you her favourite success story that's coming from that investment in her division.

Ms Giesen: Sure. Thank you, Minister. Through the chair to the hon. member, thanks for the question. We are very excited about the unprecedented investment in employment services in Alberta and the incredible opportunities that provides to Albertans who haven't really had opportunities previously to explore employment pathways and access employment and the important inclusion that comes with employment.

In terms of a success story, the minister referenced simulated work sites. We have seen incredible success with our simulated work sites. I know the minister has had an opportunity to visit and tour a few of those work sites. We have more opening in the next few months here in Alberta. I want to share a story coming out of one of those work sites. We had a married father of two living in Edmonton for 10 years who had experience largely in delivery and taxi driving, with reduced job opportunities due to the pandemic. He took the initiative to upgrade his skills and earn a class 3 licence, but he still struggled to find work. Through the Bredin equipment operator program, which is one of the simulated work sites funded by our ministry, he was accepted and completed on-site training, which led to his certification as a water truck operator. This additional hands-on practice received through employment services allowed him to secure full-time employment, and he shared that he hopes the program continues helping others. That's just one example.

If I could, I'll share one more, and this relates to our new digital platform called Thrive. An Albertan shared recently that the Thrive platform is easy to use, provides tools to keep him organized, and provided resources to make job searching feel less overwhelming and less stressful. He said the resumé critique service was especially valuable, helping him improve his resumé and land a job as a customer service representative.

Those are two different examples of how we are investing some of these additional funds to support employment prospects for Albertans, some who have significant barriers to employment, including disabilities, and others who just need a little bit of help to nudge them forward to their next job. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Marika.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I've got a couple more questions just to follow up on that, and I think you've touched on one of them. First, how is your ministry ensuring employment services are aligned with current labour market demand, especially in our high-growth sectors? Then, and I think you touched on this a little bit: how is your ministry measuring success beyond job placement rates? And how is data being used to improve employment outcomes for the clients?

Mr. Nixon: Thank you for that. You know, aligning with current labour market demand, particularly high-growth sectors, is a priority. We also, I should say, have some level of partnership with jobs and economy as well in this space. But our website, for example, publishes the latest short-term employment forecast, prepared by jobs, economy, and trade, that comes down to us to make sure that we're focused in that area. With the upcoming launch, though, of ADAP, the department has been very focused on making sure that we have enough specialized disability

employment service providers to work in that space. I know the ministry has informed me that by July 2026, as the program launches, so just in a few months, there will be 64 specialized disability employment service delivery agreements in place and available across the province to be able to make sure that we're focused on that space, which is a high priority for us in the department inside our employment space at the moment.

We measure success beyond job placement rates. Job placement rates are important, though. At the end of the day, if we're instructing the department to help create jobs and get people connected to employment, the best line of success, or the best way to measure success, is the success that they're having in that area. But we also look at things like a boost to average monthly income of people that come through our programs, time spent on income supports. If it's going down on average, then that shows that that investment is working.

Since we've been doing this work, we have 1.9 months less on income support, which therefore is saving the ministry and taxpayers about \$2,500 in financial assistance per client, so it's significant. But mostly it's about making – well, I should say that we've also measured satisfaction with the services that they received, whether or not they are being helped by them. At the end of the day, the main goal is making sure that everybody has the best chance of getting employment as a result of participating in that process.

Mrs. Johnson: Madam Chair, thank you, through you to the minister, for those answers and to your team. I'm going to move on to a topic that's kind of close to my heart. I have the centennial centre in Ponoka in my constituency. They have the brain injury centre there, and I would like to talk about the Alberta brain injury initiative. I would suspect there's a little bit of overlap, and I would really like to hear a little bit more about this initiative that's happening. On page 65 of the government estimates, it shows an investment of more than \$1.77 billion, an increase, again, over last year for the disability services division. This division funds programs like FSCD and PDD, and in previous years it has also included funding for the Alberta brain injury initiative.

Acquired brain injuries change lives in an instant and can impact an individual's memory, emotions, communication, and movement. The road to recovery is often long, unpredictable, and challenging, not only for individuals with brain injuries but for their families and communities who support them every step of the way. Madam Chair, through you to the minister: can he please confirm for this committee that Budget 2026 continues to support the Alberta brain injury initiative? What amount of funding is dedicated to that initiative? And then could he also share some metrics or results from that initiative that demonstrate to this committee the importance of continued support for this initiative and tell us a little bit more about that program?

Mr. Nixon: Thank you for that question, Madam Chair. I agree with the hon. member. She knows I have a son with a brain injury. It's a tough recovery, and it's not something that fits neatly into all of our other programs that are often in this space. For example, PDD does not overlap well with that, so that's why we partner with the Alberta brain injury initiative. Yes, the funding is maintained for it in this budget, and it will continue to be going forward.

[Ms L. Sigurdson in the chair]

The results that the agency has are important. It has actually grown across Alberta with 12 agencies now delivering supports for adults with acquired brain injuries and their families, extending

their services to approximately a hundred communities across the province made up of both urban and rural parts of the province.

The initiative supports approximately 1,600 individuals living with a brain injury in Alberta each year. Between April to December 2025 the agencies received over 200 referrals and were able to provide service co-ordination and outreach supports to nearly 900 clients and community living supports to over 400 clients. Consistent service levels show that the program continues to effectively address the needs of Albertans with acquired brain injuries and support their caregivers.

Lastly, Alberta's government recognizes the impacts that brain injuries have on people and their families and loved ones. As part of Brain Injury Awareness Month, every June, our ministry rolls out a campaign to highlight the importance of prevention and available resources and supports to Albertans that do acquire a brain injury.

Mrs. Johnson: Madam Chair, thank you, through you to the minister. You look different than the last time. Thank you to the minister for the personal story and for how that has affected him personally and for being vulnerable in that moment. We all have those vulnerable moments, and I appreciate that.

I'm going to get even a little bit more specific in the brain injury area, and it has to do with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It's a lifelong, again, brain-based disability that affects thousands of Albertans and their families. Individuals living with FASD may experience challenges related to learning, communication, emotional regulation, mental health, and adaptive functioning. These challenges often evolve across the lifespan, requiring co-ordinated, stable, and responsive supports that extend beyond early childhood and into adolescence and adulthood.

In looking through the main estimates, I can see funding has been maintained for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives at over \$27.6 million, per line 4.6 on page 65. I'd like to understand a little more about the supports for individuals and families impacted by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD. How is the government supporting individuals and their families who are impacted by FASD in Alberta, and how will the government ensure that FASD supports and services continue to reach those who need them?

10:30

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you again for that question. In Alberta the FASD network model was actually created in 2007, so it's been around for a long time. We currently fund 12 FASD service networks along with three additional supporting initiatives to make sure that Albertans with FASD and their caregivers can access those services. From April to December 2025 nearly 3,000 individuals and 600 caregivers received FASD-related supports across Alberta. These services focus on assessments, diagnosis, awareness, support, and prevention, where each community ultimately tailors those programs to meet local needs.

According to Canada FASD, the national research body on FASD, the estimated lifetime cost of FASD is about \$1.1 million per person. Four per cent of Canadians have FASD, which is about 200,000 Albertans. This really underscores why prevention is also important as part of our programs.

In Edmonton examples of programs would be the Edmonton fetal alcohol network partnership with the Bissell Centre and Homeward Trust to operate Hope Terrace. This supportive housing building is home to 34 adults with FASD. It's the first program of its kind in Canada and is designed as a long-term housing solution specifically for FASD. Another example would be in Cold Lake, a partnership with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction. We fund the Lakeland FASD network to operate the 2nd Floor Women's

Recovery Centre. This is a residential addiction program that supports about 28 women each year who are pregnant or at risk of becoming pregnant. In Calgary the Calgary FASD network runs the Connect FASD hub, a single point of contact that helps individuals access information, resources, and co-ordinate integrated services. Since its launching the hub has connected with 494 people, and interest continues to grow.

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

We are going to continue to look ahead on this file and continue to invest in it. Budget 2026 provides \$27.6 million in funding to FASD programs, and we're going to continue to fund it but also continue to move forward with our partners, looking ahead at new, innovative ways like I've described to be able to work inside the space.

