



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  
3:30 p.m.

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

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC), Chair  
Gochring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair

Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)\*  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)\*\*  
Getson, Shane C., Lac St. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
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Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)  
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\* substitution for Peter Singh

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**Also in Attendance**

Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)  
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)  
Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)

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

### **Participants**

Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services

Hon. Jason Nixon, Minister

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

Sonya Johnston, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer

David Williams, Assistant Deputy Minister, Housing



3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

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

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services for the fiscal year ended 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. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of the committee.

We'll start to my right.

**Mr. Dyck:** Nolan Dyck, MLA for Grande Prairie.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Jennifer Johnson, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka.

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

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Good afternoon. Jason Nixon, Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services and the MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. On my far left is Marika Giesen, who is our acting minister of financial services. To my left is my deputy minister, Dennis Cooley. On my right is Assistant Deputy Minister Sonya Johnston, who is our senior financial officer, and beside her is David Williams, assistant deputy minister of housing.

**Mr. Kasawski:** I'm Kyle Kasawski, the MLA for Sherwood Park.

**Ms Goehring:** Good afternoon. I'm Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the deputy chair of this committee.

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

**Member Irwin:** Good afternoon. Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Miyashiro:** Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Rob Miyashiro, MLA for Lethbridge-West.

**Mr. Haji:** Good afternoon. Sharif Haji, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

**The Chair:** Thank you, everyone. I'd like to note that there is no one joining us remotely today. To review the following substitutions for the record, hon. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk will be substituting for Mr. Singh until 4:15. Mr. Dyck will be substituting for Mr. Getson until 5:15.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to business at hand. Please note that microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audiovisual stream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn your camera on while speaking; however, there's no one joining us that route. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Finally, I'd note that a request was received to have American sign language interpretation services available for this meeting. I'm

pleased to advise that we will provide ASL interpretation services for our meeting this afternoon.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services shall be considered for a total of six hours. For the record I would note that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities has already completed three hours of the six hours of debate. As we enter our fourth hour of debate, I will remind everyone that the speaking rotation for these meetings is provided for under Standing Order 59.01(6), and we are now at the point in the rotation where speaking times are limited to a maximum of five minutes for both the member and the ministry. These speaking times may be combined for a maximum of 10 minutes. Please remember to advise the chair at the beginning of your rotation if you wish to combine your time with the minister's. Members are reminded that they may not share any unused portion of their five minutes with another member.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone object to having a five-minute break today? All right, we shall proceed with one.

When we adjourned this morning, we were three minutes and 20 seconds into the exchange between Mrs. Sawyer and the minister. I now invite Member Sawyer to complete the remaining time in this rotation. You have six minutes and four seconds, Member.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If I may, through you, just because it was an interruption I'd like to highlight what we were discussing for the benefit of anyone joining us. It was with respect to the asset management, key objective 1.3 under outcome 1, describing the work under way to enhance a long-term maintenance and renewal strategy for affordable housing properties owned by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, and page 115 of the fiscal plan showing \$52 million invested in capital maintenance and renewal.

Just to go back to where I was, I have a couple more questions, if I may. How does the ministry prioritize projects to keep as many units online as possible? And could the minister speak to how the ministry is strengthening asset management practices, including work under the capital strategy and improvements, that help extend the life of housing assets and reduce downtime for units?

**Mr. Nixon:** Thanks, Madam Chair, and to the member for the question. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation applies a structured and policy-aligned prioritization process to allocate limited capital maintenance and renewal dollars across its housing portfolio. This process ensures that that capital maintenance for projects is selected consistently and supported by clear, evidence-based rationales. I'm happy, actually, because he's up here in housing, to let the assistant deputy minister quickly talk about how they manage that process, if he would like.

**Mr. David Williams:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Member, through the chair, for the question. We do have a prioritization process that goes through, and we look at the conditions of the assets, prioritizing health and safety first and foremost in terms of the prioritization. We also then look at other factors. Once we're done, we make a giant list of about the 3,000 requests that we get every year and prioritize them out.

We also have to take into consideration things such as building load because they are lived-in residences, so we have to be cognizant of that so we're not disrupting life for individuals living in there. We do prioritize based on life and safety and maintaining units on board so that we can have every available unit ready to go.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Okay. That was it for that.

If we could talk about the senior lodge program relating to seniors' housing, in Budget 2026 I'm happy to see there's an increased investment from Budget 2025 in the Alberta Social Housing Corporation shown in the statement of operations on page 37 of the business plan. The lodge assistance program is delivered through the ASHC, and it supports housing providers serving low-income seniors and helps sustain lodge operations across the province. Noting that the seniors' lodge program review panel recommendations are informing improvements to help lodges meet evolving care needs, through the chair, Minister, how will this year's increase to the lodge system program help operators continue serving low-income seniors in their communities? How does the ministry plan to implement the senior lodge program review panel recommendations?

**Mr. Nixon:** The budget itself will provide \$64 million for the lodge assistance program, which is an increase of a million dollars from 2025. That funding will increase the current rate of \$2,150 a day per eligible resident of \$2,350 per day per eligible resident. That's the biggest change as far as the budget change.

As for the lodge review panel, I'm actually going to let the ADM take you through that process. It has been completed. The member to the right of you chaired that process and did an excellent job. ADM Williams' team is diligently working on implementing those recommendations.

Go ahead, David.

**Mr. David Williams:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question, hon. member. I would just say that there were 19 recommendations that came from the panel. It was a really comprehensive panel that was put together with industry experts and folks across the province. They gave us 19 recommendations. Three of the recommendations have currently been completely implemented and are moving forward. The remaining 16 recommendations are currently under progress. We expect four to six of those recommendations will be fully implemented by June of this year, and the remainder are moving forward. As the minister said, we have increased the lodge rate from \$2,150 per day to \$2,350 per day, and this over the last three years represents an increase of \$10 to the lodge rate. In 2023 it was \$1,350 a day, and it has now moved up to \$2,350 per day per resident.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you. In rural communities especially I think having our seniors be able to age in place is incredibly important. Those are the communities they built and they have such strong roots, especially in the agriculture community. What I would like to know is: what steps are being taken to enhance the collaboration between lodges and continuing care so that our seniors can age in place and to reduce pressure on the acute-care system?

**Mr. Nixon:** One of the first improvements that the department has been directed to do as they merge continuing care into this ministry is to really focus on how the lodge program and the continuing care program connect. We've seen at times challenges even in my own communities where you had it that the former department of seniors and housing would be running the affordable housing component of the senior lodge, but down the same hall in the same building there would have been a AHS continuing-care facility, and those staff did not connect well.

We also saw challenges where home care was not allowed to enter our lodge programs, as another example. Obviously, treating individuals in a lodge program the same way you would inside their homes, because it is their home, by allowing home care to be able to do their work there is another way that we can help people remain and age in place this time in a lodge program rather than their home.

It prevents seniors from having to use the hospital or to go into continuing care prematurely.

The department is working through that that process, and ADM Williams' shop also has now taken control of all the capital side of continuing care, just like they do for housing, which allows that planning to take place in one division to figure out how to make sure we utilize our infrastructure the best way possible and to make sure that infrastructure is connected. ADM Williams doesn't run home care. Assisted Living Alberta does do that, but by allowing him and his team to do their excellent work that you already see taking place in housing is making sure that lodges and continuing care are working together. We're seeing some really good opportunities from that, and over the next couple of years we'll continue to adjust to be able to make sure that we maximize the capacity that we already have, all with the goal of making sure people can remain in the best spot that they want to remain in their community for as long as possible.

3:40

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Over to the Official Opposition.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. No, I'll go block time. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Block time. Okay.

**Ms Renaud:** I'm going to start my questions with the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped. For your reference, I'll be referring to 2026-27. government estimates page 65 section 3, and key objectives supporting outcome 2 on page 34 of the ministry business plans.

I think before I start I'd like to, you know, say something about AISH. I think it's really important to remember that when everybody is moved from AISH to ADAP, what the ministry hasn't said is that they're changing the definition of what severe disability is. From 1979 until now, adjudicators have made decisions about who is severely disabled and who is not, and that was based on a few pieces of criteria. If the disability is permanent, there is no therapy that will change that disability, it will permanently impact their ability to earn a living and support themselves, and for that reason AISH was established and people on AISH were allowed to work and earn up to \$1,100 – just about \$1,100 – without having their benefit impacted dollar-for-dollar.

Now, the whole point of that was that if they earn more than that, AISH would come down, and hopefully if the disability miraculously changed and it wasn't sporadic and they were able to work, that they would just transition off AISH. I find it offensive that the minister says that in the program previously people weren't allowed to work. That's false. I just wanted to clear that up.

Google "AISH age and residency criteria," and you'll learn that, in Alberta, you must live in Alberta and you must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident to be eligible to receive AISH. I imagine lots of people were googling that because the Premier said, again spreading misleading information, that immigrants were accessing social services. My first question is: how many immigrants received AISH in the '25-26 fiscal year, and how many immigrants is the department budgeting for in this particular budget?

We know that AISH caseload growth has been steady for decades over several governments. We know the contributing factors to this steady increase, and it's not Trudeau's fault. Advancement in life-saving care means more Albertans are surviving strokes, aneurysms, heart attacks, stage four cancer diagnosis, and traumatic brain injuries. It also means that more Albertans are surviving life-changing accidents that leave them with spinal cord injuries. We

understand more now about disabilities that we can't see than ever before. Subsequently, the number of people needing financial support has increased.

It's important to set the record straight that this increase is not because of immigration; it's because things are changing, the things that I've just listed. My next question: on average, how many AISH recipients die in a fiscal year? How many move out of province in a fiscal year? How many age out at 65 in a fiscal year, and how many leave because they found permanent employment in a fiscal year?

My third question: on average, how many new-to-the-program, severely-disabled Albertans received AISH last year, and how many because they turned 18? How many moved to Alberta? How many because of a new injury? How many because of a palliative diagnosis, and how many because of immigration?

Finally, the most important question I think that people want to know is: when will we know what the new definition of severe disability is?

Last year, the department noted less than a fraction of 1 per cent of the allegations of AISH fraud were substantiated. In fact, there was a total of 81 fraud charges with 42 convictions in '24-25. That was not just for the 80,000 people on AISH. That includes income support, PDD, FSCD, which are tens of thousands more. Not too long ago, the Premier mused that fraud was the reason that AISH was escalating, that it was rampant in AISH, but the facts don't support that claim. I'm curious why this government would share misleading information in the Legislature about fraud as it relates to AISH. I encourage them to stop spreading misinformation.

Next question: what is the total amount the department is spending on fraud-related activities related to AISH? How much is recovered by these activities? How much of this work is contracted outside of government, and what is the value of those contracts? Given this government's problems with procurement, what procurement safeguards will be built in to ensure that we don't have the problems that we saw in health care?

Now, program delivery for AISH and ADAP is costing \$26 million in '26 for program planning and delivery. That's a 90 per cent increase in delivery from last year. I would appreciate it if the minister would outline why we need that increase. Again, given this government's ongoing issues with procurement, we're alarmed that a 90 per cent increase exists without any details. Is the 90 per cent cost increase in program planning and delivery a one-time increase, or will it be repeated next year? FTEs have gone down in this ministry, so I'd like to know where the \$26 million will be spent.

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

We'll just pause, Minister, to allow Member Armstrong-Homeniuk to introduce herself for the record.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Hello, everyone. I'm Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

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

Minister, to you.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you. I think, Madam Chair, it's a little rich to accuse any member of the House, whether it be the Premier or any member around this table, of providing misleading information while spending your whole five-minute segment providing misleading information, but I digress.

We're here for the Department of Assisted Living and Social Services budget, and the budget, when it comes to disability supports, is something the government is proud of and that the Legislature should be proud of. I sure hope all members will vote for it. It was disappointing to see the Official Opposition vote

against supports for the disability community last time around. This time around it's going to be, again, another unprecedented amount, the highest amount in the history of the province that we will invest in this space, \$3.7 billion, which is a year-over-year increase of almost \$100 million.

Now, that fits in line, Madam Chair, with what the United Conservative government has done since they took power in 2019, when they increased disability funding by \$1 billion since 2019, when the UCP became the government. That's an increase of 40 per cent, which is what this budget is about.

It also maintains the indexation process as set out by the Department of Finance. This year it will be 2 per cent. We'll continue to see AISH rates, which are legislated, continue to increase. They will be \$1,940 a year in this budget, which is significantly higher than all other provinces in the country and something that we should definitely be proud of as a Legislature and continue to support going forward.

I also want to recognize that we will be changing and adding a second component to our disability services, ADAP, Alberta's new program for individuals who face disabilities but are able to participate in the workforce or want to participate in the workforce. You know, just comparing this process straight to AISH and then to ADAP is not the right way to do it. What the member is glossing over is that hundreds if not thousands of Albertans who have a disability that would not be able to go on AISH and receive supports because they would not meet the high threshold of AISH are now going to be able to have access to other disability supports through ADAP that will make sure that they can continue to receive supports and be able to participate fully in the workforce.

You know, the core of some of the changes that have been made after lots of consultation comes originally from a letter from an Albertan, who was an accountant, who had gotten MS and cancer, I believe, at the same time, went through that treatment, and had her situation stabilized. It could change, but it was stabilized. She was highly educated, and she wanted to re-enter the workforce, but she wanted to know that she would have that safety net if things deteriorated later in the future. AISH can't accommodate that. That's not how the program was designed. It doesn't mean AISH is not important. AISH is important. That's why we're keeping it. That's why we're keeping it legislated. That's why we're keeping it high as far as payments compared to the rest of the country.

But now we're providing an option for that individual, who thinks she can return to the workforce. In her case, because of her education level, she may not actually need any of the ADAP supports for a period of time but may not be able to get medical supports from her employer because of her medical situation. This will ensure she receives those medical supports going forward. This will ensure that she can keep her income that she is earning and be able to live the best life possible. And then if things change, and with MS they could, she knows that she has that safety net to fall back on through ADAP supports. And if things change beyond that, where you can't even work, she would have AISH supports to fall back on.

3:50

You know, the fearmongering of saying that the program disappears or that it's being cut, when you can clearly see it's not – it is being invested in at the highest levels that it's ever been invested in, indexed, providing more options for people that face disabilities to be able to enter to receive government supports than any government has done and, on top of that, also investing just over a quarter billion dollars in this budget to support individuals who face disabilities that are attempting to enter the workforce with things like simulated work sites, job training, transportation

support, and other issues to be able to make sure they can fully participate to the best of their ability and what they want to do inside our society. That's something all of us should support. We should be proud of that as a Legislature. We should be proud of our province, that we lead the way in the country when it comes to this space, and I certainly hope everybody will continue to vote to make sure that we can keep it.

I mean, I think that any implication that we should change this process would result – let's be clear what that change means. It means our people will get less money, they would get less supports, and they would not be able to have the best opportunities to participate in the workforce, which is not something I think anybody would want to support. It makes no sense at all, and I'm looking forward to seeing this program implemented over this budget year.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister.  
Over to the government members.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you, Madam Chair. This morning we touched . . .

