



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Public Accounts

Seniors and Community Supports

Wednesday, March 24, 2010  
8:31 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 27th Legislature  
Third Session**

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL), Chair  
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC), Deputy Chair

Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (WA)  
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)  
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL)  
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)  
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)  
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)  
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)  
Groeneveld, George, Highwood (PC)  
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)  
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND)  
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)  
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)  
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)  
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

**Also in Attendance**

Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL)

**Department of Seniors and Community Supports Participants**

Dave Arsenault	Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Support Programs and Strategic Planning
Robert Bhatia	Deputy Minister
Dana Hogemann	Director, Financial Planning
Chi Loo	Assistant Deputy Minister, Seniors Services
Donna Ludvigsen	Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Disability Supports
Jim Menzies	Director, Monitoring, Finance and Information Management

**Auditor General's Office Participants**

Merwan Saher	Acting Auditor General
Ronda White	Assistant Auditor General
Al Neid	Principal

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8:31 a.m.

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

[Mr. Rodney in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Well, good morning, everyone. Welcome back to winter. I'm sitting in the chair today. Dave Rodney, MLA, Calgary-Lougheed. I want to welcome everyone in attendance here today. I do expect that there will be more folks coming as we will call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order.

The people around the table, I'm sure, are very well aware that we do not need to touch these microphones, but for our guests today, just know you do not need to press any on or off buttons. If the microphone is pointed in your general direction, it will be picked up by *Hansard*. It is being recorded, every single word, on *Hansard* and streamed live to we're not sure how many people on the Internet this morning and in the future.

I wonder if at this time we could invite the members and the Auditor General's staff and departmental officials at the table to introduce themselves. I am Dave Rodney, deputy chair. I will be presiding at this meeting as Mr. MacDonald will be asking questions of the department. Why don't we send it over to this side, and we'll introduce ourselves.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you. Good morning. George Groeneveld, Highwood.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Tony Vandermeer, MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Good morning and welcome. Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Ms Pastoor:** Good morning. Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Kang:** Good morning, everyone. I'm Darshan Kang, MLA, Calgary-McCall.

**Ms Ludvigsen:** Good morning. Donna Ludvigsen.

**Mr. Loo:** Good morning. Chi Loo.

**Ms Hogemann:** Good morning. Dana Hogemann.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Good morning. Robert Bhatia, deputy minister.

**Mr. Arsenault:** Dave Arsenault.

**Mr. Menzies:** Jim Menzies.

**Mr. Neid:** Al Neid, office of the Auditor General.

**Ms White:** Good morning. Ronda White, office of the Auditor General.

**Mr. Saher:** Merwan Saher, Acting Auditor General.

**Mr. Olson:** Good morning. Verlyn Olson, MLA, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Ms Rempel:** Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thanks to Jody and our ever-capable staff for providing us with all the materials.

That leads us to point 2, approval of the agenda. You've had a chance to take a look at it, I'm sure, committee members. I would entertain a motion that the agenda for the March 24, 2010, meeting be approved as distributed, unless anyone needs to amend it.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** So moved.

**The Deputy Chair:** That is moved by Mr. Groeneveld. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Approval of the minutes. Again, those are in front of you, I trust. I would be happy to hear someone move that the minutes of the March 17, 2010, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved, unless there are amendments. I see no hands waving for amendments. Could I have someone move that the meeting minutes be approved? Verlyn Olson. Those in favour? Those opposed? Carried.

On to reports. Indeed, we have received the reports of the Auditor General of Alberta, April and October of 2009; the annual report of the government of Alberta for 2008-09, which includes the consolidated financial statements of the government of Alberta annual report 2008-2009 and Measuring Up, progress report on the government of Alberta business plan annual report 2008-2009; as well as Alberta Seniors and Community Supports annual report 2008-09. That was indeed prepared for our committee by the LAO research staff.

I wonder if at this time we could have the deputy minister make a brief opening statement on behalf of Seniors and Community Supports, and then we will hear from the Auditor General.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Good morning and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this morning on behalf of the Hon. Mary Anne Jablonski to discuss the 2008-09 annual report of the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. During 2008-09 we saw good outcomes in our programs for seniors and for Albertans with disabilities, which I'll outline over the next few minutes.