Mrs. Johnson: All right. Madam Chair, thank you again, through you to the minister, for that answer. I think we've got time for one last question here. It is a question that has been a great topic, a popular one in my constituency in Lacombe-Ponoka, so I'm looking forward to discussing this with the minister here. It has to do with, as you can all guess, ADAP and AISH, the Alberta disability assistance program.

On outcome two on page 34 of the business plan, ALSS states that the new Alberta disability assistance program will provide "financial, medical, and personal supports, as well as pathways to employment for Albertans with disabilities who are able to work." The program is designed to modernize supports and better align services with individual needs, helping clients achieve greater independence while connecting them to opportunities in the workforce.

My first question for the minister is: how much funding is available for ADAP clients in Budget 2026 for employment services? Following that, would the minister be able to highlight the enhanced employment supports offered under ADAP? Finally, Madam Chair, are there measures in place to ensure that the transitioned clients will not experience a decrease in their benefits?

Mr. Nixon: Yes. So Budget 2026 includes investments, as we discussed just a few blocks ago, for employment supports. The employment support line will increase to \$246.8 million in this budget, assuming it passes the Legislature. That's an increase of \$60 million from last year. Last year was \$185 million, and that was actually double the year before, so the department does continue to heavily increase investments in employment supports, including for people from the disabled community. In anticipation primarily of wanting to support the launch of the ADAP program, the ministry is also working with 64 specialized disability employment service delivery agreements and organizations to make sure that we're ready to be able to provide that service beyond just the traditional employment supports that we have provided in the past.

Ultimately, services will be designed to be flexible. They're going to be very person centred and focused on long-term success. We're launching a suite of services that will support job seekers. ADAP clients will have access to a range of employment services to help them gain new skills and be empowered to work to their full potential, including career planning, short-term training, workshops, simulated work sites, supported job placements, job retention and sustainment, and service navigation. Navigation to wraparound supports and coordinative services ultimately will support clients to achieve greater independence, which is the goal, and make meaningful progress towards securing employment.

On July 1, 2026, all AISH clients that are transitioning to ADAP will receive a monthly transition benefit that will keep their

financial benefit amount at the same rate as AISH until December 31, 2027. During this time clients can choose to remain on ADAP or be requested to be reassessed to AISH. Clients with the most severe disabilities will be automatically approved to AISH on July 1 and will not be required to submit a new medical report. This will include AISH clients who meet the below criteria, which is severe and profound development disabilities, palliative or terminal medical conditions, living in continuing care over the age of 60, or deemed eligible to receive persons with developmental disability services.

Current AISH clients who meet the criteria for automatic approval for AISH do not need to take any action. They will be identified by AISH, notified by July 1, 2026. They can choose to move to ADAP to access employment supports and take advantage of ADAP's higher employment if they would like to, but they will automatically remain in AISH.

Just to recap that, Madam Chair, for the member, yes, there will be transition benefits that are kept in place for people that are moving from AISH to ADAP for an extended period of time to be able to make sure that that employment process that the government is investing in can do its job and get everybody into the best spot possible for their unique circumstances. And I will reiterate again: AISH will remain legislated to be the highest benefit in the country, and we're excited about that.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

That concludes the government members' first block of questions. Now we move to the second round of questions and responses. The caucus rotation going forward will be the same as the first round, starting with the Official Opposition, followed by members of any other party should they choose to join us, and then members of the government caucus; however, the speaking times are now reduced to five minutes for the duration of the meeting.

We will begin this rotation with members of the Official Opposition, who will have up to five minutes for questions and comments followed by a response from the minister who may speak for up to five minutes. After both individuals have had an opportunity to speak once, we will then move on to the next caucus in rotation. If the member and the minister agree to share time, we'll proceed with the 10 minute segment, during which neither a member or minister may speak for more than five minutes. Members are reminded that they may not share any unused portion of their five minutes with another member.

Are we going to have block or shared time?

Mr. Nixon: Block is fine with me, thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Block it is.
Please proceed.

Member Irwin: Thank you very much. As the minister refuses to share time, I just need to quickly counter some of his claims made previously. I've never once disparaged those on the front lines, and in fact, I have so much respect for shelter staff and for housing workers doing incredible work in very challenging times. I'm so proud to represent an area where there are countless organizations doing great work on the ground supporting our vulnerable community members, and I'd be happy to have that minister walk my communities with me as I've offered many times. It's clear the only one denigrating workers in this room is that minister.

Mr. Getson: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called. Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Getson: Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j). The member causes false motives, potentially causing disorder; brings into question the minister's intentions, who is a very honourable man. I would request that the chair caution everyone in the room to keep it professional, to the point, so we can minimize the amount of potential slanderous comments that are being played over the way of trying to get to the budget in the best interests of Albertans.

Ms Pancholi: Madam Chair, I think this arises from a lack of clarity from your rulings as to whether or not the minister's comments have previously been out of order. The ministers has made similar comments, and the chair did not find it out of order. I think some clarity from the chair as to whether or not these comments are appropriate would be appreciated. I believe the member is only responding to comments that the minister had made in his block of time, so I'd appreciate your clear guidance on this.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. Member. I do appreciate this opportunity to address it. We are here for budget estimates discussion, and I think we should get back to it, so let's proceed.

Member Irwin: Okay, so no clarity there. I've been asking very clear, respectful questions of this minister, so I would just ask that he respond in the same manner.

10:40

Anyways, I would love to continue talking about homelessness here, and I just wanted to mention as well that, you know, one of the things we don't hear about at all from this minister and this ministry is around youth homelessness. In Edmonton alone there are close to a thousand youth staying in precarious housing shelters or sleeping rough every night, and we get that data from Homeward Trust, yet youth shelter data is not included in the current reporting system. So I would just like to ask: why not? Is that data held somewhere, and if so, would this minister be willing to talk about it a little bit?

How is this minister addressing youth homelessness? We know from folks in the sector who I speak with regularly that youth homelessness is a growing, serious concern and a very urgent issue that we should all be compelled to address.

Okay. I want to move on and talk a little bit about, you know, the restructuring of homelessness supports, housing supports, and the defunding of the CBOs which are community-based organizations. Page 31 of the ministry's business plan indicates that "Provincial funding for housing and support programs is allocated directly to service providers to increase accountability and create better alignment of services across the homeless-serving sector." Through the chair I would like to ask: is this statement related to the defunding of community-based organizations? Just maybe unpack a little bit: what does it mean to create better alignment of services across the homeless-serving sector?

It is my understanding that as of April 1, 2026, the ministry is fully taking over distribution of funds for these aforementioned housing supports. From the many conversations that I've had with front-line service providers, there is a lot of confusion and a lot of concern and, in fact, even despair, I would say, about the changes that are happening and about the lack of clarity and direction from this government.

You know, I remember quite clearly these conversations we had last year in estimates. I also remember, unfortunately, that I didn't get a lot of clarity from this minister. He's had over a year to really work through some of the plans, so I'm going to ask a few questions that I asked similarly last year.

What is the rationale for centralizing that funding power within the ministry located in Edmonton? It seems a little bit odd for a

government that seems to talk about, you know, small government that they continue to grow and expand their government. How will such a centralized and top-down, prescriptive approach really work for those local communities, many of which have had a great deal of success on the ground using their local expertise to address housing and homelessness?

When I look at the annual report, on page 22 it indicates that 94 per cent of clients who received housing supports remained stably housed or exited to another type of housing. This occurred through the CBOs, the community-based organizations. Again, why would the government feel the need to change this? What information, what evidence, what data did this minister and government use to inform these changes?

Currently we know that CBOs manage their co-ordinated access programs, the CBOs in Edmonton and Calgary, that is, which are key features of the evidence-based, housing-first approach to addressing homelessness. Through the chair, if or, I guess I should say, when the CBOs fully lose their funding, will the government of Alberta be taking over that co-ordinated access approach? If so, where will that essential data be stored, and will it be available to the homeless-serving agencies, the ones I've mentioned before that I'm so honoured to work with?

I guess I must ask directly: does this government still support a housing-first approach? We know, folks in this room know, that many of the CBOs functioned under a housing-first model. Will this be the strategy when these centralized changes are made? If not, why? I guess I would love just some clarity from this minister and from this government about: what is the new model then? Right? If they're rejecting housing-first, what is the new model? We know that we see terms like housing-focused, recovery-oriented. We see that in the strategic plan and as well as on page 33 of the business plan. Are they saying that that's going to be similar, that it's going to run parallel to housing first? If not, well, again, what is this new model and what research are they using to support their new approach? I have to ask, is the ministry equipped for these significant changes? Bringing everything in-house means that this government needs to be staffing up significantly. You know, are the FTEs increasing?