**The Chair:** Blocked or shared time?

**Mr. Nixon:** Shared is fine.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Through you, Madam Chair, we were touching on homeless shelters this morning, but I want to take a moment. I have some of my own questions because I want to be able to allow you to provide some insight into the good work your ministry has been doing. We all know how important it is to ensure that vulnerable Albertans have access to safe, stable housing. It's fundamental to building strong and healthy communities across the province. We know that housing and security and homelessness can have far-reaching impacts on individuals, families, not to mention community well-being, particularly during periods of economic pressure and population growth.

On page 65 of the government estimates, line 5 on homelessness and housing supports shows an investment of nearly \$227 million in '26-27, which is important to note is an increase of more than \$6 million from Budget 2025, so kudos to the ministry. Can the minister please share how this increased investment will support vulnerable Albertans access safe, warm shelter and other critical supports?

**Mr. Nixon:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair, to the member. She is right. This Budget 2026 is going to invest \$227 million specifically in combating homelessness. Affordable housing and other supports are on top of that, but this is specifically focused in that area. First, this investment, the increased investment that we have made over the last several fiscal years – and I do appreciate the member pointing out that despite what you hear from the Official Opposition, the line item clearly does not have a cut in it. It has an increase in it. But the largest portion of that is continuing with our commitment and our investment in 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week shelter spaces.

I also want to emphasize another thing that you'll hear often from the Official Opposition that's false as well, that somehow those spaces are only at night. I think the word bed is what causes some of that confusion for them. The way we fund homeless shelters is we identify how many spaces that we would need, obviously for sleeping spaces, but when shelters – I know. I used to run one. In the daytime we don't kick everybody out of the shelter. The contract in the agreement is that they must remain open 24 hours, seven days a week. In the daytime you may have some people sleeping. You

also may have some people eating. You may have some people participating in other social services supports that may be taking place inside the shelter, but, again, you must be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, something that only our government has done, hon. member, and I know you're proud of it.

We also are continuing to look now how we will increase other resources beyond just Edmonton and Calgary, which have had a predominant amount of homelessness resources, rightly so. They have the largest population of homeless individuals as part of large cities, but we continue to see challenges growing in our mid-size cities, places like Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, where we have been increasing it through this budget and continue to increase in this budget spending inside that space.

One of the biggest areas is the creativity that we've done around partnerships, particularly with Indigenous communities – I'm very proud of that – over the last couple of years, obviously in Edmonton, the work that the Enoch is doing with us with their shelter. But if you go down to Lethbridge, we've built the entire system of emergency shelter with the Blood Tribe Department of Health, who are just doing exceptional work there. Our job was to make sure that we can get them the resources and empower them to do that work, and they're just taking it absolutely to the next level. I want to assure you their shelters meet the standards. They're clean, they're beautiful, and they're really going out of their way to be able to make sure to care for those individuals.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you, Minister. Because you addressed some of the cities, and of course I'm a rural MLA, so what I'd love if you could answer for me is: what is the government doing through Budget 2026 to address rural homelessness in the province? How can a rural community experiencing homelessness access support or funding from the provincial government?

**Mr. Nixon:** Rural comes with a different set of challenges, where we can't use the same tools as we do in a larger city. First, the scale is not there, which is good news, and, second, is that communities don't respond to the same tools very well. We saw this in Wetaskiwin, which has a very serious challenge when it comes to homelessness, where, frankly, and you can ask the former mayor, it became a real major political issue inside that community how to be able to structure that process.

As we get more and more rural, we look at different types of tools that we can partner with other organizations that are in the community that already have infrastructure that is in place to make sure they have the resources. Warming centres are common use in places like one of my towns, Rocky Mountain House. That's the tool that works very well for that community. We have been supporting organizations in that process.

The department is also playing with this concept of rural navigation to try to take the things that we've learned from the navigation centres in Calgary and Edmonton and expand them into rural areas in different ways. Obviously, we're not going to go to Olds and build the same level navigation centre. The numbers would not justify it. It would not make sense. But we've been working closely with the RCMP, local municipalities, and other areas to look at ways that we can do surge capacity, mobile capacity, when you see things like OD rates being up or increased homelessness, certain things that are taking place in the community. We just did some trial runs on this in Wetaskiwin in partnership with the RCMP that saw some really exciting results for the community. The department is going to continue to look at how we expand that.

We also are really looking at Red Deer and Lethbridge in particular that would help us in a lot of the rural communities,

including your riding, that have helped with some of the impact that's taking place in surrounding communities. We'll have our new provider of the Red Deer shelter. I mentioned the work that we've been doing with the Blood Tribe Department of Health in Lethbridge to be able to make sure that we can increase that capacity.

Then our other major tool that we're working on in this space is continuing to build our partnership with Minister Wilson's department, with Mental Health and Addiction. There's a tremendous amount of overlap in that space, you know, as an example, Mr. Wilson's department's recovery coaches, staff, the navigation centres in both Calgary and Edmonton. We continue to look for ways that we can co-ordinate together to be able to access our shared clients in the best possible way.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you. That actually is a perfect segue into what I wanted to ask you next with respect to homelessness. Looking to page 33 of the business plan, key objective 1.5 states "[ALSS is implementing a] provincial housing-focused and recovery-oriented delivery model that supports people experiencing homelessness to access the services they need to support their long-term housing stability." And in the initiatives supporting key objectives it says, "in 2026-27, \$217.5 million is allocated to support homeless shelters, Navigation and Support Centres, and housing supports programs to assist Albertans experiencing homelessness."

Given that navigation and support centres have been in operation for almost two years in Edmonton and Calgary, can the minister elaborate how these centres continue to support and assist Albertans experiencing homelessness and how you're measuring the success and outcomes of the support centres, particularly in helping individuals transition into stable, long-term housing?

**Mr. Nixon:** This budget will increase funding in this space for homelessness, as I said, and the navigation centres are a key part of the work that we do. It's simple things, sometimes like providing government ID, by far the most popular service inside the navigation centres. All of us who worked in that space were not shocked by that, but everybody else was and also getting access to income and medical benefits supports. Mental health and addiction connections take place there. Indigenous culture supports are a big part of the work that takes place in navigation centres, health supports, probation and justice supports. Simple stuff like cleaning up warrants to be able to make sure that you can move forward can take place in the navigation centre in a productive way and a connection, obviously, to shelter and housing being a core part of it.

The navigation centres support on average between 90 and 125 people each day in 2025. They are being accessed by the community as a direct connection to where individuals can get supports. As of March 2, so the beginning of this month, both centres have supported 18,819 unique Albertans to access critical services and supports, and they continue to do their work.

4:00

Again, the most important part about them is our partners. It's not about the navigation centre in and of itself; it's that we are able to bring all the partners together in one location to be able to access services. When I worked at the Mustard Seed in Calgary, somebody would come in and they would have four or five different challenges. We used to have this thing called the *Street Survival Guide*, and you'd have to say: "Go over here to get your diabetic foot issue dealt with. If you want to go talk to income supports, then you're going to have to go down three more blocks here, and then you've got to go over to here to get your housing supports." And

then you had to hope that that individual, who was already dealing with some pretty tough times, was able to get to all those locations.

What we do now is we take the *Street Survival Guide* and we put it in one location to get everybody access to the help they need. Sometimes that's just having a warm place to sit and be able to talk to somebody who understands and can, you know, be an ear that you could talk to or a place that you could have a hot cup of coffee and understand what's taking place. Anybody who has been in the navigation centre has always enjoyed it, and we continue to have leaders from all over North America come to see the work that's taking place in the navigation centre and try to mimic it elsewhere.

I will stress again: can't do it without those partnerships, though.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister.  
Over to the Official Opposition.

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

**The Chair:** Blocked or shared?

**Ms Renaud:** Block.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. I was asking questions, Madam Chair, on 3.1 and 3.2, and I didn't hear one answer to any of the questions that I asked about AISH, about the definition of AISH. I asked about how many immigrants received AISH, or how many do they project will receive AISH in the coming year? I asked about fraud. I asked when we will see the definition of AISH. I asked about the 90 per cent increase in program planning and delivery, \$26 million since the ministry actually reduced the FTEs by three. My question was: who's going to do this work? Is that going to be contracted out? What will the procurement look like? Zero answers. Okay. Let's move on.

Canada disability benefit. After years of lobbying the feds, disabled Canadians were successful in getting the federal government to address the pressures related to disability poverty in Canada by creating the disability benefit. The disastrous rollout of this government of the clawback was so full of misinformation that it left people confused and fearful, and to this day there are people that are still struggling. They're getting letters saying: your AISH has been reduced because you didn't submit this form. That's happening. These are folks with barriers. Disability poverty includes specialized transportation, assistive devices, medical equipment, staffing costs, rent, sometimes, for an accessible unit. To make matters worse, call centres started calling people, and they could not even understand the instructions. They had to be home to get a call back – some people don't have cellphones – and all of this was to reduce AISH by \$200.

Now, here's my question: what percentage of AISH recipients is the ministry projecting will receive the Canada disability benefit in '26-27? How much less will be spent on AISH benefits in that same year because of this benefit clawback, and what is the projected total of the clawback? My next question: does this ministry stand by the rhetoric that AISH is generous enough and severely disabled Albertans don't actually need the extra \$200 specifically to address disability poverty? Next: had the CDB not been available to take away from severely disabled Albertans, what would the cost of AISH – so that would be line 3.2 – have been? Over the next three years how much is the department planning on receiving from the Canada disability clawback or savings due to the corresponding reduction?

What I find extraordinary about this is that the federal government made this extra pot of money available to people with

severe disabilities. Now, you know, this government is going to change that definition, so we don't actually know who we're talking about. Anyway, people on AISH right now are still severely disabled. This money was meant to be a cushion against poverty, and unless you know someone with a disability or understand the life that they live, I don't think people understand what \$200 can do. Now, do I think it was enough that the feds made available? Absolutely not. But \$200 is a game changer. It can be the difference between getting evicted, eating, getting your medication, getting glasses if you need them. It's everything when you are living in poverty, and for the leader of this government to stand up and say that people on AISH don't need an extra \$200 because AISH is generous enough is just sickening. The entitlement is just sickening, and disabled Albertans see all of you for what you're doing.

I'm going to go back to my questions because I'm guessing that the minister didn't actually hear them. I'm going to repeat them. I would like to know – we would like to know – what percentage of AISH recipients is the ministry projecting will be receiving Canada disability benefit in '26 and '27? And I would really like to know: why is it that this government believes that people with severe disabilities do not deserve the extra \$200?

Now, I'm kind of wary about moving on because this minister doesn't seem to be able to keep track of the questions, so we just get rhetoric. But it is what it is. I'm going to start my next line of questioning, and that's about the Appeals Secretariat. That is line 1.5. Now, the appeals panels in the '26-'27 budget estimate indicate an increase of \$3.7 million, or 92 per cent increase, to appeals panels. We know over the last few years that this government was informed of barriers within the appeal system and how to fix them. I would like to hear about that, any improvements that the department has made to improve accessibility in the Appeals Secretariat.

So here's my question: which social service and social benefit program will be covered by this adjudicative body in budget '26-'27? What is the total number of appeal hearings in the last fiscal and the projected number for this fiscal? Of the aggregate projected number how many are you anticipating for AISH? How many for income support and if you have any breakdowns for FSCD, PDD, or the seniors' benefit?

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member. That's your time.

Now over to the minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Madam Chair, you know, if the hon. member wants to have a policy debate, she's going to get a policy debate. I would suggest that if she wants to see more answers to her questions, she spend a little bit less time attacking and making things up about the government, that have to then be corrected by myself as the minister, and more specific questions. We'll be happy to answer them. I doubt that will happen, though.

I do want to focus on the accusation that staffing is being decreased in AISH, specifically. I don't know where the hon. member is coming up with that, but it's increased by 107 per cent for program delivery in AISH right now in this budget. Again, just making things up to make things up doesn't happen.

I want to circle back to the last block really quick, on fraud. There were 275 concluded investigations into a fraud issue associated with AISH in the last fiscal year; 109 charges were a result of those investigations, both criminal and/or regulatory, and 41 convictions to date. The department continues to do significant fraud work to make sure that our programs are not being abused and that we can continue to make sure those resources get to who needs them and make sure we're getting the best value that we can for our investment and, most importantly, that the money is getting to who

needs it, not to people who are committing fraud. I would suggest, Madam Chair, that to imply that the government should not do fraud investigations on programs that are \$1 billion plus or bigger would be not very smart and certainly not something that I would encourage.

I want to talk about this definition issue. Both people that are on AISH or ADAP going forward have severe disabilities. There is no disconnect on that issue. You're entering the government to receive supports because of your disability. You have to go through a medical process to make sure that you're assessed and that you have a disability. The difference between AISH and ADAP going forward is this. AISH is a severe disability that permanently prevents employment. ADAP will be a severe disability that sustainably impacts employment. Both of those issues require different solutions. It doesn't mean that anybody in either of those circumstances doesn't need support. In fact, we're saying the opposite. They do need support.

One of the real challenges with AISH, that, again, has been glossed over by the Official Opposition, is that there are a lot of people that face disabilities that could not get on to AISH because they did not meet that definition. By ADAP coming forward, it's going to give others who could not get on to AISH opportunities to be able to receive some level of support for the work that they're doing.

Now, the member keeps talking about the fact that the government says they have the most generous supports and that that's somehow a bad thing. I think the fact that Alberta has the highest supports in the country is something that we should be proud of. I don't understand why she would not be proud of that. I think some of the stuff that we see elsewhere in the country, frankly, is appalling by other provinces. You know, we pay on AISH \$690 per month higher than Manitoba, \$532 per month higher than Ontario, \$711 per month higher than Saskatchewan, and \$456 per month higher than B.C., all for their equivalent programs, none of which, by the way, have anything like ADAP. Anybody that is going to be able to enter our programs here in the province on ADAP would not be able to get on any program inside that province, so yes, that's something we should be proud of.

**4:10**

That does not mean that people in these circumstances are not struggling. It does not mean that we don't care about them. It's exactly the opposite. We care about the situation so much that we in this province decided to invest more than any other province inside this space, something that we should be really proud of.

I mean, again, you know, when the government of Alberta even in these tough economic times is spending \$3.7 billion specifically just on standing with the disability community, that is a strong, significant investment for the Alberta government, and it shows that we continue to be committed to this space going forward, and we are going to continue to do it. It's legislated. It's something that we think is important. It's why we're proud to be the government that indexed AISH benefits, as an example, and that we're bringing forward new programs to continue to be able to expand that process going forward.

Again, if you've got specific questions, we will do our best to answer, Madam Chair, but you've got to drop the rhetoric around it, and if not, I'm going to focus on responding to the false information that is coming from the Official Opposition. What's mostly appalling about it is it continues to provide fear inside the disability community that something is taking place that is not. I will respond each and every time to correct the record on that, and that will be my priority for my blocks if that's what the hon.

member chooses to do. If she would prefer to ask specific questions, my ears are open.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you so much, Minister. Please proceed. Blocked or shared time?