To begin, I'd like to talk about some of the ministry initiatives that helped us continue to support seniors and persons with disabilities in our province. The ministry responded to the growing need for supportive living spaces across the province through the affordable supportive living initiative, or ASLI, and through the lodge modernization and improvement program. In 2008-09 these programs provided approximately \$120 million in capital funding to help build and modernize 1,181 affordable supportive living spaces and to modernize and improve 1,992 lodge spaces across Alberta.

To promote the safety, security, and quality of life for supportive living and long-term care residents, the ministry implemented accommodation standards for these types of facilities in 2007. To help Albertans know how these facilities are complying with the standards, a web-based public reporting system for continuing care accommodation standards and monitoring was launched in July 2008.

To continue supporting those in long-term care who are most in need, the ministry increased benefits for approximately 8,700 low-income residents. The increased funding fully or partially covered the increase through the Alberta seniors' benefit and Alberta assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, programs. We also improved employment opportunities for Albertans with disabilities by implementing an increase to the AISH employment income exemption. This has allowed approximately 6,300 AISH clients to keep more of the money they earn from working and still be eligible for needed financial assistance.

Our efforts in the continuing care area also include working closely with Alberta Health and Wellness to develop the continuing care strategy aging in the right place, which was released in December 2008. It responds to the Premier's mandate to improve the choice and availability of continuing care accommodations.

That same year, in 2008, we also took steps to prepare for the province's aging population. The Demographic Planning Commission was established to consult with Albertans and advise on meeting the needs of current and future seniors. The information collected from the commission is being used to develop the aging population policy framework. The framework will convey the Alberta government's roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of an aging population as well as key policy directions.

Also in 2008 the community boards for the persons with developmental disability program, or PDD, held stakeholder engagement sessions across the province. Feedback from the sessions helped to establish the priority actions for the PDD program.

In the area of legislation the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act was introduced in the Legislative Assembly in February 2009 and received royal assent in June. As well, amendments to the Personal Directives Act were proclaimed on June 30, 2008, and the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, designed to provide more supportive decision-making options and protective measures for vulnerable adults, was passed by the Legislative Assembly in November 2008 and received royal assent in December 2008.

8:40

Looking briefly at the financial performance for 2008-09, the ministry's budget was \$1.91 billion, of which \$1.85 billion was spent. Of this, \$1.7 billion relates to four key program areas. Mr. Chairman, \$340 million provided direct benefits to seniors in 2008-09. This included income supplements through the Alberta seniors' benefit as well as supports through the seniors' dental and optical programs, special-needs assistance for seniors, and school property tax assistance for senior homeowners.

Supports for Albertans with disabilities are provided primarily through the assured income for the severely handicapped program and the PDD program. Almost \$1.2 billion was provided in 2008-09 through these two programs: \$600 million was spent to provide income supports and health-related supports through the AISH program, and over \$560 million was provided to the PDD community boards to support their work in providing community supports for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Alberta aids to daily living, or AADL, supports about 80,000 Albertans, with about 90 per cent of program spending directed to seniors and persons with disabilities. Almost \$100 million was spent on AADL in 2008-09 to provide financial assistance for basic medical equipment and supplies to allow people to remain independent in their home, lodge, or supportive living setting.

As noted earlier, almost \$120 million was spent to build and modernize over 3,000 affordable supportive living spaces and lodge units throughout the province. I look forward to further discussing our programs during this meeting.

Turning to the Auditor General's reports for April and October 2009, I am pleased to report that he did not make any specific recommendations for our ministry. Our ministry and the PDD community boards continue to address outstanding recommendations concerning the board's contracting systems, and the October 2009 report notes the progress made by the PDD boards. In addition, we have continued to address the recommendations from the Auditor General's 2005 report on seniors' care and programs, and we believe that information provided as part of the current audit will be sufficient to satisfy any matters that are still outstanding.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. I'd like to thank our staff for all of their hard work during 2008-09. Now I'd be pleased to answer your questions.

**The Deputy Chair:** Just before you do, thank you, Deputy Minister, for that. Clear and concise. The committee did hear that there were no recommendations on behalf of the Auditor General. However, I would like to open the floor to the Auditor General's department to see if there are any comments. It sounds like there's at least one.

Please, go ahead.