I know I'm running out of time, so I will stop there.

Mr. Nixon: Well, again, CBO funding has not been cut. When you spend your time making up cuts, we can't get to actually answer the question for you; \$98,018,000 is the funding amount that will remain in place for CBOs, which is flat. What the hon. member, I think, is getting confused about is that in your one-time spending things to support, for example an investment in Elizabeth Fry Society for a particular project, an investment in some alternative level of care funding that we did in partnership with health care to help with homeless individuals inside the emergency that are one-time investments, which end up in the same line item but they are an in-year spending choice that was made to deal with certain circumstances that took place in the year. The CBO funding remains flat. They are not being cut.

We are going to continue a direct funding model with CBOs to make sure that they continue to be our data steward and to do that important role for the government. We're getting ready to, in this budget, spend almost \$100 million with the CBOs as we always have through partnership programs across the entire province to be able to help step in and provide housing for some of the hardest individuals to be able to provide housing for inside the province. Again, not cut. It continues to be a priority for the government.

What has changed is that the administrative process for handing out grants has been streamlined. Rather than using seven CBOs to hand out grants, essentially, we send a cheque to the CBO, who then

turns around and sends a cheque to the provider, we've streamlined that process. The department went through an extensive process with our seven CBOs over the last year to be able to get this lined up for this year. We don't anticipate any challenges on the staffing side. I'm happy to report that the division was able to staff up to be able to accommodate the work that they will do going forward.

We continue to hear a lot of misinformation, again, on homeless shelter investments. I've already said it in other blocks but happy to do it. It's not being cut. In fact, it's being increased inside that space. We have increased the level of shelter space in our largest cities and are expanding it to some of the other target areas that we have in the province. We've expanded it to 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week service, and that has been taking place for an extended period of time.

Now, we also strongly believe in investing in housing, which is why you see inside this budget the highest amounts being invested in housing in the history of the province, both from a continuing care side as well as continuing with our stronger foundations plan. Again, implied that there's cuts. Madam Chair, not cuts; increases. Hundreds and hundreds – billions of dollars being spent by the Alberta taxpayer in this spot.

The question about youth homelessness: not this division. That's actually done by children's services. They would be the right ones to ask about that data when Minister Turton comes for estimates. I don't know when that is. That's the division it is in. We do provide some help on some capital investments inside buildings, but at the end of the day they cared for the children in our province. The only aspect of children's services that still remains in the social services ministry is children with disabilities. The rest of it is managed by the children's services division going forward.

Then lastly, on recovery housing. Yes, there's a big difference between us and the NDP. We see it in other provinces like B.C., pushing drugs inside hospitals and that type of process. We think something opposite. We have dedicated our process to recovery. Now, at the end of the day that is done through Mental Health and Addiction. They are the best ones to ask specific questions, but we do provide them support with things like recovery housing, postrecovery housing, connecting our homeless shelters to their recovery supports. Mental Health and Addiction works inside all of our navigation centres, and our focus is on making sure that people facing addiction get access to recovery.

That's not a new thing in this province. It's something the province has been dedicated to for a very, very long time. If there's a difference in philosophy on that, I'm interested to hear a little bit more about it. But to be very, very clear Madam Chair, if you want to know Alberta's position when it comes to the topics the hon. member was asking about, we believe in recovery. We believe that addicts deserve to have an opportunity to recover, and we continue to invest unprecedented amounts for years to be able to make sure that we have the best recovery programs anywhere in the country. We're seeing success as a result of it, and I'm very, very sure Minister Wilson would like to talk to you about that in more detail.

10:50

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister. Let's take our break now. Five minutes, everyone.

[The committee adjourned from 10:50 a.m. to 10:56 a.m.]

The Chair: All right, everyone. I hope you've all enjoyed your break. We will resume and I believe we're at the government members' side. Please proceed.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to confirm with the minister how our time is going to be used here.

Mr. Nixon: Back and forth is fine.

The Chair: Okay. Let's proceed.

Mr. Lundy: Okay. Thank you for that, Madam Chair, and first off, of course, thank you to the minister and his staff for joining us and sharing this important information. I know I have some constituents who are very interested in this information and they might be watching along at home, along with my parents. Perhaps just my parents will see that.

Madam Chair, I do have some questions, of course, and I wanted to thank my colleague the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for talking a little bit about ADAP and AISH. I think it's fair to say that that's an extremely important topic lately, including in my constituency office. I've had the opportunity to chat with several constituents who might be impacted by this program. Right off the hop, I need to thank the minister's office. We will send that information in with questions from constituents, and we have received very timely information, so I just wanted to share my appreciation to the minister and his office because once we provide that information to constituents, they understand that this takes a lot of pressure off of these changes and we're really appreciative of that.

If I may, Madam Chair, through you as always, I'd like to maybe dig in on a specific topic related to this that refers to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, or AISH, application processing times. I'm going to be referencing a performance metric under outcome one, and this is on page 34 in our business plan, and specifically performance measure 1(b). This measures the median time when an AISH application is ready for medical adjudication and an eligibility decision is made in terms of weeks. The target for '26-27 is set at nine weeks, and as I previously mentioned, this is a very critical piece to this program. We know that any delays can directly affect vulnerable Albertans' access to the financial, medical, and personal supports.

I just maybe wanted to ask the minister if he might be able to help and start by explaining to this committee the process of applying for AISH and clarify what contributes to this processing time that we see in the business plan.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks for that question, Madam Chair, and thanks, hon. member, for pointing out the great work the department does to be able to respond to those issues. Marika, who's at the table with us and oversees that division is dealing with billions – literally billions and billions – of cheques that have to go out, and you're dealing with, I think it's almost a million Albertans who are receiving some sort of a cheque from that department. The fact that they keep up with that is a real testimony to the hard work inside that division.

I do want to point out the performance measurement that you point out, hon. member. It doesn't measure the end-to-end process. Instead it measures the time between when an AISH application is ready to be sent for medical adjudication and when a medical eligibility decision is made. That's the measurement that is referred to in that part. An AISH application consists actually of two standardized forms: first the AISH applications information form and then the AISH medical report, as well as supporting documentation, of course, stuff like photo ID and bank statements. An applicant's information form is completed by the applicant and collects information about the applicant's age, their residency, employment, training history, and their income and asset information. The AISH medical report is completed by the applicant's physician or specialist and provides information about the severity and the permanency of the applicant's medical condition.

When an AISH application is submitted, an initial review is conducted to ensure all necessary information is provided and supporting documentation is included. Staff then contact the applicant or the physician to request any missing information. Once the completed application is received, the general eligibility criteria has been met – age and Alberta residency – the AISH application is then sent for medical adjudication. The applicant is notified that their application has been sent for adjudication at that time. The AISH adjudicator reviews the application to determine if the medical eligibility criteria for AISH is met.

In some cases the applicant and/or their physician may be contacted for additional information or a referral is made for the applicant to participate in a specialized assessment. These requests ultimately do prolong that application process. If medically approved, the AISH application is further assessed to determine if the applicant meets the financial eligibility criteria, and then benefits commence. When determining financial eligibility, the applicant may be contacted by the staff to provide additional financial documentation during that process.

Mr. Lundy: Through the chair, thank you, Minister. I appreciate you being able to impact that a little bit for not only this committee but, of course, for those who might be potentially part of this process. As a quick follow-up on that, you know, as a very client-focused ministry who is fortunate to have great support staff assisting Albertans, could you maybe comment quickly on how the ministry is incorporating client feedback to improve the service delivery and ensure applicants receive timely and co-ordinated supports once approved?

Mr. Nixon: I can, but you know what? I'll let the ADM, because she's up here, talk to you about how she's incorporating client feedback.

Ms Giesen: Thank you, Minister, and through the chair to the hon. member, thanks for the question. We regularly review our programs, including AISH, as well as our application processes to make sure that we are moving files through as quickly as possible and being responsive to applicants and clients as they have questions or raise concerns. We do have a digital identity verification team in place. This is a digital team that's responsible for the AISH online application and process. We are always looking to enhance and modernize that process so that it's as user friendly as possible. To inform that, that team regularly consults with applicants to understand their journey through the application, gather feedback on where it can be improved, and we have on a regular basis incorporated changes to that online application process as well as our paper-based form based on that feedback.