**Mr. Dyck:** Minister, are you okay with shared time?

**Mr. Nixon:** Of course.

**Mr. Dyck:** Excellent. Well, thank you so very much, through the chair. Minister, we both know that it has been about a over a decade now of failed Liberal governments. The cost of living has risen. The cost of gasoline has risen. Groceries have climbed. It's a serious issue, but we also know that this is really important to Albertans, that they're able to put nourishing food on their tables in order to be able to sustain their way of life and be able to actually get a good job and be able to go to work and be able to survive. I understand that Alberta's government over the last several years has provided food security funding to support multiple community organizations across Alberta.

I just want to confirm. This is on page 65 of the government estimates. Now, it says that the government invested \$112 million in community support services. Can you confirm that this continues to support Alberta's food security and confirm that it falls within the community support services line item?

**Mr. Nixon:** I can. In Budget 2026 we are maintaining food security funding. Within the community support services line on page 65 of the government estimates is where that would be located. Interestingly enough, we are also the only government that has actually invested in the food bank space. The only ministers of social services who ever invested in the food bank space all have my last name, but I can't take credit for starting it. My little brother was the first one to invest in it when he had this portfolio.

We have taken that money and tried to, as much as possible, partner with organizations like Food Banks Alberta and others and really try to focus on capacity building as a part of that to be able to make sure we could help expand the capacity of different food banks so they could be able to do their job better in the community. We've also made sure some of that money was focused on things like ethnic food and other areas where traditional food banks were not being able to get full access to it.

But to answer the hon. member's question, yes, it's there. I can confirm it, and it's on page 65 of the government's estimates.

**Mr. Dyck:** Excellent. Well, thank you very much, Minister, through the chair.

Minister, can you just expand upon any metrics that demonstrate the impact of Alberta's food security program? I think we have an organization in my community of Grande Prairie that has received some funding. It has been successful so far, and I would love to continue to see that. I do just want to hear any metrics that you have on how we can continue to see that expansion and what you're looking for.

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. We work closely, again, with Food Banks Alberta and their 112 members that are working all across the province, including in everybody's community that is around this table right now. Some of the things that we're looking at is the ability for them to be able to compound our investment to be able to get more food out to communities. From July 2024 to September 2025 Food Banks Alberta distributed over 3,800,720 pounds of food valued at more than \$13 million to food banks all across the province. Last year Food Banks Alberta supported nine member

food banks with \$100,000 in grants for emergency operating expenses, as another example, and these grants, obviously, continue to make sure that those food banks can do their important work inside the community. We really value that relationship and, again, try to empower Food Bank Alberta and their people and give them the resources they need to do the job. It's not the department's job to run food banks; it's the department's job to try to support those who are running food banks.

**Mr. Dyck:** Thanks, Minister, through the chair.

Minister, Alberta is a big place. There are multiple communities. It's not just a rural problem. It's not just an urban problem. It's across Alberta. Many communities are struggling with this. Can you expand just upon how you're ensuring that the food security funding is reaching the correct communities that are needing it?

**Mr. Nixon:** With our investment we prioritize rural communities at the advice of both Food Banks Alberta and the large food banks. Calgary and Edmonton, who need support – they do very important work – often have access to other supports, including donated food. You know, they can go to the football games and they will be able to get access to a larger amount of donations in that process.

A lot of what we do with the department money is try to make sure that we're getting to other places that may not have access to as many of those resources or to focus on other types of food banks, again, like a certain type of ethnic food that may be needed in other parts or portions of the province that may not get that same type of food that they may need that's culturally appropriate inside traditional food banks. Again, we work with Alberta Food Banks to try to distribute those resources across the province, focused on capacity and underfunded areas as best as we can.

**Mr. Dyck:** Excellent. Another question just on this area here, Minister, and thanks, Chair. Can you expand on how you're working with community partners? This is a key aspect, as you mentioned before. They're the ones distributing. Your department helps fund them, but how are you working with community partners and other levels of government to ensure food security supports are both sustainable and co-ordinated over the long term? I think both of those are super vital portions of this. I just want to make sure that those are continuing and going strong.

**Mr. Nixon:** Again, a lot of focus is on capacity itself, different type of pilot projects that food banks in portions of the province may not want to try without us helping with a little bit of the risk, and if they can get it established then we can move on to somewhere else. Infrastructure upgrades: that's what I mean by capacity building. I know in Rimbey, as an example, there were grants done to be able to make sure they could bring a different type of refrigeration they may need for the food bank. That has a much bigger long-term impact for the work that the food bank is doing in this space.

I know the ministry is also investing in supports for things like regional meetings and webinar focus groups to share information, share fundraising techniques, different things that are taking place within the food bank sector in general across the province.

**Mr. Dyck:** I appreciate that, Minister.

I'm going to switch. I'm going to hit on a different topic here that I think we often hear about it but isn't always front and centre. Once again, still on page 65, 6.3 shows that \$16.4 million is invested in family and community safety. In prior years my understanding is that this included the service dog program, and service dogs are pretty important for people with our community partners and those

people with visible and nonvisible disabilities: epilepsy, PTSD, diabetes, mobility limitations. There's quite a list of help that can be offered through these service dogs.

I understand there's more need all the time for this to support individuals, and also the benefits and increased quality of life that these service dogs provide is significant. Can you confirm the budget allocation to the service dog program and also elaborate on the value that you see in this program as well?

**Mr. Nixon:** I can. Every ADM that I have in my division all wants the service dog program. It's really important. I've had the privilege of having two ministries that involve dogs. In environment we had dogs chasing zebra mussels, and then over here we have service dogs. It's pretty extraordinary what these dogs can do and their impact to Albertans who need them.

Budget 2026 provides \$400,000 in funding for the service dog grant program. That program: what it does is that it ensures access to qualified service dogs so people with disabilities have the opportunity to ultimately use that dog to help get a job or go to school or access services or participate in their community. Qualified service dogs support people with a variety of disabilities, as the member alluded to. These range from mobility issues, autism, sensory impairment such as hearing and, of course, vision, and posttraumatic stress and operational stress injuries. As of January 31, 2026, since the service dog qualification regulation came into effect in 2018, eight hundred and thirty-six ID cards have been issued to qualified service dogs, which includes 372 owner trained dogs and 464 dogs that have been produced by qualified organizations. In '25-26 the service dog program certified 131 new service dogs in Alberta, and year over year the service dog program certifies between 100 and 200 new service dogs a year.

4:20

**Mr. Dyck:** Thanks for the stats, Minister.

Now, one of the key aspects of this program, I understand, too, is that the organizations play a significant role. Can you expand just on those organizations themselves, what their role is, and then also what the process is on receiving a dog, too? I don't know, and I'm actually kind of curious on this one.

**Mr. Nixon:** There are 15 qualified service providers located in the province. We don't train dogs. You're correct. Twelve are working on the minister's qualified list, and then three assist dog international schools with locations in the province. One of these schools also has International Guide Dog Federation accreditation. Under Alberta's Service Dogs Act and service dog qualification regulations organizations listed on the government of Alberta's qualified list may train, produce, or assess service dogs for public access and eligibility.

I don't think we have enough time to bring the ADM up, but she'd be quite happy to talk with you about the process of getting dogs. It comes from a variety of different processes. I mean, the Lions, for example, are a major fundraiser to be able to help make sure that people get dogs, but those dogs need to be trained to a standard and they need to be qualified. It's not just about trying to get funding to help people get dogs, which is an important part of it, but it's also making sure that you build an appropriate training and qualification process for those animals to, one, make sure that they can provide the service that the individual needs, and then, obviously, there's a whole bunch of overlap, safety issues and stuff, because of where service dog can go. We've got to make sure that the standards and the training are up to snuff.

**Mr. Dyck:** I appreciate all that, Minister. Thanks for the answers.

**The Chair:** That's our time, Member.

Back over to the Official Opposition. Blocked or shared?

**Ms Renaud:** Blocked.

**The Chair:** Please proceed.

**Ms Renaud:** Going back to the last few questions I asked: again no answers. Not even one. My questions are very specific. They relate to line 3.2. How many people left AISH last year because they left, moved out of the province, died, whatever reason? How many people left AISH last year, turning 65 or whatever?

Next question: how much was clawed back so far in last year for the Canada disability benefit, and how much is the ministry projecting that they will claw back? How much will they reduce AISH because of the Canada disability benefit? Again, line 3.2.

I asked very specifically: how many immigrants receive AISH? The Premier was pretty clear that immigrants were driving up the cost of social services. How many?

Saying that, you know, "We haven't really done anything; we really didn't change the definition; you're severely disabled; it's not changing" is incredibly ableist. It's actually shocking to hear that this government has decided that a certain group that they're labelling as severely disabled: they have decided that they're just unemployable. That's it; you're kind of a writeoff. The other group: yeah, they can work, and they can earn more money.

And I'm telling you this not because this is how I feel; this is the feedback from the disability community. I will tell you that the fear that is out there is not because I'm saying anything. It's fear. It's fear of the unknown. They can't answer a simple question: what is the definition of severe disability that will cause you to be eligible for AISH? It's a simple question. When will they get that? All of these changes are based on that one simple fact that we can't get an answer for, but the minister will give us rhetoric for, you know, 10 minutes saying: I can't answer that because it's not specific.

**Mr. Lundy:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

**Ms Renaud:** These questions are specific.

**The Chair:** Members, a point of order has been called. Please proceed.

**Mr. Lundy:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to raise a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j). Frankly, it's probably been applicable to every single word the member opposite said this afternoon. It's quite clear that she's here making accusations against the minister, against the Premier. She used the term "rhetoric" numerous times. I find that incredibly rich. The member opposite feels entitled to use the estimate process to tee off and go after the government and then gets offended when presented with facts. This is clearly a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j).

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**Member Irwin:** No, this is clearly not a point of order. In fact, we've been quite, I guess, restrained and I've been quite restrained in not calling points of order against that very minister for his rhetoric. I can tell you quite clearly that using the term "rhetoric" is certainly not a point of order. I would encourage the minister to be as respectful as we're trying to be towards him in asking questions, and I would like us to continue on with this debate.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you so much, members. It's been a pleasure listening to both sides. We're going to be here for a very

long time this afternoon, and I would like to hear some very thoughtful questions and some very thoughtful answers, so if we could just bring the temperature down a little bit. Just be considerate to one another. Focus on the budget.

Let's proceed.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. It would be great if we could get some answers. One year ago this ministry announced a massive overhaul of AISH under the guise of employment without much detail. Now, we saw it trickle out for months. We still don't know what is the definition of severe disability to qualify for AISH. Disabled Albertans, people that love and support them want their questions answered. They want to know what the new criteria for AISH eligibility will be and why the ministry thinks slapping a permanent unemployable label on someone is helpful in any way at all. They want to know why they are being moved, why they will lose the ability to appeal, and why they were not included in the process of designing the new program.

Very specifically, very simply, they want to know who was consulted specifically, because the people that I spoke to and, actually, people that reached out to me said, "How can I get involved? How can I give a submission?" and I said, "I don't know, because this government doesn't like to share that information." So here are a few questions. Well, actually, I was going to ask this question, but we saw the ministry release something yesterday, so it answered a few of my questions. I was going to ask what assumptions are made about the number of individuals on ADAP and the number of individuals on AISH that would allow for line 3.2, financial assistance grants, to cost \$1.6 billion, which is a significant reduction.

Now, I know people over 60, people that live in a facility, people that are palliative, or this government has decided are severe – I don't really know what that means – they're saying that, no, they'll be fine. They're going to stay on AISH. So they're making decisions about who's going to go there, but they're not clearly saying: this is the new eligibility. That is a problem. Will 100 per cent of AISH recipients who are moved to ADAP, which is \$200 less than AISH, all get the new \$200 ADAP grant? If not, what criteria will be used to decide who gets that?

According to the ministry's '24-25 annual report on page 38 to 42 they're spending \$81 million on career and information services. CEIS is their acronym. Based on the work outcomes reporting project – they have another acronym, and it's WORP – 67 per cent of Albertans found that they found employment three months after taking exposure courses, doing a placement or a workshop. With a reported 14,146 unique Albertans using CEIS and a 67 per cent success rate, we have a significant employment deficit. Add to that a 6 per cent unemployment rate and a lack of even basic accessibility legislation, and a picture is emerging.

Now the Premier will brag that 30 people in a program were placed, again spewing the last thing she heard without context, but we don't have real information about what the jobs plan looks like. We don't even have basic information about what is the criteria to qualify for old AISH or AISH or new AISH or whatever you're going to call it.

The other budget estimate lines that include some sort of employment support did not receive a significant increase, so we're left believing that a \$62 million investment in job readiness and training will be sufficient to help tens of thousands of severely disabled Albertans currently on AISH. This is really lack of realistic planning.

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

We'll head over to the minister now for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Madam Chair, I'm sure for a few moments there I thought we might get some questions through that segment that didn't turn into a policy debate, not a budget debate, and the hon. member insulting many members of the Legislature, but I was wrong. You know, I did find it ironic though, and I do think that it's important that we respond to this ableist comment, which is deeply offensive and highly inappropriate, but it's also ironic coming from a member and a party that are fighting against a program being implemented that is dedicated to helping disability people enter the workforce. I mean, I know some members around this table are nodding their head trying to square that round hole, but you get that with the NDP.

I mean, you know, to come into this process and make comments like that and then ask for your questions to get answered is quite bizarre because, again, we have to spend our time refuting the inappropriate and wrong things that the member is saying. I will try to answer a couple of the questions, but again I will encourage the member if she would drop the policy debate and actually get talking about the budget. What is before you right now, Madam Chair, isn't a policy debate about ADAP. What is before you is the budget of the Department of Assisted Living and Social Services, one of the highest budgets in the province, who is getting ready to spend \$3.7 billion supporting the disability community, the line item which increases by \$92 million, all part of a line item that is increased by \$1 billion, or 38 per cent, since 2019. That's what the budget is. If you'd like to ask questions about that, I'm happy to answer them. This government is going to continue to invest – and that's what this budget does – heavily into disability supports to support the disability community in our province.

4:30

Any accusation that ADAP has not been consulted on is also outrageous. There have been town halls held by the minister, town halls held by the department. There have been town halls held by the Premier's council on disability services. There have been town halls held by the disability advocate, somebody that the hon. member, unfortunately, said looked like a hostage, whatever that means. An individual who's disabled in a wheelchair, I don't think we should be talking about how he looks in a disparaging way. It doesn't make any sense. But it has been widely consulted on across the system and, as a result of that consultation, changes have been made to the process, which the member referred to yesterday, to make the system better, taking that feedback that we received very, very seriously to be able to make sure that we can make that program better.

There are two ways you could do it, Madam Chair. You could do it the way the NDP did it, which was make programs behind closed doors and then just launch them and that's that, or you could do it the way we did it with ADAP, which is say: this is our goal, but we want to sit down over a period of time to be able to make sure that we can have this accomplished.

I do want to talk about the second part of the budget that the hon. member keeps missing when it comes to ADAP, and that's the \$246.8 million investment in career and employment services. We do believe that people that face disabilities that want to enter the workforce should enter the workforce. We are not going to go with that rhetoric and say that there can only be one program and that people that face disabilities cannot work. We fundamentally reject that.