There's also a feedback link within the AISH online application where we ask applicants to enter their comments about their experience and feedback about the process. That goes directly, again, to the team that manages the online application to incorporate changes. We know that it's a large application. There are many questions. We take a very rigorous and comprehensive approach to assessing both the personal information provided by the applicant and their medical professionals. That means that it can be a challenge for some of our applicants to complete the process, so making sure that we're getting it right, incorporating feedback, and simplifying and clarifying the process is very important. Of course, we have other mechanisms, including correspondence from Albertans, that we regularly review to inform improvements to the program.

Thank you.

Mr. Lundy: All right. Well, through the chair, thank you very much, ADM, for speaking to that.

I would like to shift gears here and talk a little bit about the attainable market housing. This is an acute issue, of course, in Leduc-Beaumont. I have two municipalities who are growing very quickly, so this is certainly a topic that is relevant. I'll be referencing page 33 of the business plan. This is in relation to key objective 1.1, that talks to collaboration "with other ministry, federal, and municipal partners to remove barriers and incentivize the construction of new homes and rental units."

11:05

I will note that, again, I talked about the growing population. In 2025 we saw a record level of housing starts, including a significant rise in apartment construction. Through the chair, I did want to give the minister an opportunity to maybe provide some comments on, you know, how the ministry is helping to increase the supply of this attainable market housing for Albertans.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Madam Chair, I'm sure that the housing situation in Alberta is the envy of the entire country, and I hope the member comes back in the next block on it because there's actually a lot to talk about. I know you also used to work in this space, in fact, for this department.

We had a record-breaking year in 2025: 53,200 housing starts, by far the most in the country, a 14 per cent increase compared to 2024, which was also a record-breaking year. That broke, at that time, a record set back in 1978, including the fact that in 2025 we saw 26,600 apartments and purpose-built rentals built, which is absolutely critical to stabilizing the rent situation. That's a long time ago, for that record. I don't think the hon. member and I were alive yet. The deputy minister was, but it was a long time ago. I don't believe you're probably going to see records at that level for a while now as the housing situation stabilizes. I'd love to talk a little bit more about what's going on with housing in the province, but the good news is that we are seeing increases, record-breaking increases, and as a result of that reductions in rent, which is the main goal.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Members, we will go to the Official Opposition. Blocked or shared?

Member Irwin: I mean, I'd love to do shared.

Mr. Nixon: Blocked.

The Chair: Blocked it is.

Member Irwin: That's unfortunate.

I didn't get a lot of clarity from the minister around my questions related to community-based organizations. I do have a few more questions on this area of the budget. In December 2024 the ministry announced an expert panel to help shape Alberta's long-term approach to combating homelessness. I know one of the MLAs, Justin Wright, and Robin James from Lethbridge were involved in that. The panel was announced over 14 months ago, but I just have not seen a great deal of progress, and it doesn't seem to appear in any of the budget documents. Again, I could be wrong. I'd be happy to be respectfully corrected. Through the chair, can the minister provide an update on the status of that panel, and has a report been completed? If so, is it publicly available? I'd love to go through it. Are any of the initiatives referenced in the latest budget documents related to the findings of that panel?

Moving on, I want to talk a little bit about the use of hotels for emergency accommodations for families and for those unable to stay at shelters. Page 31 of the most recent annual report indicates that the Income Support Contact Centre issued over 58,000 emergency income support and AISH benefits, which I know my colleague from St. Albert is going to talk more about later.

We do know that some of those emergency benefits include hotel stays, and this is something that MLA offices deal with a lot. I know in my office we hear from a lot of folks who are needing advocacy to have their hotel stay extended, especially families with children. Again, it is heartbreaking how often my office – my constituency being the second-lowest income actually across the province, we deal with a lot of families that are struggling.

I just want to dig into that a little bit more. Can the minister advise of where in the budget there is a breakdown of those emergency accommodation costs? More specifically, how much did the ministry spend on hotel rooms this past year for emergency accommodations, and are they budgeting more for next year?

Of course, as I noted earlier with my caveat around shelters, similarly, I mean, I wish I weren't advocating for more money to be spent on emergency accommodations. I'm advocating for the long-term housing solutions, right? Again, as a stopgap until this government makes those investments required, we really need to see support for those folks. Especially, it's reprehensible that in a province as wealthy as ours there are children that are having to live in hotels in less than ideal conditions.

I want to talk a little bit about navigation centres. Page 31 of the ministry's business plan indicates that navigation centres in Edmonton and Calgary have connected more than 17,000 Albertans with housing, health, and social supports. I personally toured the navigation centre right here in my riding in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I really want to thank, again, the front-line staff. As soon as we walked in, we were greeted with their smiles, and they're working tirelessly to serve vulnerable Albertans. I want to thank the minister, actually. We had a chat in the Chamber the one day. I just said: hey, can I visit the navigation centre? He helped make that happen.

I note that in the most recent annual report, navigation centres are referred to as life changing on page 4. I just want to ask about the evidence and the data coming out of those programs offered in the navigation centres. We hear from so many front-line staff all the time that there's a bottleneck related to housing, so even when vulnerable Albertans are at the navigation centre reaching out for help, they're often just referred to a wait-list. Right? We know that referrals to programs only go so far if it's just being put on a wait-list.

I'll ask again. I think I've asked this the last couple of years in estimates: could we just get a little bit of clarity around how many folks have been housed through the navigation centre, and again, just to be fully clear, housed, not referred to a wait-list? If the ministry doesn't have that specific information, is there a plan to just kind of analyze the success that they're having through the navigation centre when it comes to directly housing folks who we know need that housing the most?

Yeah. Again, is homelessness being reduced? Is that core housing need, which we know in Edmonton in particular continues to grow, being reduced? One of the challenges is that in the business plan and in the budget documents we don't see a lot of metrics. They've got performance indicators for a few areas, around some of the other areas in this ministry, but not specifically around a lot of the housing pieces. So if there are no performance indicators, how can we know that any of these metrics are being met? Again, it's my

urging, as I've done many years with this government, to make sure that they're actually accounting for items.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Again, I think sometimes the confusion with the navigation centre is what its role is. The navigation centre is not the housing division of the ministry. The navigation centre's job is to connect individuals with different aspects of our ministry but also other ministries and other services that are provided. They're a connection point, not part of the housing system. Their job is to connect individuals into something like housing supports, and that work is then tracked through, obviously, the housing division through things like wait-lists and other aspects of people who interact with the system. We're happy to talk about what's taking place with housing at any time.

The navigation centres do collect data of who they're interacting with. In 2024 and 2025 ninety-five per cent of the clients who received housing and supports through the navigation centre process remain stably housed and in programs or other types of stable housing. These figures are collected by program staff every three months or upon exit from the program. So far in '25-26 the funding has been in place for years, with 5,000 Albertans in housing support programs. This includes over 2,000 Albertans who were newly admitted to housing support programs between April 1 and December 31, 2025. Data is collected from service providers, cleaned and verified by the data steward, which is the CBO, quarterly, and this data is then presented to ALSS.

Housing data is also collected in terms of outcomes reported in caseloads. Annual housing outcomes are not ready yet, obviously, for the fiscal year, which is not complete, but for 2024 and 2025 ninety-five per cent of the clients who received housing and supports, again I want to emphasize, remain stably housed. Our housing wait-lists have gone down since the NDP's time, where you saw increases at 74 per cent.

We continue to invest pretty heavily in capital inside this space with our providers going forward. But again I want to stress that the navigation centre's main role is to connect to service providers, and not always the government. In fact, the service providers that we depend on and work with the most, often funded by us, are outside government agencies that are doing that critical work.

On hotels: in '24-25 employment financial services spent just over \$7.2 million for hotel stays in Edmonton. We also at the same time have been working through multiple different strategies to help make sure that we could connect families that find themselves in those circumstances to other long-term supports. For example, in January 2025 the department implemented a collaboration with Hope Mission in Edmonton for a housing and transition team to provide case management to families in hotels to help them transition to market housing, which has seen success. We've also increased funding to the Edmonton family shelter to specifically focus on families who find themselves in those circumstances. By far the biggest thing the department does to help inside this space is income support division, which provides individuals with financial support who find themselves in tough circumstances like that. That is by far the biggest thing that the division does and will continue to do.

11:15

Then lastly, the Alberta Homelessness Advisory Panel. They were to complete their work in December 2025. They have. That report has been received by the department who is reviewing

recommendations and will have a conversation with me shortly on what the next steps will be associated with it. I will thank MLA Justin Wright for his great work co-chairing it and, of course, Robin James, who's the chief administration officer at Lethbridge Housing Authority, an excellent partner for the department and also the head of the CBO in Lethbridge, making sure that we've got this right for our seven largest communities.

By far the biggest area that we continue to focus on as a result of the advice that we've received from sectors is continuing to move forward with specialized shelters. So not just our existing shelter system, which is important and has been here for a long time, but expanding into Indigenous-led shelters, which we've seen great success with our partners in the Enoch here in Edmonton, and women-only shelters, not to be confused with domestic violence shelters, which are also critical, but specifically for females who are experiencing homelessness to be able to have access to a women-only shelter. We've seen great results as a result of that.

The fact that, you know, there's been over 111,000 services provided from the navigation centres in both Calgary and Edmonton to date shows that people in tough circumstances are being able to access it to get to those services, which is great news.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister. That's our time.

Over to the government side. Blocked or shared?

Mr. Lundy: Shared?

Mr. Nixon: Oh, for sure.

The Chair: Okay. Let's proceed. [interjection]

Mr. Lundy: I thank the opposition for their continued reaction. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, through the Chair of course, if I may I think we could maybe pick back up on this attainable market housing discussion that we were having. I'll restate that this is on page 33 of the business plan and in relation to key objective 1.1, in collaboration with other levels of government to remove barriers. You were talking about some of the things that we're doing to increase some of these record-setting numbers that we're seeing.

I do want to give you a chance to pick back up on that, but I might also ask about the stop housing delays portal. This is supporting this growth by collecting data to identify and address delays in the development process, helping to support faster, more efficient housing delivery, and meet the growing needs of growing communities, again, like we see in both Leduc and Beaumont. Through the Chair, if the minister could maybe talk about how this portal is contributing to this increase in our housing starts, and then if the minister could also describe what further actions the ministry is taking to support faster home building under the government's housing strategy.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. The government in Alberta focuses on making sure that we increase supply, which was identified by both the federal and provincial government as the best way to address the housing crisis that we've seen over the last couple of years, which was different than multiple other housing crises that we've seen in the past, both in the province and the country. Alberta's situation was also compounded by the fact that we remain the only real affordable jurisdiction left in the country, and so even as things like interest rates went up, you did not see the market react the same way because people could be frankly fleeing places like Ontario and selling their houses for a significant amount of money, coming here and buying a house, and leaving a significant amount of money in their bank account because we're still affordable. So the market was

not always reacting as you would traditionally see it to some of those pressures.

We went all in on supply and have had extraordinary success at that. As I said, two record-breaking years in a row. The last record was 1978. We continue to see increases in overall housing, but most importantly in purpose-built rentals. Our apartment stock has increased across the province, which is absolutely critical to addressing rent. We're seeing rents now go down in Alberta. We have some of the most affordable jurisdictions, including the top four most affordable jurisdictions in the country, and Calgary and Edmonton remain amongst the most affordable large cities in the world as a result of some of that investment.

The stop housing delays portal was an example of some of the work that we did. We worked with industry to try to figure out where there were barriers in place that were slowing down their construction time to be able to accomplish those objectives. We made a process where they could report in what they were running into with either permit delays or other aspects of their projects. We could then take it from my ministry, share it with other ministries that may be in charge of the area where the delay was, or with our municipal partners. I believe we've had about 88 major submissions through that process that have resulted in pretty big policy changes, including legislation, that have come forward from other departments to be able to create that environment.

We've also really focused on making provincial land available for housing, also partnering with municipalities to do the same. Edmonton in particular worked with us very closely to make former school sites available to be able to build housing. That has been very successful. We exempted affordable housing projects for property taxes. We've also been working on alternative financing options to support home ownership to be able to make sure people can enter the market, and we continue to work very closely with the federal government to make sure that Alberta receives its fair share of all housing money going forward, and making sure that whatever money is flowed from the federal government goes to actual provincial priorities.

I will say that the Alberta affordable partnership program in partnership with the federal government has been enormously successful, creating a significant amount of units across the province. We're going to continue to work as a department across government to look for ways to reduce red tape. Municipal Affairs is laser focused on this in the building area. We want to continue to incentivize construction. I do not believe you're going to see record years forever. The market is stabilizing considerably, but what we do know is that we have to continue with that investment and that focus on creating supply if we want to make sure that there are enough places for people to live.

Jurisdictions that went down the road of rent control: Ontario and B.C. flirted with it; their numbers are terrible right now. They just don't have access to new units, and we've got to make sure that there are places for people to move into. Limiting that building of supply, as you know, hon. member, is a significant challenge. Then, of course, there is the investment in affordable housing, which I'm sure you're going to ask me some questions about as well, which is a little different than the work that we're doing in the space of the market.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Minister, through the chair. Certainly exciting to see rents coming down in Alberta, and perhaps a bit of a uniqueness across Canada. Again, that's going to help my constituents and folks across the whole province. As you mentioned, I would like to transition and talk a little bit about affordable housing. Madam Chair, I'm actually going to stay on

page 33 of the business plan, this time focusing on outcome 1, which focuses on supporting low-income households.

Budget 2026 continues to invest in both capital and operating funding to advance stronger foundations, which is Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing across the province. Through you, Madam Chair, I certainly wanted to give the minister a chance to talk about some of these critical investments, which include on page 33, a \$648 million investment "to build, renew, and maintain affordable housing and operate government-supported affordable housing programs." Maybe to kick us off, Minister, would you mind outlining how many affordable housing units the ministry expects to support over the next three years through Budget 2026, including through the affordable housing partnership program and other capital streams?

Mr. Nixon: Together with our partners – I know the hon. member has heard me say this lots – we're investing \$9 billion between now and 2031, specifically on affordable housing. The investments we're putting into continuing care, which also support housing in our province, are separate from that. Our goal, as you know, Madam Chair, through the stronger foundations plan is to get to 82,000 low-income houses in Alberta by 2031. That's an increase of more than 40 per cent since 2021.

Budget 2026 continues to invest heavily in that area with \$2.2 billion of our capital plan going towards affordable housing and continuing care over the next three years. Of that funding \$1.2 billion is allocated to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation for affordable housing. We expect the funding in Budget 2026 to provide over the next three years to the development of about 7,300 new affordable housing units across the province. This is in addition to the 4,900 units that are currently under construction. The majority of these units will be built through the Alberta affordable housing partnership program, which receives \$767.5 million over the next three years. This is \$270.2 million in new funding inside this budget. Through this investment we think we'll be able to support about 6,500 more new affordable housing units.

11:25

Then, of course, we also have our investment in making sure that we're modernizing and keeping up our current assets to make sure that they can continue to do the job through our senior lodge modernization program with \$150 million over the next three years, which will support the modernization and/or redevelopment of around 540 units plus an additional 490 units that are already in progress inside the system.

And then lastly, something that's not talked about a lot in this space is the Indigenous housing capital program, which is \$75.2 million over the next three years, and it is going to create 250 new units inside that space. So we continue to heavily invest in it, Madam Chair, and as the market stabilizes, we still know that we're going to have to continue to create supply inside this space both for general affordability but also for our aging population.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you. Through the chair, Minister, I appreciate that information and giving us some examples of these capital investments and the new units that we can expect to see, which will, of course, help our affordable housing strategy quite a bit.

I might maybe switch a little bit to the rental assistance component of the strategy. I would note that as part of our stronger foundations strategy there's the goal of supporting 25,000 additional households by 2031 on the rental assistance side. In 40 seconds or so, if the minister could maybe shed a little bit of light on that, through the chair.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. Rent supplements are really important. Obviously, as you build new units, it takes time. It's just the nature of construction. Whenever we can take a unit that exists and put it in the rent supplement program, we are able to create a new affordable unit in the province quicker without that construction time. So we have to have a mixture of both the 25,000 number on the stronger foundations. The goal is about 13,000 new units and about 12,000 of that will come ultimately through rent assistance programs making the unit affordable and then bringing it online as quick as possible. We're also increasing rental assistance in this budget from \$111.1 million to \$125.5 million.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Over to the Official Opposition.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: And is it blocked or shared time?