Madam Chair, if you want to have a policy debate, that's the difference in policy. The Official Opposition seems to want to keep only one disability program that results in people not being able to work at all, and we believe there needs to be two programs because 1 in 5 Albertans face disabilities and they're not all the same. People

face very different circumstances and sometimes need different support. I just find it absolutely stunning that the Official Opposition would continue to fight against that and use just such inappropriate language like that.

But, again, Madam Chair, I'm here to defend my budget, and my budget invests \$3.7 billion in income supports. I would ask the hon. members why they didn't do that when they were in power. That's what's in our budget. If they have some specific questions about the budget, not a debate about ADAP policy, we will do our best to answer them if we could figure it out between all of the rhetoric that is coming from the Official Opposition as they try to debate their individual thoughts and feelings about the policy division of the government. In the meantime we'll see where these questions go in the future.

We're very, very proud to be the province that pays the highest disability support payments anywhere in the country, and I'm proud of Alberta taxpayers for continuing to prioritize this and invest that level of support in supporting the disability community.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's the time.

Please proceed, Member. Blocked or shared?

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to have shared time with the minister if it's okay with the minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** You bet.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Minister. I wish to acknowledge the minister and the entire team for your continued commitment to enhancing the safety and overall quality of life of Albertans with special attention to our seniors in Alberta.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, my question is on elder abuse prevention. Protecting our older Albertans is critical to the health and well-being of our communities. I see that on page 33 of the ALSS 2026-2029 business plan key objective 1.7 is to prevent and address elder abuse by raising awareness, supporting co-ordinated community responses, and collaborating with government and community-based partners. Under the initiatives supporting key objectives it says, "in 2026-27, \$4.1 million is allocated through grants to prevent elder abuse." My question is: what actions will the government be taking to reach this objective? I understand that Budget 2026's \$4.1 million investment into elder abuse prevention builds upon the work your ministry has been doing. What are the outcomes you have seen from these efforts so far?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks for the question. The member is right. We are investing \$4.1 million towards prevention and supports for older adults that are experiencing elder abuse in the province. That's actually just shy of a \$100,000 increase this year.

I'll give you a couple of examples of where that money would go: \$1.52 million to the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council to support co-ordinated community response networks; \$1.7 million for the Unison Elder Abuse Shelter in Calgary and the Sage Senior Safe House in Edmonton; \$840,000 to the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, again, for the safe spaces program. Also to them \$50,000 to enhance the Indigenous resource liaison grant in that space.

The process here is about co-ordinating community response programs. Communities actually hire an elder abuse caseworker who leads the local co-ordinated community response and provides supports and referrals to older adults that are experiencing these types of circumstances.

We also, in our province, currently have two shelters for older adults that are fleeing abuse in Calgary and Edmonton, with a total

of 25 beds available across both shelters. In Calgary the Unison Elder Abuse Shelter has 14 shelter beds. In Edmonton the Sage Senior Safe House has seven shelter beds plus four transitional suites that work inside this space, and it continues across multiple budget years. I also think it's been a unique way to use our lodge program, to try to help with individuals that are facing elder abuse that traditional domestic violence shelters probably would not work for, so this is able to make sure that we can capitalize on that resource and to be able to keep care of people.

The Alberta co-ordinated community response program, as I said, is also unique across Canada. It ensures that older adults have access to local supports that are tailored specifically to their needs.

ALSS's multiyear commitment to funding this program has enabled the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council to build capacity in communities across Alberta and ensure that more older adults have access to supports when and where they need it. Funding in 2025 and '26 allowed councils to expand support from 20 to 25 of these councils in both rural and urban areas across the province. Case managers in these areas worked with over 900 older adults across the province, providing direct services and supports 5,600 times and more than 2,600 referrals to other services. Survey results for older adults who work with elder abuse case managers show that the program is making a difference in the lives of older adults; 81 per cent said that the program improved their safety, which is the main goal, obviously, of the program.

Alberta's two elder abuse shelters ensure that older adults have a safe place to go when they're fleeing abuse. In the first three quarters of '25-26, the fiscal year that we're in now, these shelters provided emergency housing to 74 clients, including 53 admissions. Shelters worked with over 100 clients through their outreach programs and responded to more than 900 calls for information and support.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

My next set of questions is on seniors aging in place, SHARP. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, supporting seniors to age safely and independently in their own homes is an important part of building healthy and sustainable communities across Alberta. Many seniors prefer to remain in their homes as they age, and programs that support home safety and accessibility play a key role in making that possible.

I see on page 66 of the budget, line 7.3 shows \$1.565 million allocated to the seniors home adaptation and repair program, SHARP. This program plays an important role in supporting seniors to age safely and independently in their own homes by providing low-interest loans for home repairs and accessibility adaptations, and by helping seniors make necessary modifications such as improved accessibility, safety upgrades, and essential repairs.

**4:40**

SHARP also helps reduce pressure on the continuing care system by delaying or preventing the need for more intensive support. Can the minister please outline how this funding will ensure that seniors continue to access timely home repairs and adaptations? And how is this ministry ensuring that SHARP remains accessible to seniors across the province, including those in rural and smaller communities?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. Thanks for that. The SHARP grant, that you're referencing on page 66, is for low-income seniors who do not qualify for the SHARP loan program due to insufficient equity in their homes and can only be used for basic or essential home repairs. But if you go to page 67, you can see the SHARP loan program, which is referenced there. That's \$8 million that's

allocated to SHARP, which can be used for accessible safety upgrades and broader ranges of home improvements to be able to help people remain home.

That program offers low-interest loans to ensure seniors have access to funds that enable senior homeowners to make renovations that can improve accessibility, address necessary safety upgrades, and make other needed home repairs. Eligible seniors can access up to \$40,000 in loans. Those loans and incurred interest do not need to be repaid until the senior sells their home. The interest rate is equivalent to prime lending rate and simple interest, not compound interest. Using the prime lending rate with simple interest charge keeps the program sustainable by off-setting the government's cost of funding and administering the loans while still providing senior homeowners a more advantaged rate that is available to them, that they would not receive if they were trying to go to the open loan market.

How we're ensuring that SHARP remains accessible to seniors is that the program itself is particularly helpful to address some of the unique needs of rural seniors. For example, a senior may seek a loan to dig a well, install a septic tank, or address safety and security concerns by repairing or replacing fencing or gates on larger rural properties. It's very accessible in that type of a space, recognizing that not all Albertans remain in urban areas.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Minister. If you could please expound on what types of home adaptations or repairs are most commonly supported through SHARP, and how do these upgrades help seniors remain safely housed?

**Mr. Nixon:** Typically – oh, sorry.

**Mr. Singh:** Just another question since we're there.

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. Go ahead.

**Mr. Singh:** How does SHARP align with broader government objectives around aging in place, reducing continuing care demands, and supporting seniors' independence? Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** SHARP is an important tool for our main goal, which is trying to make sure that everybody remains in the place that they are best to be for their unique circumstances. People who want to remain at home for as long as possible end up helping the government by not taking up space inside acute-care, as an example. It's also better, obviously, for those individuals to remain in their home for as long as possible, and SHARP is one of the tools that we use to do that.

Some examples of common programs are house roof repair and replacement, window upgrades, furnace replacement, flooring replacement, and, of course, bathroom repairs, adaptation, those type of things that you would need to be able to make the house more accessible. Typically, the program provides in Alberta around 430 loans per year at an average of about \$12,000 per loan. Again, it can be used for a variety of different reasons; \$1.6 million has also been allocated to SHARP to provide grants to help low-income senior homeowners who are not eligible for loans with basic home repairs as well. So it's just one of our programs in a suite of programs designed to help people be able to age in place.

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

To the Official Opposition, block or shared?

**Ms Renaud:** Block. Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Ms Renaud:** Going back to more of the unanswered questions on – what is it? – line 2.3 on page 65. I've heard the minister say a number of times today: just a massive investment in career and employment services, \$246 million. But, really, all that's changing this year is \$62 million. Now, I'm not saying \$62 million is something to sneeze at. It's not. It's a significant investment, but that brings the total up to what the minister was talking about. We already were investing almost \$200,000 in career and employment services that actually had a target of, well, first it was 65 per cent; then it was 67 per cent success following three months of finishing the program, that you would be successfully employed. So 67 per cent success.

Now, if these programs were so successful that you're going to, you know, dump more money into, we wouldn't really have the problem that you're describing – would we? – about people with disabilities not having the jobs that they needed. And there's a reason for that because these programs are not specifically only for people with disabilities. It's all kinds of people that have difficulty finding and keeping employment. So naturally, you know, their expertise is not going to only be for people with disabilities.

This morning I heard the minister say that there were 64 service providers that they found that were specifically going to be looking at working with people with disabilities. So I guess my question is: of the 64, can you tell us a bit about the procurement process that you used for those contracts and tell us how many of those organizations were supporting people to find and maintain employment two years ago, let's say? If the minister could answer those questions, that would be lovely.

Now, the other question I had that the minister again refused to answer because he said it was rhetoric. On page 160 of the fiscal plan, if you look at the full-time equivalent chart, you'll see that in the ministry that we're talking about here, they reduced their workforce by two FTEs. As you will recall, my question was that this ministry increased program planning and delivery by 90 per cent – that's line 2.1 – by \$26 million. That's a whole lot of administration when you've lost two staff. So my question was: who's going to do this work of program planning and delivery? Is it just going to be staff doing just more work with the same money? Are you going to contract out? Or can you tell us a little bit about that procurement process? That would be lovely.

Okay, going back to my comments about ADAP. So the minister says: "ADAP, you know, it'll be great. People can work." Listen, I want to be clear. I've said this a number of times, but I don't know, the minister likes to put words in our mouth. I think employment for people that can work and that want to work is vitally important. I think it's incredibly important.

In fact, you know, I'm on Public Accounts, and I think there are some people around the table that are also on that committee. I think that I bore the hell out of people because I'm always asking questions about accessibility and pathways to employment, whether it's Advanced Education or JET or whatever it is. I'm talking about, like, what are you doing? Has this ministry talked to you about opening pathways here? I hear the aeronautic field is looking for more people. Here's an ideal group of people that might be able to be trained. So I'm asking questions all the time, and what I get is the same answer: "Yeah. No, we don't really do that. We don't have that data." In fact, I would suggest postsecondary education. They don't even track people with disabilities that graduate, how successful they are at getting employment. So when the government says: "No, trust us. We're going to dump \$62 million. It'll be great." We have questions about that. It's unfortunate this minister won't answer them.

Anyway, the \$62 million in line 2.4 in government estimates, career and employment supports. Okay. We've already established

that people that get PDD, people that are severe, people that are palliative, people that are over 60 are going to be fine. They're going to stay with AISH. So let's say about half stay with ADAP. That means 40,000 people are going to need to find some work or something to keep their income up to where they're used to because if it drops under where it is right now, which is just over \$1,900, a lot of people will lose their homes. A lot of people won't eat.

Assuming that people with severe disabilities can actually keep a job – we don't have time to talk about that. What happens around episodic disabilities? What happens then? They get the job, they maintain the job, but then six months later, MS. You know what? It's episodic. That's what happens. It continues to get worse, and then maybe that happens. What happens? Do they get to go and apply to go on AISH again or maybe appeal that decision? No, because those rules have changed. But you know, again, we don't know what the definition of severe disabilities is to qualify for AISH. We're still waiting for that basic question to be answered.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member. We'll head over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** First, let's start with the – you know you're an NDP MLA when you start calling 60-some million dollars not a very significant investment or a quarter billion dollars to the departments investing in this space. But I digress on that as well, Madam Chair. You have to take into account this year that that increased just in this budget. You have to go to the previous year where we doubled that investment and have now continued in this space and bringing both of those investments together to make sure that we can continue to support those on ADAP.

4:50

I will have the ADM in a moment focus on the procurement question, but I do want to again go back, Madam Chair, for the committee's sake just to point out, in my mind, the outrageousness of trying to imply that large numbers of people cannot participate in the workforce. In Alberta we have the highest employment rate for disabilities within the entire country, 53 per cent, something we should be proud of. Alberta has the highest hourly earning rate for employed persons with disabilities, \$33.60 an hour. The reality is that individuals with disabilities can participate in the workforce. Not all of them can, which is why we have AISH, but many can, and unfortunately underneath the NDP and other governments before the existence of ADAP those individuals would not receive any supports.

This is actually expanding beyond AISH, something the hon. member continues to forget about. There will be individuals now who are going to be able to receive ADAP that would have come for help when they got disability underneath the NDP government and got no help. This will expand disability supports pretty significantly inside this space.

Just before I go to the ADM on the procurement process, I also just want to emphasize what will happen if situations change. AISH and ADAP have been designed specifically to deal with that. That's something that we have taken into consideration. Once you go through the application process and it's determined whether your disability prevents any employment or that you could participate in an employment situation, we recognize that circumstances change. You will remain on disability supports with the government forever. You will not have to reapply if you're on ADAP, and if your situation changes, you'll be moved into AISH. There's a reality that in some circumstances, I don't think a lot, you may want to move off AISH for a period of time back to ADAP. The lady who I talked about a couple of blocks back would be one of those

circumstances, but she needs to know that she's got that safety net to be able to make it back to AISH, which is what this program does, plus, of course, secures those health benefits for life.

Marika, if you could on the procurement question. The floor is yours.

**Ms Giesen:** Sure. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, through the chair, hon. member. I'll speak a little bit about our procurement process for disability employment services, but I do want to just make a comment also about that overall investment of \$246 million. Over half of that investment will be dedicated and targeted for employment supports that support Albertans with disabilities, including ADAP clients. Over \$130 million of that \$246 million investment will be dedicated for ADAP and disability employment services.

In terms of our approach to procurement I know that the minister referenced the 64 agreements that we are working to have in place for July 1 so that we have the capacity, the reach across the province and the range of services to support our ADAP clients. Those have been procured through open competitive procurement through Alberta Purchasing Connection as well as unsolicited proposals from service providers that are presenting innovative approaches and opportunities and that are demonstrating experience and expertise supporting Albertans with barriers and in particular individuals with disabilities.

We also had a province-wide expansion of our work-based learning projects. We collect data with a lot of rigour around outcomes related to our career and employment investments, so we're able to identify which service providers have demonstrated real success in terms of time to employment for the individuals that they're supporting and the ability for individuals to progress in small, incremental but meaningful ways towards employment and reduce some of their barriers. We are using that evidence to select service providers as well as through that competitive procurement. Just to clarify, we also amended and expanded existing agreements with service providers who were demonstrating that success through our time working with them and particularly building out services specific to the ADAP population.

**The Chair:** All right. That's our time.

Let's take a five-minute break, everybody.

[The committee adjourned from 4:54 p.m. to 5:01 p.m.]

**The Chair:** All right. Well, let's resume, everyone. We're on to the government side.

Actually, you can't be at the table. Let's proceed. Only you guys have the privilege; they do not.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Good to go?

**The Chair:** Government members, it's time to go.

**Mrs. Johnson:** All right. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you again to the minister and to his staff for really enduring with us. We're into the final hour and a bit here. I'm surprised that we haven't broached this subject yet, so I'm going to do so. We're going to talk about the assisted living navigation portal. Navigating this continuing care system can be complex for seniors and their families, particularly when trying to understand the different options available and how to access them. Improving access to clear, centralized information is an important step in helping Albertans make informed decisions about their care.

Page 83 of the fiscal plan identifies that health-related assisted living and continuing care services account for \$5.9 billion of your

ministry's total expense. Alberta's government recently announced the assisted living navigation portal as a one-stop shop for Albertans and their families to locate, learn about, and access the assisted living options that are available to them. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: could you maybe just define that term first, the assisted living navigation portal, just for clarity? How will this portal empower Albertans to make informed choices about their care with their families?

**Mr. Nixon:** One of the things that we found most shocking as we got into the health refocusing was just how little understanding Alberta Health Services had of any assets that they owned and how little work had been done to assess those assets. I know Minister Jones and others have talked about it when it comes to hospitals. It was no different when it came to continuing care facilities. There was no list of all of the almost 30,000 beds that exist in the province. We actually had to go out and get some outside help to be able to go and put up phone banks and be able to get a hold of every provider, get a list of them and build a concrete list of what was out there. That allowed us to get a good handle on vacancies and other things and be able to make sure that we are using the assets.

It was interesting, Madam Chair. We actually ended up finding empty beds and beds that nobody knew were there despite the fact that we may have been paying for them. We really took what the housing division knows through the lodge program and used some of those tools to bring to bear on that. Now that has allowed us to, one, make sure that we're utilizing all of our capacity at the moment and then also to plan our expansion for continuing care in the best way possible to make sure we're going to be able to service Albertans, particularly with our large aging rate right now in the province.

Now, the goal of the portal is to be able to take that process that we did internally and then make it available both to Albertans at large but also to those who care for Albertans at large. The first phase of the portal was to take every continuing care space and provider into one location as well as our lodge program, which is not continuing care but also has overlap, obviously, in that space. Somebody can now log on and/or their caregiver can now log on to that process. They can either go through a map around where they live so they can see all that's available or they can take a questionnaire about their unique circumstances. For example, you're on there trying to help your mother; you could say that she's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, she has a mobility issue, whatever the circumstance will be through that questionnaire, and that will pop up the appropriate facilities that may be available for mom or grandma.

Our goal now that we've launched it is to also then start to expand it beyond that to include other services besides continuing care and the lodge program. Home care eventually will probably go on there, and we're hoping to expand things that we've already talked about today, other types of senior support programs that may be available in the province and then to add an application process to it as well. Right now you can't do that. You can just see, and then you have to contact us or the providers, but our next evolution of that will hopefully be that you can then apply for that service that you would need through that portal. Basically it takes all the information that we have in the province, we can see exactly what's going on, and then it allows Albertans to be able to see what resources may or may not be available for their unique circumstances.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Mrs. Johnson:** Oh, beautiful. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister for that.

I want to follow up a little bit on this. You mentioned continuing care and supported living accommodations. Could you again provide us with some clarity on what those two terms mean, maybe even for those who are watching, and that that is going to be confirmed that that will be on this portal? How is the ministry ensuring that this navigation portal is accessible and user friendly for seniors and their families? I think we talked about this a little bit today, that we're not all tech savvy. Although some 96-year-old grandmas, or 79-year-old grandmas in our family, are very tech savvy, they aren't all there. Does this include those with limited digital literacy or access to technology? How is the success of this portal going to be measured, particularly in helping Albertans navigate this system more efficiently and to access appropriate care in a timely manner for them?

**Mr. Nixon:** I'll start with the question, Madam Chair, on the difference between continuing care and lodge care. Continuing care is essentially housing with medical supports. Lodge care is affordable housing. If you go to my constituency – Madam Chair, I am the hon. member's MLA – and if you go into Bentley, her hometown, it would be like the lodge just outside of Bentley there. That's affordable housing. That's not a continuing care facility. Traditionally a continuing care facility would have had services provided by AHS and/or a contractor. Now a continuing care facility would be having services provided by Assisted Living Alberta and/or a contractor of Assisted Living Alberta. So essentially when you hear ALA, you hear AHS in the continuing care context.

If you drive up the street from your farm to Rimbey and go to the Rimbey Lodge, you would see both taking place inside that facility. You have one building. A portion of it is affordable housing for the senior lodge program, and a portion would be being provided by an ALA contractor for continuing care. Obviously, the difference is the level of medical supports that you need for that bed, which comes with a higher level of staffing and a higher level of compensation to be able to care for your health needs, where the affordable housing is about making sure that fixed income seniors can have a place to live in their community that fits with their individual circumstances along those lines.

Madam Chair, I forgot the second question, so maybe the member . . .

**Mrs. Johnson:** Technology.

**Mr. Nixon:** Oh, technology. Yes.

Look, the department put a lot of effort into making the portal use plain language, be very easy to use. I've tested it out a few times. It's pretty user friendly. It's built off a framework that is not very complicated. The questionnaires are fairly easy. But you're right; not everybody is going to be tech savvy, though, as we talked about this morning, we're seeing significant increases in seniors utilizing technology over time. It's also designed not necessarily for just the senior, right? If you're entering a circumstance where you have a loved one where you're going to have to make decisions for them and you're trying to help them navigate that, it's also designed that you can do that with them. Also, over time, hopefully, medical providers, seniors support services, FCSS, or other things inside the community who are working with somebody trying to get them access to the best supports could also access it for them.

This doesn't stop the other traditional methods that we already have existing within the department to be able to get access to services, but it streamlines the entire process so we can see what's taking place. For the vast majority of Albertans it will make their interaction simpler and more effective.

5:10

**Mrs. Johnson:** Well, thank you again, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister.

In the remaining time we have I will quickly touch on Assisted Living Alberta, as you just mentioned with ALA. This goes back to page 37 of the business plan, and this is showing a budget of nearly \$5.3 billion. This significant investment reflects the central role ALA plays in delivering assisted living, home care, and continuing care services to seniors and vulnerable Albertans across our province. As demand for assisted living and continuing care continues to grow, it's important to understand how these budget investments are being directed to expand capacity, support aging in place, strengthen the transition of care, and ensure a stable, skilled workforce that is capable of meeting Albertans' evolving care needs. Could the minister elaborate on the funding provided to ALA under the budget and identify the investments made to support Albertans with their assisted living care needs?

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

**Mr. Nixon:** The budget itself is \$5 billion in that space. Of that, about \$3.62 billion is allocated to continuing care homes and community-based services, about \$1.1 billion is allocated to deliver home-care services, and the rest is a mixture of other programs and administrative costs that are associated with, obviously, running that aspect of the health care system.

Assisted Living Alberta works very closely with a significant number of partners that they end up providing contracts through that money to be able to provide services in the system. We are continuing since September to see it integrate very well with the department and seeing some really exciting results now for people interacting with the continuing care system. The result of that decision is a large aspect of the health care system that was often forgotten is now receiving the dedication that it needs, which is going to be absolutely critical for the future of the province.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Over to the Official Opposition. Blocked or shared?

**Ms Renaud:** Block. Thank you.

I'm going to ask a fourth time. Line 2.1: there's a 90 per cent increase in program planning and delivery, a \$26 million increase. This ministry didn't add any more FTEs, actually reduced by two, so what will this be used for? Will this be in-house? Will this be contracts? What will this be used for? That is a question.

Okay. Next I'm going to go to family supports for children with disabilities, and for your reference, I'm going to be referring to the statement made on page 71 of the Budget '26 fiscal plan and line 4.4 in government estimates. Since 2021 we've not been able to access the FSCD wait-list on open data. At the time, the last time I saw it, it was at 4,400 people waiting for services. Now, we have no idea right now how many children and families have been unable to procure a contract for services with this government, but we can see that the number of children with contracts has shrunk 7.5 per cent over the last five years.

Over the last five years there are 7.5 per cent fewer people with an FSCD contract than there were before. That's alarming, because at that time that's when the wait-list started – it just vanished. We used to know how many people were waiting for service in 2021, and now we see there's been a decline, 7 and a half per cent lower. That's interesting given the Premier's comments about people moving here for programs. More rhetoric that is just based on – I don't know – some story the last person told her. I don't know.

Alberta has one of the fastest growth rates among Canadian provinces. We know that, with almost 600,000 more people in the last five years. If I'm not mistaken, the UCP spent about \$10 million with Alberta Is Calling. This was by design, from lobbying the feds for higher immigration numbers and Alberta Is Calling financial incentives, and people came. When people come, they bring their families. They tend to bring their families, and often people with families have kids with disabilities. We know that. I think the government's own estimates are somewhere between 25 and 27 and a half per cent of Albertans live with a disability. That's significant.

I listened to the Premier insinuate that social services like FSCD were being accessed by immigrants, who are the latest target for this government, yet this ministry clearly states that to qualify for FSCD, the child must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident. Next up we heard musings that people were literally moving here because our social services were so great, yet this government's own documents show a downward trend in caseload numbers. It is just ridiculous. It's ridiculous rhetoric.

On page 71 of the fiscal plan the UCP government tells us there are \$178 million in lapses due to lower caseload growth. The same government chose to stop reporting on the number of children and families waiting for services in '21, so we're just supposed to believe them. I know my office is flooded with e-mails and calls from families who can't get a contract. Is the department saying that there were \$178 million in lapses due to lower caseload growth because the need was lower, or was it that the department chose to reduce the number of people that they support?

My next question is: would the minister help me understand why his boss would say so many people are coming to Alberta to use our social service programs, but his ministry documents say otherwise? I don't understand that. Almost every day there's a new statement. First, it's immigrants. We know that's not true because it's in the government documents what you need to qualify. Then we heard: oh, it's rampant fraud. We know that's not true because it's a fraction of 1 per cent. Next it's, you know, people are moving here to access services. We know that's not true because the numbers have consistently gone down. So it's rhetoric. Like, look at your own documents.

We know that when kids are not getting the early intervention they need, there is going to be a cost. There's a cost to education. They are going to require more complex supports. When you are not intervening when they're very young, the cost comes later. We know that when they're not getting the early intervention, FSCD is going to continue, and then when they turn 18, PDD is going to be their reality. Perhaps it didn't have to be, but that's what happens when you mess up early intervention.

And we don't even know – I can't even ask questions about, "Is this amount sufficient?" because I don't know how many people actually qualified for the services because it's legislated. I don't know how many people qualified, how many people are still waiting, have been approved and waiting. The latest excuse was: we're waiting for a caseworker. That just means they're waiting for services. That just means the child and the family are not getting the supports they need. What is the wait-list number? How many children are waiting?

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Member.

Now over to the minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, I mean, if we're going to add to the budget debate process – I'm fine with it – things that people's bosses say or are doing, let's talk about why the hon. member's boss raised taxes in Calgary by 82 per cent or didn't bother to fix the water pipes . . .

**Member Irwin:** Point of order.

**Mr. Nixon:** . . . and spent more money on art programs. I thought we were talking about what our bosses said. I'm confused.

**The Chair:** Sorry to interrupt, Minister. A point of order has been called.

Go ahead, Member.

**Member Irwin:** Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, that's a great example of a point of order. This member, under 23(b), is speaking to a matter . . .

**Mr. Nixon:** It's (h), (i), and (j).

**Member Irwin:** . . . other than – no – the question under discussion, actually. Thanks. Good try there, Minister.

Yeah. I would say this is clearly a point of order, and for this minister to continue to claim that the hon. MLA for St. Albert is not engaging in budget discussion is absolutely false. She repeatedly referred to line items there. She repeatedly asked specific, pointed questions of this minister around his ministry's budget, so I would urge you to call a point of order on this matter, Chair, and I would urge the minister to be more respectful and attempt to answer the clear budget questions under discussion.

**Mr. Getson:** Yeah. Chair, I appreciate the other member's position on calling a point of order, but this is clearly not a point of order. I think the chair has been charitable, quite honestly, to allow for the type of conjecture or preamble or whatever that last rant was, subtly referencing a line item and then going on a tirade or a lecture for the last five minutes. The fact that a point of order is so quickly called on the minister as soon as he starts to respond in kind – I'm sure that the chair, given the latitude to the last member – if you give the minister a little bit of time, I'm sure he'll reference a line item and retort. Not to presuppose what the chair may say, but perhaps this might be a caution for everybody to stick to what the program is, or this will result in these type of conversations, which are getting a little bit more than spirited and less than professional.

Obviously, Madam Chair, not a point of order. I consider this tit-for-tat and leave that for your consideration.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, members. I'm not even the one doing the talking and I'm losing my voice.

Let me just say this. Members, we are almost in the final stretch here. I know it's been a long day, but if we could just stick to the budget, that would be so great. Let's head back to the budget.

Minister, it's your turn to speak.

**Mr. Nixon:** Thank you for that. I'd love to stick to the budget. I recognize the sensitivity of pointing out what the Leader of the Opposition did when he was mayor, so I'll move past that.

5:20

It's kind of bizarre, Madam Chair. In all the years that I've been in the Chamber and have had an opportunity to participate in this, I've never quite seen an Official Opposition who would use their entire block to attack people personally and not in any way ask anything effective and instead spend their time attacking the Premier of Alberta and then get mad when they receive the same back in turn.

Nonetheless, I digress, and I'm quite happy to get back to the budget. The hon. member spent a considerable amount of time talking about both PDD and family support for children with disabilities.

**Ms Renaud:** No, I haven't talked about PDD yet.

**Mr. Nixon:** You know, again, she just can't stop heckling. I mean, anybody watching this tape has got to just be shocked at the behaviour of the NDP. It's not surprising to me at all.

On FSCD the budget has increased this year by \$7.4 million. It continues to be funded by the province, and despite the rhetoric and the bizarre allegations from the hon. member it is still an active program inside government. You know, again, if she would spend her time not attacking a member of the Chamber, the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, who's not here to defend herself, and instead ask questions about the budget, she'd also find out, for example, that the PDD program has been increased by \$26.5 million to \$1.3 billion, again, all part of a \$3.7 billion investment in disability services, more than her government ever dreamed of doing.

Now, she continues to ask about line 2.1. Madam Chair, I think she's confused and not following how the budget works. I will get my financial officer to show her how those line items line up, but she's misunderstanding the programs that are in them.

If you could, Sonya, feel free to take the member through it.

**Ms Johnston:** Thank you, Minister. Just to clarify, the increase in program delivery in element 3.1, approximately \$45 million, is a reclassification between element 2.1 and element 3.1. Budget 2025 anticipated a significant program delivery implementation expense related to the AISH and ADAP program changes, so what we've done this year is just clarified and moved the funding for the various supplies and services and the salaries, wages, and benefits that we needed between 2.1 and 3.1.

Program planning and delivery in element 3.1 is \$88 million compared to the prior year budget of \$42.6 million, and element 2.1 was a \$157 million budget last year, going up to \$168 million this year. Of course, within the program planning and delivery there are some compensation adjustments related to collective bargaining.

**Mr. Nixon:** Madam Chair, if I could, on FSCD specifically, individuals coming to receive benefits from other provinces, I will table tomorrow in the Legislature an article from the *Edmonton Journal* that really articulates some of the thefts that we're seeing. It's titled Why Are So Many Ontario Families Flocking to Alberta for Autism Support? I'll quote the article.