Mr. Nixon: Blocked is fine with me.

Ms Sigurdson: Page 29 of the fiscal plan indicates that \$178 million was saved due to lower caseload growth in social programs, including seniors programs. Which seniors programs had lower caseloads? I'd certainly like the analysis of the ministry regarding why this is happening since our seniors population is growing significantly. Is it gatekeeping? What's going on in these programs?

Then I just want to go back to a question I asked earlier, but I'm going to give more details, about the redesign of the funding model in continuing care. I'm referring to estimates page 66. Organizations that are serving the agencies that work in continuing care like the Alberta Continuing Care Association, the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association, Healthy Aging Alberta, the Christian Health Association are really calling on the government to build a new model for the funding, redesign the funding models for this. It's well known in the sector that there's not enough funding. The cost to care for someone who often has vulnerable health issues is insufficient, and the government needs to redesign these funding models and increase them. You need to address cost pressures, and this is for the continuing care homes A, B, and C to sustain services and restore public confidence.

People are definitely concerned about the continuing care system, because people are not receiving the care they deserve. These agencies are also asking the government to develop innovative funding approaches that align with increasing care needs – people are more vulnerable in these facilities – and also for home-care clients and continuing care home residents, increasing flexibility to support continuity of care as needs change because sometimes that happens. Someone can have a fall and then right away they need, you know, perhaps 24/7 care. And recognize the costs of changing operating environment. So just what the minister can speak about in terms of the redesign of those funding models.

Then I just want to go to home care, page 66, 11.3. We know that when more than 40 hours a week are needed in home care, and some people absolutely need that because they are very vulnerable, it is a very difficult process to receive an exception. You need to have an exception to have more than 40 hours. The government tends to steer individuals with high needs into continuing care facilities. Of course, this is incongruent with the government's value of supporting Albertans to age in their communities. Will the minister stop this practice and allocate sufficient resources to home care so that Albertans can age in their communities? That that's another question I have for the minister.

Then I just want to go back to homelessness, specifically for seniors, on page 65 of estimates 5.3. Homelessness amongst seniors

has increased, as we see more turning to shelters. With the high cost of living becoming more challenging, seniors who live on limited income and may have limited ability to work cannot find affordable accommodation. How is the minister ensuring that seniors do not become homeless? And if they do, how are they being supported?

Okay. Page 66, estimates, 11.4, \$344 million is allocated for continuing care beds. Can the minister tell us how many beds will be created? How much has been allocated for each door? Like, how much in grants? How is it being funded exactly? Will the government own it? Will it be the private industry? Will it be a nonprofit industry? How are those being allocated? So, the minister's information about that.

Then I'd like to talk briefly – and the minister did reference it already – about the lodge program. The lodge modernization program, page 105 of the fiscal plan and 114 of the fiscal plan: there was a report written some time ago, and there were 19 recommendations. Certainly, I think it was an excellent report and had addressed many of the key issues that I'm familiar with. Is the minister going to accept all 19 recommendations? Will he be implementing the recommendations of the report, specifically fair share between municipalities and the province in terms of costs? The provincial government has downloaded many of the costs to municipalities.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Nixon: Again, Chair, one of the challenges is that when you keep hearing bizarre statements like “massive cuts to whole divisions that don't exist,” it's really hard to take any of the question seriously. I mean, through Budget 2026 – and the documents are in front of this committee – the government is investing more than \$5.9 billion in assisted living and continuing care, including \$5.3 billion specifically for Assisted Living Alberta, which is an increase of \$670 million, or a 15 per cent increase, not a cut.

If you go to home care, which the member said is being cut, it's being increased. I don't have the exact number in front of me right now, but I'd say – I don't know. Sonya, you do the math real quick, and then we'll get back to them on that. It's a lot.

You have more than \$150 million in this budget specifically going to help make sure patients move to the right locations. That's a \$685 million commitment over three years, an increase; more than \$152 million for Alberta Continuing Care transformation, part of that three-year \$873 million commitment.

If you go to the workforce specifically, where there are pretty significant increases in this budget, there's almost a billion dollar increase in this budget. That's why the member is having a hard time finding any cuts to these services; it's a pretty significant investment that is taking place. Budget 2026 commits \$555 million to address staffing challenges in continuing care and supporting this workforce. It includes \$538.3 million to support collective bargaining compensation, including supporting our providers, \$14.4 million to support the education of continuing care workers, on and on and on.

The reality is that there are no cuts inside this space. It's actually an increase. It remains amongst the highest priorities of the province to be able to make sure that the continuing care system is expanded and appropriately built because, sadly, it wasn't under previous governments, to be able to make sure that it can do its job to, one, care for our fast-aging population and also stop using the health care system, which has been used to be able to care for this population to their detriment, by the way. By accomplishing this investment, we know that we'll be able to create more capacity in

acute care while making sure that seniors and others who need care are cared for in the most appropriate spot.

There is \$1.6 billion over three years going into continuing care capital. The hon. member talked about ACCA and the continuing care organizations. Their number one ask was a commitment from the government to invest in long-term capital partnerships with them. Alberta has announced and in this budget is funding the largest capital investment in the history of continuing care in the province of Alberta, bringing forward an unprecedented 15,000 new continuing care units in partnership with our providers to be able to make sure that we care for everybody.

11:35

There were also quite a lot of comments there on the Continuing Care Act, hours of care. The reality is that the United Conservative government legislated care, increased significantly the care that was legislated under the NDP government. Type A operators are now required to provide an average of 3.7 work care hours per resident per day. Type B operators are required to provide an average of 3.07 work care hours per day. I want to point out, Madam Chair, how much higher that is than the NDP legislation; 1.9 hours previously was mandated under the NDP government. Quite a difference. Certainly not a cut; an increase to our care processes.

To fix the challenges that we see in this space, there must be investments in workforces, which is what's inside this budget; there must be investment in capital, which is what's inside this budget; there must be investments in services that overlap with acute care to be able to make sure that we can get people to appropriate services. That's what's inside this budget. There must be investments inside affordable housing for seniors to be able to make sure that they don't necessarily have to access the health care system to get it; they don't have health care needs. That's inside this budget. The hon. member referred to Healthy Aging Alberta, one of our great partners: invested in this budget to continue to make sure that they can provide services to help seniors be able to age in place inside their communities. Inside this budget.

So, Madam Chair, nonstop increases in this budget in this space because we know it's absolutely critical to do it because we have to invest in that space because unfortunately previous governments, including the NDP government, failed in the sector, which is why you saw under that former minister wait-lists go up by 74 per cent. We are going to invest in the space. We're going to make sure that we continue to deliver.

The real question is going to come down to whether the NDP are going to vote against it like they did last time or they're going to vote to support the seniors and the most vulnerable inside our province.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. member?

Mr. Getson: Madam Chair, thank you.

The Chair: And is it blocked or shared?

Mr. Getson: If it could be shared?

Mr. Nixon: Yes, a hundred per cent.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate it, Minister, and thank you to the chair. Just for orders of magnitude, this is my first time that I've had the honour of sitting on this committee through estimates in six years. What jumped out of the page at me is how much all the MLAs around the table here honestly care about the seniors. I think we might have different approaches coming about it, but it was very

interesting to hear the passion and the caring for it. Through you, Chair, to the minister as well, I know that we both believe in our communities that the seniors are literally the pillars and the shoulders of giants that we stand upon.

One of the things that did jump off the page at me as well – and I'll get to estimates on page 67 really quick, Minister – was the size of your budget. Back of the napkin, you're three times the size of Transportation and Economic Corridors. So when we're talking orders of magnitude, folks at home, I think, Madam Chair, through you to the minister, need to put that in perspective. All the roads that you travel and move up and down, the highways and byways, your budget is massive in comparison, if I can say it that way.

Again, part of that, as we've seen in our communities, is that we'd like to see our seniors age in place as long as they can. Their quality of life is better. Their costs go down. It helps them have that, you know, reason to live and be in touch with their grandkids and all the other things and still continue to be the elders in our communities. In the government estimates on page 67, in the loans and advances section, I see that the budget for element 7.3, seniors home adaptation and repair, is being decreased by just about \$2 million while the budget on element 7.5, the property tax deferral loans, is being increased by just under \$2 million. To the minister: can you please share the reason for the change in the budgets and the programs? Can the minister also please explain how a senior can access these programs? And I've got a follow-up with that.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. Absolutely. There is a \$1.95 million increase in the seniors property tax deferral program, but it also corresponds with the decrease, to your point, in the seniors home adaptation program. But it's not a cut to the program. It's purely rightsizing based on uptake of the program. I mean, it's that simple. So the department is projecting based on what we see as user rates for the program. It doesn't mean the program is not important – we continue to fund it – but putting it in the budget, where it's not going to end up, would make no sense. So we are rightsizing that budget line based on what we are seeing in the uptake for that program, and then making sure that we continue to utilize resources in other programs; for example, the 1.95 per cent increase to the senior property tax division, which is seeing a higher uptake during the year.

Seniors ultimately can access our department programs by submitting an application that they can find on our website or by calling Alberta Supports contact centres. In addition, seniors interested in a long-term deferral of their property tax can choose an option when applying whereby they can defer their property tax for up to 10 years without having to reapply each year. And for seniors who apply for the seniors home and adaptation repair program loan, program staff contact each applicant to review and discuss the amount of the loan requested and the renovation or adaptation cost estimates to ensure that the senior is well informed and comfortable with proceeding with the process.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate the clarification and that's where I was heading next, Minister, so you anticipated that of how the two programs work together and how we can keep the seniors in their home. I do appreciate the comment on the rightsizing and making sure that the taxpayer dollars are allocated where they can get the best bang for the buck.

Staying on the seniors and aging in place. Supporting our government, I see in the estimates on page 66 that line 7, senior services, increased by more than \$2 million for '26-27. I was pleased to see the strong maintained funding, and in fact the increase is incredibly important to myself and my constituents. As mentioned earlier, we want to make sure that our seniors are

supported and have that best quality of life as possible. Many constituents have shared their long desire to age in place in their homes and retain their independence for as long as possible. Can the minister share with this committee on how Budget '26 supports that goal?

Mr. Nixon: Well, as part of this budget, we're continuing to invest ultimately in initiatives that enhance home and community care service and supports, which also includes \$1.1 billion for Assisted Living Alberta to continue to deliver home care, which is one of the most critical tools to be able to help individuals be able to age in place. This is going to be further supported by \$28.3 million in continued provincial continuing care transformation funding for initiatives such as expanding palliative and end-of-life home care by hiring more staff. We're also expanding complex home care to additional urban and rural communities, and we're meeting forecasted demand for the central direct home-care invoicing.

The budget also will see funding under the Canadian-Alberta aging with dignity funding agreement with the feds to go to supporting services that directly support seniors aging in place. This would include things like \$8 million for community-based senior service organizations to be able to sustain and expand nonmedical home and community supports and social prescribing as well as \$139.4 million to strengthen home and community care and expand caregiver supports through that partnership.

Mr. Getson: Thank you to the minister for that response. Madam Chair, through you to the minister again: can you explain some of the community organizations – I think you've touched on that a bit – that have partnered with Alberta's aging with dignity in their homes and communities? As folks age, often they need accommodation of both medical and nonmedical supports. Are you able to retain their independence and age comfortably with dignity? Can the minister please share on how nonmedical and medical supports are provided by this ministry to work hand in hand? And how does Assisted Living Alberta contribute to this important work?

Mr. Nixon: Well, to give you a couple of examples, in the budget there will be invested \$2.1 million to the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories to connect people living with dementia and their caregivers to support services earlier in their dementia journey. We're expanding available supports across the province and hoping to reduce dementia-related stigma. Another example would be \$1.7 million to the Alberta Northwest Palliative Care Society to provide community-based, compassionate, volunteer-based care tailored to palliative needs for patients and families. We also work really closely with Healthy Aging Alberta. As an example, \$1 million will support Alberta Men's Sheds Association to strengthen, co-ordinate, and expand programming for community-based support that improves social connections and then ultimately reduces isolation. There is also \$7 million for social prescribing programs that deliver home and community supports to help older adults age well at home.

That's where a lot of our focus is, again, really trying to make sure that we get those resources to unique community organizations who are providing that service and make sure that they can do their job; Healthy Aging Alberta being one of our big partners.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Minister. Madam Chair, to the minister again, I'd like to ask about some online services for the seniors. Honestly, looking at this, it always raises concern with me because I have the worst time with online services. So I want make sure they work for the seniors as well. I notice there's a propensity to go to those services, so hopefully you can walk me through that

and take away any pains I might have. I see on page 34 of the '26-29 business plan the performance measure outcome 1(c) measures the utilization of online application methods for seniors assistance. The target for this measure is 55 per cent for first-time seniors' financial assistance applications completed online. In '24-25 49 per cent of first-time seniors' financial assistance applications were completed online, so looking like an uptick.

11:45

What is being done to ensure that these targets are met? I know that some of the seniors in my constituency are a little more comfortable with the technology as others, as I mentioned. How does your department manage the utilization of those systems to make sure, indeed, they're functional for the seniors and they can get the services they need?

Mr. Nixon: I think it's important to note that we are seeing a significant uptake in seniors' utilization of technology, though there are still individuals out there who aren't comfortable with it or have remote situations where they can't access as easily. But it is going up. I did just have a text from my 96-year-old grandmother while sitting here. I don't know why, but she's watching us online, so she has figured out how to do it for sure. But we want to make sure that people can access it.

You know, Canadians aged 75 years and older grew by 62 per cent. Let's just say that those who are accessing the Internet grew by 62 per cent in 2020 and now by up to 72 per cent in 2022. It does show that, more and more, that uptake is getting there. Maybe a younger generation is now becoming seniors and are more comfortable with it. We do want to continue to increase online usage for seniors who are applying for financial assistance, first, to be able to promote the use of existing online services. Second, the department also continues to grow the number of online services that seniors can utilize, making the online experience as attractive and efficient as possible.

For example, when a senior utilizes their alberta.ca account, they are not only getting a secure way to access online services to apply for the seniors' financial assistance program; they are also able to maintain their application information on an ongoing basis, which makes it significantly easier for them. Examples include being able to update your address, banking information, review past payments, previous claims, and other important information, such as T slips.

We're confident that we're going to continue to be able to meet our target in that area and at the same time be able to make sure that those who can't access through that process are given different types of supports to do so.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate it, Minister. Again, maybe when I become a senior, like our colleague across the aisle here, I'll feel more comfortable with it by that point and that a number of the seniors are taking that time.

Again just through you, Madam Chair, to the minister and his staff: thank you for literally doing God's work here. It's not easy to be able to disseminate budget allocations to make sure those needs are met, but I do really appreciate the kind care that you take to support our vulnerable and our seniors.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Over to the Official Opposition. Block or shared?

Member Irwin: Shared would be great.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Nixon: Block is fine with me.

The Chair: Okay. Let's proceed.

Member Irwin: Girl has got to try, right? Okay. I know this will likely be my last time here on the record, so again, you know, I'm grateful for all the staff and all the folks working really hard on the issue of housing.

I want to talk a little bit about social housing and just increasing poverty and how this relates to our ministry here. Statistics Canada data shows that poverty is worsening in Alberta. Our province actually led the country in percentage change in total food bank visits over five years, 2019 to 2024, the same years that this UCP government has been in power. We know that housing costs play a significant factor in rising poverty rates. For instance, the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Edmonton takes up 66 per cent of a person's AISH benefit, and it will be an even higher percentage if they get bumped to ADAP.

It was shocking, it was depressing to hear last June that it was announced that the UCP was introducing a new formula for calculating rent for community housing and rent assistance. We know we heard that from so many of our constituents in particular who are living in social housing getting a notice of a significant rent increase. Really, that predominantly impacted folks on AISH and seniors getting a subsidy. Because so many of those Albertans who qualify for social housing are already living at poverty levels, that was just another blow to those folks.

This announcement actually also came just shortly after the UCP sent a threatening letter to AISH recipients indicating that their benefits would be reduced if they didn't apply for the CDB, the Canada disability benefit, a benefit that's being clawed back by this UCP government from everyone who qualifies.

I guess I would like to ask the chair to the minister: you know, how much money are the changes in the rent subsidy calculations expected to save the government? Gosh. I guess I would love to know: does any money saved really justify the pain and the hardship that you're adding on to already incredibly vulnerable community members?