For families across the country who are managing autism, the slogan "Alberta is Calling" has taken on special meaning with plenty of . . . evidence that Canadians are flocking to a new Alberta Advantage – a relative ease of getting financial help for their high-needs children.

There are many other articles along that way.

Now, I think that's probably, again, because this province is the beacon of hope when it comes to this space, as we already talked in some earlier segments. When you see things like AISH and you're getting almost \$500, \$600 more a month in Alberta than you are in Ontario, no wonder people are looking towards this province to receive those supports because of the circumstances that are inside their province.

Again, we have some of the most significant supports anywhere in the country right here in Alberta, and on top of that we have one of the most affordable jurisdictions in the country. I don't think it's shocking that people are coming here for the Alberta advantage, which is more than just our economic advantage. It's our strong social programs, our strong health care system, access to affordable housing, and other things like that that, obviously, are attracting people to this province, and there's plenty of evidence that that's the same case for FSCD.

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

I've gotten mixed up with where we are. Whose turn? Yours? Okay. Please proceed.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Blocked or shared?

**Mrs. Johnson:** I would prefer shared if the minister is agreeable.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you. We left off on Assisted Living Alberta, and if we could, I'd love to go back there and revisit that and dig a little bit deeper. As the minister alluded to, this is a relatively new part of the health portion in his file here. I do have another question on that. It refers back to page 66 of our estimates. It includes \$344 million in capital funding for assisted living and continuing care infrastructure. Madam Chair, through you to the minister: could he describe how this funding will expand capacity, including new spaces, upgrades to existing sites, and support for innovative or repurposed capital projects and then how these investments will ensure Albertans can access the right care in the right place?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. Happy to. The budget includes \$922.7 million over three years for continuing care capital programs to increase the number of continuing care spaces and also to modernize some aging infrastructure in continuing care homes across the province. The funding will support the development and modernization of more than 3,000 continuing care spaces over three years.

There are different grant streams under the continuing care capital program that target different provincial continuing care priorities. There is a new capacity stream, which focuses on developing new continuing care spaces in communities across the province with the greatest need for continuing care accommodations and services. The modernization stream focuses on modernizing the existing aging and/or outdated continuing care homes. The Indigenous stream focuses on developing culturally appropriate continuing care capacity with Indigenous groups and organizations.

In addition to this program, the department is providing funding for two named projects in the capital plan, the Bethany Care Society in Calgary for \$75 million over two years, the Good Samaritan in Edmonton for \$63 million over two years. We anticipate modernization will provide an additional 700 units through those projects. This is all part of both our 10-year stronger foundations plan to be able to create 82,000 more affordable households across the province as well as our continuing care capital plan to create 15,000 more units across the province over the next decade.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Well, thank you. That was a lot of information.

I apologize if this question is a little bit redundant with what you just offered there, but if you could continue on that and maybe expand: how does ALA bring together home care, community care, continuing care homes, the nonmedical wraparound supports into one integrated system? Maybe also expand on the mandate of Assisted Living Alberta.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Assisted Living Alberta's mandate is to care for individuals who still require some level of care but not in an acute-care setting any more. What that means is there are individuals who have either handled or dealt with their acute-care situation or were never in acute need but need some sort of community care. Now, that could be facility-based care. That could be home care. That could be a social services, nonmedical component care. That work

is both in the hospital, helping transition people out of an acute-care setting into a continuing care setting, also focused on diversion within the emergency room for people who are not in an emergency situation but do require some other care, obviously, as I mentioned, home care.

The main goal, at the end of the day, is to take all of that and bring it together in one operation to be able to make sure that we're providing all care for individuals, not just continuing care but the other wraparound social services supports that people will need, depending on their unique circumstances.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Okay. Thank you again for that.

One last question on this. This began operation on September 1 of last year. Can you provide an update on where you're at right now with it? How is this transition work being completed up till today? Where are we at?

**Mr. Nixon:** The department and Assisted Living Alberta have had a pretty big job since September 1. Of the four health organizations they were the last to be instructed to create the organization. Since September 1, which was their first legal day 1, over that last half a year, they've been able to stand up the organization, put in the leadership that is needed to be able to do that work, transition appropriate continuing care facilities over to their operation, as well as stand up a transitional social services network inside acute-care systems to be able to provide those transition services. A tremendous amount of the early focus, obviously, has been making sure facility-based care is totally transferred over and being operated safely and effectively for the individuals that are in it. Then, obviously, a major focus on ALCs, alternate level of care patients, making sure that we're getting those individuals safely out of the hospital and into appropriate facilities.

The department continues to work to integrate with Assisted Living Alberta, which is not a day-to-day operation within the department. It's an organization that is associated with the department, but a lot of the work for the department has been to build that capacity. I will say that the deputy minister and his team have had a lot of work over the last several months because, as I'm sure you can appreciate, setting up a \$5 billion organization from scratch has required his department to take on a tremendous amount of that workload. The good news is, Madam Chair – I think the deputy agrees with me – that we're getting to a point now where we're really starting to see Assisted Living Alberta stand up on its own.

5:30

We're seeing some really cool results. One of my favourites is the fact that we've seen a reduction of 65 per cent of people who are inside hospitals who are waiting for continuing care, which means that those transition connections are working, and we're getting people to the right place for the right care that they need.

**Mrs. Johnson:** That is really significant. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I'm going to segue into that. Since you went into alternate level of care, let's go there. Page 78 of the fiscal plan says ALA is investing

\$146 million for continuing care capacity and alternate level care initiatives to help patients transition from hospital to appropriate continuing care settings and mitigate capacity pressures in hospital . . . these efforts have

as you suggested,

reduced the number of [nonacute] patients in Alberta hospitals . . . by more than 20 per cent.

So can you describe – and you have a little bit already; maybe expand upon that – some of the work that has contributed to that

reduction in the number of our alternate level of care patients in Alberta hospitals, where they shouldn't be.

**Mr. Nixon:** It's several different mechanisms: firstly and obviously, expanding home care, focusing on implementing targeted transitions, figuring out how many ALCs there were. When we first started to get into Alberta Health Services, what was being reported to us was somewhere around 800 ALCs. We would later come to determine that there's probably closer to 1,700 or 1,800 ALCs. That work that we talked about a little bit earlier, hon. member, about figuring out where capacity was, what was owned across the province, what were the vacancy rates: building a system so that we can manage that in real time have all been tools that we brought to bear to be able to make sure we can provide ALC discharges.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Fabulous. I have, I think, one last question here. Could the minister share how he has been collaborating with the other health ministers – we now have four with these pillars – and in particular, the Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services to ensure Albertans who no longer need acute care are transitioning into the appropriate care in the community? So what kind of collaboration relationships are being formed there and the collaborations going forward with these other ministers? Can you go into that a little bit and describe that for us?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, what we're hearing, particularly on the ALA side, is that this is the most communication that they've seen in a very long time. We've really focused on building processes that connect the divisions to each other so they can work together. Obviously, the ministers are communicating on a regular basis, but the more important aspect is that we've connected technology. We're all working through Connect Care. We can see the work taking place in real time. ALA is in all hospitals, working side by side with acute-care staff so they can start to plan transition immediately. Even before a person is finished acute they can start to think about what their long-term destination is. Different aspects like that.

I will also say that our executive chair of ALA and the team have been travelling the entire province, meeting in every acute-care facility to make sure that acute-care staff understand the social services resources that are available to them, to make sure our discharge teams are aligned, that the transition teams are now working on our standard protocol. Bizarrely, before we did that, each facility was doing a different protocol. A lot of the work has been about standardizing the process to be able to make sure that we can get individuals access to the process, and we've seen, again, extraordinary results.

I think everybody has to agree that it was shocking that people were living in hospitals for four or five years that didn't belong there. Nobody wanted to see that taking place. The fact that we've been able to see the significant reductions across the province shows that the system that is being set up is working. Long-stay ALC patients were reduced by over 45 per cent already, as an example. It's only been six months. Acute-care ALCs have been decreased by 28 per cent province wide, and we have the lowest average ALCs anywhere in the country. For us in cabinet that's not enough. You can ask the fine folks that are around me. We want to be more than the lowest; we want to set the new benchmarks for the world, but the processes that have been built are showing results going forward, and that cannot happen without communication between the four health organizations.

**The Chair:** Yes, Opposition, please proceed. Blocked or . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. Thanks. So I look forward to you tabling that 2024 article that actually doesn't say the things that you're saying, but okay. We'll look at it tomorrow.

We're going to ask some questions about persons with developmental disabilities. Okay. Once again we see very little information. Line 4.2 and 4.3 are persons with developmental disabilities, direct operations, and supports to Albertans. For such a huge program – I mean, it's over a billion dollars – we see very little detail. Again, in 2021 this government stopped reporting the wait-list for PDD services. We see that the department has left \$51 million of the 2024 PDD supports to Albertans estimate unspent in the forecast.

My question is: what is the current number of disabled Albertans who applied for PDD, met existing criteria, and are waiting for services? Next question: what is the total number of people who had their services with PDD stopped in the last fiscal year? Next question: on average how many PDD applications are received per month, how many eligibility decisions are made each month, and what is the average cost per person per month? I mean about people receiving PDD. Then my last question in this topic area is: how many PDD contractors receive more than 20 per cent of their direct services in service delivery and administration contract funding? What is the breakdown of PDD contractors between not-for-profit and private providers? How many of these privates have their head office based outside of Alberta?

Then I'm going to switch over to Appeals Secretariat, some questions that I had. Maybe you could just help us understand the difference. You know, you like to say that I'm confused, that I don't understand, so help me understand. Line 1.5, appeals panels, in 2026 budget estimates indicates an increase of \$3.7 million, or a 92 per cent increase, in the appeal panels. Now, we know over the last few years the government was informed about the barriers in the appeal system and how to fix them. The Ombudsman was very clear. I think there was even a report called – what was it called? – Denied by Design or something like that, where it was very clear what you could do to fix the appeal system so that it would be more accessible. I'm hoping that's what some of these funds are going to be used for. If there's any improvements to accessibility, that would be wonderful. I would look forward to hearing that.

I'm going to move on quickly to the office of the disability advocate. I see there's a slight increase, \$200,000, bringing it to \$1.4 million. That's great. I think it's probably a very busy office these days. I'm getting a lot of information from Albertans who are very afraid and worried. I guess you can just let us know what that increase is for. Are there more FTEs? That would be wonderful.

When Albertans look at the body of work of the disability advocate, I actually think there's been a number of really great reports, some of which we actually couldn't see until they got FOIPed, which is unfortunate. But there was a really good report on the need for accessibility legislation, where we saw a presentation from Treasury Board and Finance talking about the contributions of disabled Albertans. I've heard the minister reference that little bit, so clearly he's seen it. You know, it talks about the value of having accessibility legislation in terms of the economic realities here in Alberta. How many more taxpayers? You guys like to talk about taxpayers. Let's get people paying taxes. It was a really great report, and I guess I can't really understand why we would hide this report when a disability advocate hired, actually contracted, Happy Cities to go out and consult – I was at a few of those consultations – then talked to Albertans and came back with “we really need accessibility legislation because we have barriers in all of these areas,” and we didn't even get the report.

The disability advocate clearly called for immediate creation and passing of accessibility legislation via his 2025 report, *Accessible Alberta: Recommendations for Provincial Accessibility Legislation*. My question is: why was that not made public, and why did organizations have to file a freedom of information request to actually get the information? Then, finally, are there any plans to pass accessibility legislation?

That's it.

**The Chair:** All right. That concludes the time for the Official Opposition.

We'll head over now to the minister for his response.

5:40

**Mr. Nixon:** Specific on appeals, which was the only budget question asked in that entire policy debate: a \$3.4 million increase for staffing costs in '26-27 forecast as part of the union settlement for the Alberta disability assistance program appeals and implementation, and \$3.7 million for increased staffing costs, again as part of our union settlement, which will be for ADAP appeals and implementation. I just want to make sure I got that right. Oh, that's the difference between budget and forecast rates. Sonya, is that what I'm looking at? Forecasts would be \$3.4 million and estimates \$3.7 million. That's the number I think the hon. member was referring to in appeals. We are beefing up our medical appeal panel process as part of ADAP, and that will be completed through this budget year and it is certainly fully funded within the budget.

Again, the hon. member is wanting to ask a bunch of specific questions again that you would probably see at Public Accounts or at a policy debate in question period. We're here about the budget, and this budget has significant investments when it comes to continuing care and disabilities: \$3.7 billion, an increase of \$92 million overall; an increase of \$26.5 million for persons with developmental disabilities, it'll be \$1.33 billion in this budget; an increase of \$7.4 million for family support for children with disabilities, \$270 million in this budget. As I've said before, this budget ends up completing over a \$1 billion increase since 2019 in the disability space, which is a 38 per cent increase overall. Funding for both FSCD and PDD have increased every year under the UCP government, totalling more than \$430 million in increases. PDD's totals are \$357 million increases since 2019, including a \$26.5 million increase in this budget. FSCD totals of \$74 million increases since 2019, including \$7.4 million increase in this budget. In the last two years Alberta government has increased funding for persons with disabilities by nearly a quarter billion dollars. That's what's in the budget. It would be interesting to see if the hon. members support it. They didn't last year, which I'm sure is alarming to see that much money being voted against for the important sector.

I didn't hear any other specific questions about the budget in that entire segment, so I'd be happy to try to answer questions about the budget. If you want to have a policy debate about what the government has decided to do about ADAP, I'm happy to do it. We do it all the time in question period. We're not ashamed of bringing forward the most comprehensive disability support packages anywhere in the country. We're not ashamed of making sure that Albertans who are severely disabled and cannot work are receiving the highest payments in the country. We're not ashamed of making sure that we've added a support program that could help people that are not eligible for AISH and to be able to still receive supports while they enter the workforce.

We're certainly not ashamed, Madam Chair, in this budget of spending a quarter billion dollars making sure that we invest in employment support, something the hon. member referred to as not

a significant investment. Her constituents must have a very different idea of money than my constituents because that's a pretty significant investment, more than double where it was years ago. We're not ashamed of bringing in-house employment support programs to care for people that are on income supports and on disability services to make sure that they can receive the best chance that they can of being able to enter the workforce, contribute to their families, and have the most successful life that they can in Alberta. That's what Alberta is about. We're not ashamed of supporting the 53 per cent of Albertans who have a disability that are already inside the workforce. We're not ashamed of having, because of the investments inside this budget, the highest hourly rate for individuals who face disabilities anywhere in the province.

We're happy to have that policy debate. It's not a budget debate. At the end of the day the budget is investing \$3.7 billion in supports for Albertans with disabilities across programs like FSCD, family support for children with disabilities; across programs like PDD, persons with developmental disabilities; across programs like AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped; and across our new program, Alberta disability assistance program, to make sure that all Albertans can get access to the best supports that they can. That's what the budget does, and we're happy with what it does.

If there's a specific question about the budget itself, not random program providers of the thousands that provide services to the department, we'd be happy to answer them.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you so much, Minister. I appreciate your comments.