We also know that despite what this minister says, the desperate need for affordable housing far outweighs demand and wait-lists are growing dramatically, much more so than they ever did under the NDP, to correct the record. In Edmonton, through Civida, there are over 10,000 qualified households that are awaiting a home, and this is up from around 7,000 in March of 2023. In, you know, a few years that's over 37 per cent increase. In Calgary that wait-list is over 7,600. Again, these are families. These are individuals who have gone through rigorous process of eligibility, have met all the criteria proving that they are in desperate need of affordable housing.

Again, my colleagues and I'm sure those across the floor, too, hear frequently from Albertans who are sitting on wait-lists, who are waiting. News that those wait-lists continue to just get larger and larger is extremely discouraging, so I'd love to hear some tangible points from this minister on how he is planning to address those growing wait-lists in our largest centres. I mean, again, I've talked about Edmonton and Calgary, but as someone who spends a lot of time in rural Alberta, and I love talking about my rural roots, we also know that rural homelessness is a huge issue, too.

I want to talk a little bit in the time remaining about capital maintenance and renewal funding. That's on page 107 of the fiscal plan. We see \$162 million being allocated to this area. I know we were on the record. We talked to media about the fact that in November of 2024 the Auditor General indicated that under the UCP the ministry stopped tracking the conditions of affordable housing units, stopped reporting the amount of deferred maintenance and renewal dollars, and it was noted that there's

really no system, no plan in place about how they approve maintenance projects. It was really a scathing report from this Auditor General that detailed just the severe health and safety risks that many Albertans were facing: mould, water leaks, failed heating systems, infestation, so much more.

While the current business plan does mention “continue to enhance a long-term maintenance and renewal strategy for affordable housing,” we don’t see, again to my point earlier, any concrete plans around metrics, performance measures, any sort of improved maintenance strategy to address these deplorable conditions that so many of our constituents are living in. What’s shocking is that those detailed reports regarding the condition of social housing stock used to be included in annual reports, of course, when we were in government and in the first few years of this UCP government. The last time we had that detailed data was in 2021-2022. At that point already – already – there was \$1 billion in deferred maintenance. So I ask the chair: can he provide an update on what he’s done, if anything, to address the Auditor General’s recommendations to track and plan maintenance of Alberta social housing stock?

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: That’s a Public Accounts question on the details, and I’ll give you a high-level on it in a minute, but I want to start with what really is shocking. The hon. member talks about shocking. What’s shocking is that when the NDP were in power wait-lists for affordable housing went up by 75 per cent, that they built not one new unit of housing during that period of time, then the Conservative government comes in 2019 and continues to see record housing numbers on both affordable and market for multiple years in a row and the best housing numbers anywhere in the country and the best rent reduction numbers anywhere in the country.

You know, really, at the end of the day it’s just so clear to me every time that the NDP just don’t like our province. There are a lot of great things to celebrate in Alberta, in this space, and we should be celebrating the great work that the industry has done and the investment that Alberta taxpayers continue to put in this space to make sure that we can have the best record numbers and the most housing anywhere in the country as a result of that.

I’ll address the bizarre statement that somehow the social housing rates on affordability were changed: not true, to be very clear. In Canada housing is considered affordable if it’s 30 per cent of household pretax income. It has been a standard approach used by all provinces. It’s a standard approach that has been used by our province for a very long time.

What I think the member is referring to is there were a few outlier programs that had been managed differently over the years that were not put underneath the same category as everybody else. I want to be clear what that meant. That meant that somebody who is earning employment income but was struggling and needed help to be able to provide housing for their family would pay 30 per cent of their adjusted income for rent and that some people on some programs associated with government were only paying 17 per cent of their income for rent. The only thing that is adjusted is to make sure that all programs are going through the same process, which is a standardized process to determining affordability of rent that is used by every province in the country, whether NDP, Conservative, or Liberal, or anywhere in between. Any impression and stating that somehow that has been changed is just categorically false. You know, I mean, what’s new, right?

11:55

The rent issue. I notice the member often just glosses over this issue. The reality is that the rent situation in Alberta is the envy of the entire country. When we get together with housing ministers all across Canada and the federal housing minister, they all want to know one thing: what the heck are we doing to pull it off? The fastest growing place in the country, at times the fastest growing place in the world, has managed to reduce rent more than anywhere else. The average asking rent in Alberta is now \$400 per month below the national average. Six of the 10 most affordable cities in the country are all in Alberta, and the most affordable large cities are all in Alberta, including Edmonton and Calgary. Now think about that.

Now, that’s because we rejected the NDP’s advice, which was to stifle industry, bring in red tape, bring in things like rent control, stop construction, which ultimately would have made more people homeless, would have lowered supply, which would have raised the price of housing, would have raised specifically the price of rent, and would have resulted in frankly a catastrophe in Alberta.

We did the opposite, and as a result of that we now have the best market inside the entire province while at the same time investing \$9 billion in the affordable housing space, resulting in more than 8,500 new affordable housing units, 860 new shelter spaces, more than 2,200 new units specifically for seniors, more than 3,000 new continuing care spaces. That results in Calgary receiving \$263 million in this budget for more than 2,500 new units of shelter; \$224 million for 2,200 units of shelter spaces in Edmonton, and the rest of Alberta receiving \$730 million for 4,300 new units of shelter all across the province. More than 13,000 households are now receiving rental assistance on this budget, more than 25,200 senior lodges and senior houses, nearly 30,000 continuing care spaces.

Lastly, with the little time that I have left, the capital maintenance process in this province was dismal, unfortunately. An hon. member referred to it. The NDP let our capital infrastructure fall absolutely apart. The very first thing I did was put in a capital maintenance and renewal plan when I became minister, which has been signed off by the Auditor General. We’re seeing results because of it. You know why, Madam Chair? We bet on Albertans. The NDP bet against them every time.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Back over to the government members. Block or shared?

Mrs. Sawyer: I would love it if the minister would share with me.

Mr. Nixon: Absolutely, for my fellow Mountain View county MLA.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you. If I may through you, Madam Chair, I would like to start by thanking the minister and his staff. And since his grandmother is watching, I would, if I can, say to her: I don’t blame you for wanting to watch. Not only does it matter to her as a senior, but I’d be proud of what your grandson is doing and his department. Why wouldn’t you want to watch his success story live?

I’m going to take a couple of minutes here and focus on the positivity of what’s going on, because I think we need to get the correct facts out. I appreciate you doing that today and not trying to fearmonger, so I’ll get to it. I’m going to talk about the asset management. Turning to the condition of existing housing, key objective 1.3 under outcome 1 describes work under way to “enhance a long-term maintenance and renewal strategy for affordable housing properties owned by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation.” Page 115 of the fiscal plan shows \$52 million is

invested in capital maintenance and renewal, otherwise known as the CMR, for seniors' facilities and housing.

These investments not only protect existing housing stock but also improve outcomes for Albertans who rely on these units by reducing downtime, extending asset life, and maintaining the quality and safety of their homes. Can the minister please outline how this year's capital maintenance and renewal, CMR, funding will help maintain and preserve government-owned and -supported housing units?

Mr. Nixon: Well, time is tight, Madam Chair, but I do want to emphasize really clearly that we continue to implement the recommendations from our external review that we undertook in '22-23 that was validated by the office of the Auditor General. That's the process that we work with. We're increasing capital maintenance and renewal funding in this budget for \$155.2 million over three years, which is an increase of \$25 million.

What really matters is this. This funding will help us keep 4,500 units online and available in '26-27. The capital maintenance and renewal program funding remains a priority for us to maintain and upgrade government affordable housing units across the province. It covers renovations, emergency projects for our facilities. Often projects – many of you will have seen them in your constituencies in our buildings – include upgrades to boilers, elevators, HVAC

units, electrical and safety systems, siding, windows, roofing, and more, trying to be able to extend the life of our assets to, again, continue to provide safe, affordable places for our senior population to live.

It has to be balanced with new builds. We're investing in both, but no good long-term plan on how we are building affordable housing, both for seniors and general affordable housing, can be done without a proper capital maintenance and renewal plan. I'm proud that the United Conservative government is the first government to do it effectively and to get it done. That's why our wait-lists go down and their wait-lists were up by 74 per cent when they were in charge, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for your time this morning.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this portion of consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded. I'd like to remind everyone here in committee that we're scheduled to meet this afternoon at 3:30 to consider estimates of the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services. Have a good afternoon, everyone. We'll see you this afternoon.

[The committee adjourned at 12:01 p.m.]