We'll move back over now to the government side for their questions. Please proceed, Member.

**Mr. Lundy:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair, through you, of course, to the minister. I'd like to maybe tie some questions on the continuing care system improvements and maybe some coordination questions on that that some of my colleagues have talked about. I think the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland got a chance to ask a little bit about the bilateral agreement, aging with dignity, this morning, but I think that might have gotten cut off.

I would like to reference that on page 35 of the business plan, this \$139.4 million agreement to support transforming the continuing care system. I'd also like to tie that in with the release of the new assisted living framework which we saw of course on December 10, 2025.

I want to thank my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka, who was asking about Assisted Living Alberta. I might quickly add that I was fortunate enough to be part of the process where we were establishing ALA and was very impressed with the breadth and depth of knowledge on that group and the amount of consultation that took place.

Through the chair, I'd love to ask the minister how some of these pieces are going to be co-ordinated together? Minister, can you please describe what investments will the government of Alberta make in '26 and '27 to support the implementation of the assisted living framework? Secondly, how is the ministry ensuring that existing continuing care initiatives and investments are aligned with the assisted living framework and that services remain stable and consistent for Albertans as the framework is implemented?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, in this budget where the department has projected to allocate \$137.8 million in operating funding in this space and \$1.6 million in capital investment from the Canada-Alberta aging with dignity funding agreement in alignment with the assisted living framework announced in December 2025, these

investments will support the framework's four key pillars, for example, to support aging in place.

The government of Alberta is strengthening hospice, palliative, and end-of-life care by funding training, education, and capacity-building for community organizations. Additionally, the assisted living service navigation portal, which we discussed earlier, announced on February 18 of this year, will be expanded in '26-27 to improve the user experience and include things like home and community care services all in one spot. This will support Albertans' aging in place and connecting patients to the appropriate care inside their communities.

Again, some of the other stuff that we also have focused on when it comes to our partnership with Healthy Aging Alberta and those type of areas all come together. The important part of the work that we're doing now with Assisted Living Alberta is getting all of that in one shop to be able to make sure that all of that can work together, not just department processes but also all of the nonprofit and other social services sector that we partner with each and every day.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Minister, through the chair for providing a little more information on some of those pillars under that bilateral agreement.

I have a couple of questions maybe on quality and accountability, but before I jump to those, I did want to ask you, through the chair, about the continuing care capital program. I've already met with a couple of continuing care providers who are very excited about this opportunity, and they are excited to get going to build some capacity here. I will be referencing page 66 of the estimates. This is a \$344 million investment into the aforementioned continuing care beds capital grant program. This is, of course, part of a commitment to modernize and transform the continuing care system. I'm excited to see that we're going to be continuing this. These investments are critical to ensuring that seniors and vulnerable Albertans have safe, high-quality, and modern care environments that meet current needs and anticipate growing demand.

Through the chair, Minister, maybe a couple of specific questions on this program: how is government planning for the future needs of continuing care homes and seniors' housing, and how many new continuing care spaces does the ministry expect to support over the next three years through this continuing care capital program?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, the continuing care capital program for continuing care is the largest in the province's history and I think is a clear response to what we see with aging rates. It's also a response to the fact that Alberta Health Services with that investment in the past was not investing in continuing care spaces, which has created some of the challenges that we have seen.

Again, I will stress, Madam Chair – and I think we discussed it this morning – that's across multiple governments. Even the NDP put more money into continuing care spaces, but they weren't built by AHS. So we made a decision to move that process over to the housing division in our ministry underneath the leadership of ADM Williams, who I'll get to answer your questions more specifically, but who has led the best housing program in the entire country. We're expecting the same thing from him when it comes to continuing care. He can take you through how he intends to do that.

5:50

**Mr. David Williams:** Thank you very much, Minister and the hon. member for the question. Just in terms of the continuing care capital program, we have been allocated \$922.8 million over the next three years. That will support the construction and modernization of approximately 3,000 new spaces. In addition, we planned through the named projects with the Bethany Care centre, which is a

modernization and expansion, \$75.4 million, and the Good Samaritan project here in Edmonton also a modernization and expansion process, will add approximately 700 additional continuing care spaces to the system.

As the minister has alluded to, we are in the process of following up on the stronger foundations report of working on a 10-year capital strategy that will lay out and meet the needs to build the 15,000 units that government has committed to building, that are needed across the province. That will be based on the recommendations from the ALA panel and from other work that we have done in the system sort of on the demand models as to where those spaces are needed the most. We will work to construct those moving forward using this funding as we work on that.

**Mr. Nixon:** At the core of that, hon. member, is that there will be a clear, concrete plan now for a long-term investment plan in continuing care capital, similar to what we've seen with housing. Again, I think it was a little bit bizarre that level of capital planning wasn't being done underneath the former health care system, but we do know that we need to put time, effort, and money into that space to be able to make sure that we can meet the objectives of the province long term. I have all the confidence in the housing division to be able to pull that off. We're going to see some pretty successful things I think in this fiscal year and for the next decade to come because of that decision.

**Mr. Lundy:** No. Great. Thank you, Minister and Assistant Deputy Minister Williams. I appreciate that information.

Maybe if I can put a quick bow on this then, through the chair, as mentioned, I've been talking to some stakeholders who are very excited about this. Are you able to provide when the next intake is for the grant program and maybe a quick comment on how the updated continuing care design standards supported the development of these new and modernized spaces?

**Mr. Nixon:** I'll take the update question, and I'll let ADM Williams talk about the work that they're doing on design standards.

Proposals for the first stage were accepted until February 6, 2026, and are working their way through the department right now up to my desk. Then we expect a second intake to be in fall of 2026.

Do you want to talk about what you're doing on design standards, ADM Williams?

**Mr. David Williams:** Thank you very much, Minister and for the question.

Very excited that we were able to update the continuing care design standards in the fall. We did an extensive consultation process with residents, architects, operators across the whole system to talk about that. We looked at a number of issues that were presented to us and a number of concerns that folks had raised with the standards that were implemented in 2023.

Very proud of the work that was done to update that. I can highlight a few of the things. The maximum household size increased from 14 to 18 residents. We removed the requirement for kitchenettes in all rooms. It didn't make sense to have kitchenettes in some rooms, again, depending on the level of the need of the client. In some of the high-acuity rooms we wouldn't necessarily need a kitchenette in there. The minimum square footage was an odd requirement that they had in there, so what we did is replaced it with more of a livable definition around turning radiuses and the room that staff needed to move around. Just by having a strict square footage limit, you wouldn't necessarily actually develop that. You can play around with that in different ways. We made it more for a livable sort of thing.

We updated things just based on what we had heard from residents. One of the main ones in the 2023 standards was that you had to have a direct line of sight from your bed, where you slept, to the toilet. That was for safety for residents. A number of residents reported back that they didn't like that. They didn't want to fall asleep looking at their toilet, so they shut the door, which defeated the whole purpose. So we've rearranged that to have more of a standard where you have to be able to have a direct line of sight to the door. Things that, you know, maybe sounded good on paper: when we went out and talked to and engaged with individuals, we were able to come up with some better standards that better reflected how the space should be used and people wanted to live.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Back over to the Official Opposition. Blocked or shared time, Member?

**Member Miyashiro:** Block.

**The Chair:** Block? Okay. Please proceed with your questions.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for providing some time for us today. Minister, as someone who has worked for decades in the not-for-profit sector, I know that FCSS funding is the most cost-effective service delivery provided by the provincial government. FCSS-funded agencies have seen operating increases due to utilities, insurance, and overall inflation, yet this budget provides no additional FCSS funds, which means that direct services to communities will be reduced as agencies struggle to keep the lights on and to maintain staffing levels.

Now I'm just going to throw some data out there to show you the importance of FCSS. This program provides necessary and vital prevention and early intervention supports to communities across the province and provides funding for the following prevention priorities. These are the government's priorities that they've laid out for communities. Homelessness and housing insecurity helped 57,224 people up to March 2. Again, this is in a prevention, early intervention manner. Mental health and addictions helped 132,981 people; employment, 47,560 people. Family and sexual violence across the lifespan helped 64,184 people, and aging well in community, 93,199 people.

The strategies to deliver these services are to enhance access to social supports, promote social inclusion, foster sense of belonging, promote and encourage active engagement in the community, develop and maintain healthy relationships, develop and strengthen skills, and build resilience. At a higher level these strategies help communities to identify social needs and how to meet those needs. They prioritize volunteer work in the community, develop resiliency skills in individuals and families, aiding the social development of children and their families, supporting seniors' health and connection to the communities, promoting and providing access to social supports in the community. I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. I'm just emphasizing how much important work FCSS does in our communities.

This social well-being is also measured and also a requirement by the province to show and to measure success. Those that experienced personal well-being as a result of the FCSS programs, 22,601; connected individuals to community, 15,703; positive child and youth development, 33,094; healthy functioning within families, over 3,000; families now on social supports, 21,000 families; connecting all people to engaging in the community, 40,000-plus people. And then people that were identifying social issues and addressing them: well over 52,000 people. I'm saying this, Minister, just to again illustrate a fun fact that \$1 invested in prevention can save \$7 to \$12 in future costs. What is this

government's plan to ensure FCSS is at an adequate and appropriate level to maintain those service levels; that is, services that are accessible, effective, and inclusive?

Since I have a minute and a half, Minister, as you know, our paths have crossed before in the senior sector due to my long-time work. Your department has funded some vital community services in elder abuse and community outreach for seniors, but this budget shows flat funding in seniors community supports, which I believe is including funding for things like Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council and Healthy Aging Alberta, two organizations which are providing, again, vital services for our aging population in Alberta. As the senior-age cohort is the fastest growing segment of our population, what is this government's plan for ensuring community-based services and supports for seniors and making sure that they keep pace with population growth and service needs? As with FCSS, service funding is to make sure those services are accessible, effective, and inclusive.

Minister, on that note, I have no more questions.

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

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, I'll start with FCSS. The hon. member is correct. FCSS is a critical program partnership, not only with the province but with municipalities, through an 80-20 funding arrangement between the province, 80 to the province and 20 per cent to municipalities, together to run some extraordinary programs in our communities, that are often the social safety net of our communities. Each community does it slightly different, which is the way that it was designed. The government recognizes the importance of that work.

6:00

The fact that we've been able to keep that funding in place despite the fact that we're in a pretty tough budget year does show that we do really think FCSS is an absolutely critical partnership. We are having conversations with FCSS in general on a couple of key areas that I have instructed the assistant deputy minister to work on over the next year. A couple of those areas will be about mandate when FCSS organizations in other communities find themselves beyond the preventative mandate out of necessity, whether or not an FCSS line item or another line item is a more appropriate way to provide them resources.

There are other challenges also between the way the rural and urban mix works. Often FCSSes in communities like the hon. member comes from and that I come from have a disproportionate amount of funding coming for something like homelessness as an example. We talked a lot about the hundreds of millions of dollars that are being invested in the largest cities for homeless challenges for the right reason. You don't see that same thing in a community like Sundre or Rocky Mountain House for obvious reasons, so we may have to work with FCSS in those communities to provide a different level of service than they were originally intended to do.

I'm not a hundred per cent sure that would make sense just to increase the FCSS line item if that's what we're trying to target, so we do need to have some conversations about the fact that other aspects of the budget and other departments can provide supports through FCSS. We're going to do that over the coming year, and I know the president of FCSS and the team there are excited about that conversation. We'll see what comes from it.

I would disagree with the hon. member that the budget remains flat when it comes to senior supports. I mean, this budget is a pretty big budget that's in front of you. When you're talking about over \$6 billion in supports going to the senior sector in our province,

that's a pretty significant investment by the taxpayer. I mean, that's something like eight or nine times the department of environment. There are aspects, particularly on elder abuse and stuff which we talked about earlier, where there is some overlap with the federal government that you could see some changes taking place, but our commitment remains to invest heavily in caring for seniors because we see it as absolutely integral to actually, frankly, making sure that our health care system can work. If you look throughout this budget, you'll see that investment continues.

I want to stress that the biggest area for that is in the lodge program, which I know that you're familiar with. We should be proud of that in this province. I think you would agree with that, hon. member. It's unique in a way that we're investing significant money in helping seniors. We're also over half a billion dollars in specific seniors supports that are in this budget. The unique work that's taking place on elder abuse, the fact that we've been able to use our lodge program to create some elder abuse spaces all work together to be able to make sure that Alberta is the best place that you can age in.

You know, at the end of the day, I mean, I would love to max out every line item. You can't. That's the job. We're already coming here with almost a \$13 billion operating budget. You've got to work through where the best spots to be able to make sure those resources are invested in the communities. But it's a pretty significant investment.

I would close with the last minute I've got that I am really encouraged, as continuing care and assisted living are merged with the department, that we're going to see some really neat stuff take place as a result of being able to use the aspects of the part of my department that you're most familiar with – a traditional senior program, in-community lodge programs, income support programs, and other social services – coming together to make sure that all is working together to be able to make our seniors', our parents', our grandparents' lives better.

You know, other real cool things, again, like using the lodge program to create a shelter for elders escaping violence was a great idea. That's something . . . [interjection] Exactly, and that's why I'm going there. I think that bringing that all together in one shop is giving us some opportunities that are going to be pretty exciting for the department in the future.

We're very committed to caring for seniors in this province. You know, an over \$6 billion investment in this space in some ways speaks for itself.

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

We'll head back over to the government side for your next set of questions. Please proceed, Member.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to talk about the income support program if I could, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. We all know how vital that program plays to ensure that – we have Albertans facing financial hardships – they're able to meet their basic needs while working towards greater stability and independence. On page 33 of the business plan supporting vulnerable Albertans through financial assistance program remains a key priority under outcome 1. I'm going to throw all three at you at once, Minister. Can you provide an update on current caseload trends for income support and how those trends are reflected in Budget '26? How is the ministry ensuring that income support remains responsive to economic conditions, including the changes we see in cost of living, and what steps are being taken to support clients who are transitioning from income support into employment where that is appropriate?

**Mr. Nixon:** A big area of the department. Income support is, obviously, very important to also prevent other challenges, not only for our department but across the system. Interestingly enough, it's one of the programs the Treasury Board watches the most closely with us and often encourages us sometimes to put more money into it because that investment can prevent things like evictions and other challenges across the system. We do have sitting up at the table, have all day, the ADM who is in charge of the income support division. She knows it well, so I'm actually going to give her the opportunity to quickly summarize your questions because then you can talk right to the boss.

**Ms Giesen:** Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair to the hon. member, happy to answer those questions. Maybe I'll just chat quickly before I get into caseload trends to give you a sense of what caseloads currently exist in income support. We have two streams within the income support program. The expected-to-work stream is intended for short-term support for Albertans who are available to work, who don't have significant barriers to getting a job, and who are expected to be actively seeking employment. Currently, as of February of this year, we have just over 41,000 Albertans accessing the expected-to-work stream of income support. That's about 69 per cent of our overall income support caseload. On the other side, which is barriers to full employment, 19,055 Albertans with barriers to employment are currently receiving financial support, so about 31 per cent of our income support caseload.

Through budget the income support program remains fully funded, and all eligible Albertans will continue to receive benefits at the established rates. It is a legislated program. The decrease in the 2026 budget under the expected-to-work program reflects projected savings due to lower caseload growth. As a statutory program, as I mentioned before, our eligibility parameters and benefit rates are enshrined in legislation.

Importantly, this means that application volume cannot be controlled. Application volume and caseloads in income support typically and historically fluctuate based on economic changes and have been very closely tied to the unemployment rate, particularly for our expected-to-work caseload. A maximum duration of six months will be enforced for expected-to-work clients who are not meeting program obligations, including actively seeking employment or engaged with available supports to participate and prepare for employment.

This enhanced case management, really, has been in practice already for about 18 months with a small proportion of our expected-to-work caseloads, and we've seen significant success through our investments in employment services. What we are doing is supporting these individuals in a much more targeted way to identify employment services available to them, to make sure that a robust assessment of their employability is completed, and to support them to achieve independence through employment. As I mentioned, we've seen significant success, and that's why we've seen some reductions in our expected-to-work caseload this fiscal year and expect it to increase into next year. That budget decrease, as I mentioned, reflects our continued measures to strengthen case management, including our focus on negotiated action plans and intensive case management supports.

Maybe to your question then about how we ensure our income support program remains responsive to economic conditions, including changes in cost of living. As I mentioned, the drivers for income support include the economy and the unemployment rate but also the cost of living, population growth, including immigration, and the general level of skills and employability in the population as well as other social issues. All of these factors

combine in our analysis as part of the budget process, including, as I mentioned, projected unemployment rates and population growth in alignment with Treasury Board and Finance's economic assumptions as well as annual inflationary increases to support our forecasted number of income support clients. The annual inflationary increase, based on the standardized escalation factor, is the lesser of 2 per cent or the Alberta consumer price index. That's also been reflected in our budget.

6:10

Maybe to your last question: what steps are we taking to support clients in transitioning from income support into employment? We are, as the minister has outlined, investing an unprecedented nearly quarter billion this year alone to help Albertans find meaningful employment and succeed in the workforce, including an increase in career and employment services funding by \$62 million this year, which really is intended to support those looking for work to receive more intensive and timely career services, job placement support, and case management to successfully find and maintain employment.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you.

**Mr. Nixon:** If I could, Madam Chair, just add one thing to the assistant deputy minister's comments on the work that her division does.

**The Chair:** Sorry. Pardon me, Minister. You're only at this point allowed to speak for a maximum of five minutes, so if we could go to the member and then back to you.

**Mr. Nixon:** Perfect. Gotcha.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Member. Speak and then go back to the minister.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Hi. If I just say that, I've spoken. Now you can go.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you.

Some of the stuff the department has seen over multiple years and different ministers in this space does show that when you put investments in things like employment supports and other investments in removing barriers to employment, you see some pretty significant results. We have seen that on income support over the years, and it gives us a lot of hope and basis for the work that we're getting ready to do on ADAP. Then the other thing I will point out is that that number, as the ADM says, moves quite a bit with unemployment, so it really goes up and down, obviously, based with what's happening with the economy in the province.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you.

I'm going to pivot to persons with developmental disabilities for the remainder of my time. Supporting individuals with developmental disabilities to live as independently as possible is an important part of building inclusive communities across Alberta. Since I became an MLA, I've had the privilege of getting to know quite a few within my community who come visit me regularly to tell me how they are doing, give me a hug, let me know they're praying for me and the Premier. One in particular loves her to pieces, and it's some of the highlights when they come to visit.

On page 65 of the government estimates there are significant investments under disability services, which include supports for individuals through the persons with developmental disabilities program, PDD. Can the minister outline how Budget '26 is supporting individuals receiving services through the PDD program

and how the ministry is ensuring that services are tailored to individual needs and support greater independence and community inclusion? What measures are in place to ensure service providers have the capacity to meet those increased demands?

**Mr. Nixon:** Budget 2026 provides about \$1.33 billion for PDD programming. That's an increase of about \$26.5 million, or about 2 per cent, and it is in line with what is anticipated for case growth. Budget 2026 ensures that we, obviously, will continue to meet our obligation under the PDD program, which is to currently 14,000 individuals who are currently working on that caseload. The budget does address PDD case growth. It includes supporting up to 660 new individuals and supporting close to 1,000 individuals who are currently on caseload and require additional supports while maintaining supports for all others that are on the PDD program.

In an instance where there are no service providers available to meet the needs of an individual, the department does work with the individual and their family and service providers to find services that best meet their needs. Between April 2025 and December 2025 all 1,279 service requests received were approved, including 548 service requests for new individuals and 731 for PDD clients already on caseload requiring different services. Additionally, 57 ALC individuals were transitioned to community with PDD supports.

Your question about how the ministry ensures the services are – well, I'm going to run out of time on it, so maybe we'll get a chance in the next block.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you so much, Minister.

We'll head back over to the Official Opposition for their questions. Blocked, I'm guessing?

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. Well, that was interesting. It was nice that you were able to answer similar questions that I had around PDD, so there's that. But what I did want to address is that the minister has said a number of times that he refuses to answer policy questions, but these policies actually drive these budget numbers. For example, the previous member just talked about PDD. If you look at the two lines for PDD, that's all we see, and there are really no outcomes related to these programs. It's over a billion dollars in programming, but there's not a lot of information. So naturally we're going to ask questions. We're going to ask questions about policy. We're going to try to fill in the gaps, because there are a lot of gaps. Instead of just simply answering the questions, we're just getting rhetoric. This is meant to be oversight, and that's what we're trying really hard to do, and this has been very difficult because we're literally not getting any questions answered.

I've gone through and I have about 13 questions. There are far more that weren't answered, but these are sort of the high-level questions that I would really like an answer to.

The first one is: what is the amount of Canada disability benefit that the ministry expects to claw back from AISH? Now, this is line 3.2 if you see the financial assistance grants. I'd like to know – obviously, there's a cut here but we don't see it because built in there is what has been clawed back from people that qualified for the Canada disability grant. So I'm trying to figure out what that number is. Now, obviously, the minister doesn't want to share that number, but I am asking.

My second question is: how many children and families have met FSCD criteria and are waiting for a contract?

Page 71 of the fiscal plan reads, “\$178 million in lapses due to . . . caseload growth.” My question was very simple: was the need lower, or was this an in-year savings exercise?

The next question: how many people left AISH roles, total AISH roles, last year? And do you have any projections for this year? Actually, no. Scratch that. Never mind; you won’t know that.

The sixth one is: what is the total amount spent on fraud activities? How much was recovered, total? That’s in the last fiscal year, which I’m assuming is driving this budget. Was that work done internally or externally?

My next question is about the 64 new service providers that will work in career and employment: how many of those 64 service providers, whether, you know, they were upscaled, existing service providers or new ones or people that wrote in or whatever, have been working with people with disabilities in employment for two-plus years?

The next question is: when will Albertans see what the criteria is for a new AISH and ADAP in terms of severe disability?

We are spending another \$62 million on career and employment services this year, which is great. When will we see targets so that next year when we come back here, we can ask some questions? Will the ministry be setting up any targets other than 67 per cent employment?

Next question. Line 1.5: does it include any investments at all in accessibility? That is the line about the Appeals Secretariat. Again, third time asking, the Ombudsman has been very clear about the need to make this process accessible. I think that’s even more important given the ADAP changes coming. So does that include any investment in accessibility?

And number 12: will 100 per cent of the people that are moved from AISH to ADAP get that \$200 grant to take them up to where AISH was, and how long will that last?

And then – actually, that might be the last question.

I just would like to say that I know there are a lot of people with disabilities that are watching because they’re frightened. There’s not a lot of information. If they go online – and I go online to check – are there updates? Like, has the government put out a new notice for anybody? They’ll ask me questions like, “What disability qualifies for this?” And I’ll say, “I don’t know,” because there’s no information. People are watching this because they just want information. So I’m urging this ministry to just answer some simple questions instead of playing games. That’s it. That’s all I’ve got.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you so much. That’s the time for the hon. member.

I will turn it over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** I appreciate that. Look, I’m going to actually, with the limited time we’ve got, give the ADM an opportunity to talk about criteria.

6:20

I mean, again, it’s just so rich, the playing games. The department is working overtime to make sure they communicate with everybody that is on AISH rolls. They’ve had call centres up where they’ve communicated to everybody. There is constant correspondence with everybody that is on AISH, and there has been extensive consultation. I understand the hon. member is not happy with the individuals that were involved in consultation. She seems to have a challenge with the disability advocate and the Premier’s council on disabilities, but there have also been others that have participated in the process. The only thing, Madam Chair, that is causing fear is, again, misinformation being spread by the Official

Opposition, which is disappointing but par for the course when it comes to the NDP.

I do want, just before I turn it over to Marika to finish up on that question, to make clear that the \$200 transition amount is budgeted to be in place until December 31, 2027, so all of this fiscal year and the next calendar year the department and the government will be monitoring really closely what takes place with individuals that are in that spot between AISH and ADAP to make sure the program is accomplishing what we want, which is why we have put that number in, to keep everybody whole, the same way that they would be with AISH. Then we’ll make decisions based on how we see the program take place, which does show you the amount of effort that has been put in place to be able to make sure everybody ends up in the same spot or in the best spot possible. I’m very sure we’ll have conversations about that in the years to come.

With that, Marika, I don’t know if you want to talk about the criteria issue.

**Ms Giesen:** Thank you, Minister, and yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the member. I would like to take just a minute to walk you through the medical eligibility definitions that are under development currently for AISH and ADAP. I do need to point out that the specific details around severe disability definitions will be included in the regulations, which are still forthcoming and under development.

First, when we talk about a severe disability, this definition will be in the general regulation, and it’s described as “a substantial impairment, mental, physical, or both that’s permanent or expected to last at least two years and confirmed through medical or psychological reports.” Also, “where no improvement is expected after all relevant treatment has been completed.” That is the foundational definition for severe disability that the AISH and ADAP program will be using.

Now, how a disability affects employment is what separates the two programs. Under AISH the definition will require that the severe disability permanently prevents the individual from working. That shows up in the AISH Act.

Under ADAP the act uses different language. It says the disability must substantially impede employment. This means the person may still be able to work in some capacity, but their disability creates significant ongoing or episodic barriers. So AISH is tied to a permanent inability to work, while ADAP is designed for people who do have some employment potential but still face real limitations.

I’m also going to take the opportunity, if I may, to answer the question about how many of our 64 agreements, which will be in place by July 1, to support ADAP clients have experience working with persons with disabilities, and I’m happy to report it’s 100 per cent. So all 64 agreements. That was a minimum criteria for us to even consider entering into an agreement with those service providers.

Thank you.

**Mr. Nixon:** Madam Chair, I’ll close with there is lots of information available on what’s taking place at ADAP and also how AISH and ADAP work together. For anybody watching that is interested in the facts associated with that program, they can go to alberta.ca and go to the Alberta disability assistance program. They’ll see information about purpose, how it works, benefits, and income transition approach.

Madam Chair, again, to be very clear, there is a process that’s been in place in this budget to make sure – and it’ll even be in next fiscal year’s budget – that people remain at the same rates that they are right now during that transition process. The department is

going to watch it closely to make sure that we're meeting the objectives that we want, and we'll evaluate that as we proceed. So anybody hearing from the Official Opposition that their payments are about to be cut overnight or they're going to be put onto the street or any of the other bizarre things that we've heard from the Official Opposition, Madam Chair, through you to any Albertan in that circumstance, I want to assure you that that's not true. In fact, this budget makes clear that that's not true by making sure to budget a significant amount of money to make sure that can't happen.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister. We'll go back to the government side, and I'm assuming it's shared. Or is it block?

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Shared time if it's okay with the minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** Of course.

**Mr. Singh:** My questions are on record housing starts here. Alberta's housing strategy is delivering results. In 2025 record housing starts. Over 53,000 homes to help bring down rents in Calgary-East constituency and make Alberta one of the most affordable places in Canada. I see on page 33 of the ALSS business plan that key objective 1.1 emphasizes co-operation to remove barriers and increase housing supply. Can the minister explain how the ministry's collaboration under key objective 1.1 is ensuring that affordable housing keeps pace with Alberta's broader housing growth and with Alberta leading in purpose-built rental starts. Can the minister highlight how ALSS ensures that low-income Albertans are benefiting from increased rental supply, including any rent supplement expansions in Budget 2026. Given the success in lowering rents, how does ALSS plan to maintain affordability for vulnerable Albertans, especially if housing market pressures shift?

Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** It is a great way to close estimates up, with one of the great successes that the province has had by far in the country when it comes to housing.

You're correct though, through you, Madam Chair, to the member, that investment has to come both in the market side and in the affordable housing side, something the government has taken seriously, using both those levers. I do want to stress that when the market stabilizes, that makes things more affordable when we build the affordable side of the file. So the great work that's taking place overall in record housing starts really contributes to how we can provide affordable rent long-term in our affordable housing sector.

Over the next three years the capital plan in this budget invests \$2.2 billion in affordable housing and continuing care homes, including \$1.2 billion through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, which will support affordable housing construction. That funding is expected to support about 7,300 new affordable housing units in addition to nearly 4,900 units already under

construction, which will, again, help continue to ensure that our supply continues to grow. All part of our big plan to add 15,000 new continuing care units across the province to get up to 82,000 affordable households that we're paying for.

We see results from that investment, focusing on making sure that we let our industry do the job, let our nonprofit sectors do the job. When the federal government, the provincial government, and municipalities come together to focus on things like affordable housing, you end up seeing increase in supply, which we predicted would do exactly what it did, which is stabilize the rent situation, bring Alberta to be sixth of the 10 most affordable jurisdictions in the country, and that our average rent has decreased now \$400 a month below the national average. That's because of the investment in supply. We did that despite the fact that we were the fastest growing place in the country and sometimes the world during that period of time. We could not have done it without industry responding to that challenge, but also businesses and organizations responding to the big call, which was to focus on purpose-built rentals. We saw the most purpose-built rentals of any time in the history of the province. I'm very proud of the industry for doing it. They accomplished something extraordinary for our province and have really set us up such that we are the envy of the rest of the country.

If you go and take a look at what's taking place in a place like Ontario or in downtown Toronto or Vancouver – I know if you listen to the Official Opposition, they'll make it sound like Edmonton and Calgary rents are like Vancouver, but I guarantee you that they have not really, then, looked at what it costs to live in a place like that. You know, Madam Chair, we had a situation taking place in Alberta in the height of this affordability crisis on housing where people were commuting by airplanes to work and school in Vancouver but living here. It was cheaper to take a flight there every day than it was to be able to live there. Again, proven: when we bet on Albertans and our great industry, we can always accomplish amazing things, and that's why we have multiple record breaking years.

With that, Madam Chair, it's been a real pleasure to be at your committee to discuss our budget. I certainly hope that we've earned the support of all the members of this Chamber for the important work that is in this budget with Assisted Living Alberta and hope that you enjoy your evening.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you so much, Minister.

This concludes the time that we have allotted for the consideration of the ministry's estimates. I'd like to remind members that we're scheduled to meet this evening at 7:00 to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]