**Ms White:** Sure. I'll just make some brief comments. The results of our audit of the ministry start on page 305 of our October 2009 public report. As the deputy has said, we have not made any new recommendations to the department this year, but on page 341 we have listed the outstanding recommendations that we made to the department in previous years, and the committee may want to ask management about the progress that they have made in implementing these recommendations that primarily arise from the report reissued on seniors' care and programs.

We also report that the persons with developmental disabilities community boards have implemented two of our previous recommendations by improving contracting policies and procedures and auditing service providers. We also indicate they've made good progress in monitoring and evaluating service providers.

I'd be happy to answer any questions about our report as you go through the morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

I would like to greet Mr. Sandhu. Mr. Sandhu, you are on the list. However, we have Kang, Olson, MacDonald before you and Pastoor and Groeneveld after.

I would like to open the floor to the first question, and that is, indeed, Mr. Kang, please and thanks.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first question is: what measures were used to determine the income threshold levels for the seniors' pharmaceutical plan?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Okay. I think I'll ask Chi Loo to answer that question.

**Mr. Loo:** I'm assuming you're talking about the Alberta pharmaceutical plan that last was announced in April 2009. That program belongs to Alberta Health and Wellness. They are responsible for determining those thresholds, and it's not fair for me to comment on their methodology.

**Mr. Kang:** I don't know. My supplemental is: what criteria were used to determine the monthly amount of seniors' drug premiums? Maybe you can't even answer that one.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Yeah. Those are clearly matters within health's purview.

**The Deputy Chair:** I'd be happy to put you back on the list if you would like to ask questions in addition. You would be after Mr. Fawcett – and welcome to Kyle Fawcett as well – so we'll put you back on.

In the meantime Mr. Verlyn Olson has the floor.

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you. I have a number of questions. I'll just choose one here. Maybe this is staring me in the face in the documents, and I'm just missing it. Can you give me a breakdown

of how much of the funding for PDD is actually used up, for lack of a better term, by the PDD boards as opposed to being passed on to agencies and so on for their front-line activities?

**Mr. Bhatia:** I'm going to ask Dana Hogemann to supplement, but in general terms the PDD regional boards have some internal operations that oversee and contract with service providers. In addition, they have their direct operations. Some clients are served by facilities such as Michener Centre in Red Deer, which is the biggest, but also a handful of other directly operated group homes and other facilities in Edmonton, Calgary, and a few other places. Then the remainder of their funding is passed through to service providers who provide the typical community supports for PDD programs. Maybe Jim Menzies can supplement on that.

**Mr. Menzies:** Sure. I'd be happy to. As Deputy Minister Bhatia mentioned, the PDD community boards run their own facilities. Those are services provided to individuals, and across the community boards that adds up to about \$67 million for services in the facilities that they operate. In the community, those served in the community, funding goes to those organizations totalling almost \$472 million. That remains the PDD administration portion, if you like, to administer the program at about 25 and a half million dollars.

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

**The Deputy Chair:** Thanks to both of you.

Mr. MacDonald, we're anxious to hear from you this morning.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I have questions on the Alberta seniors' benefit on page 93, line 2.2.1. In 2008-09 the budget was \$288 million. The actual spent was \$255 million, for a surplus of over \$32 million. Why was this benefit program in surplus? Was there a tightening of the rules for those that possibly could receive the Alberta seniors' benefit?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, there was no change in rules or tightening of the rules under the program. That program, as members may be aware, has very clear eligibility criteria based on income. The lower spending was simply a result of fewer people being eligible for the program, or those that were eligible might have been eligible for a slightly lower amount than what was anticipated at budget time. We simply just didn't need the full authority.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay. Thank you for that.

My second question, Mr. Chairman, would be: what happened to the surplus \$32 million? Did you spend it or did you put it back in the general revenue fund?

8:50

**Mr. Bhatia:** I may ask Dana to supplement. The overall spending for the ministry, as I outlined in my opening comments, was well below the budgeted amount, so it was in effect returned to the general revenue fund, or simply unspent. We did reallocate some funding to additional capital grants under the ASLI program, but for the most part there was a surplus that was unspent.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Mr. MacDonald, a quick question for you. I'm presuming that you may have further questions. Shall I put you on the list?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, please, if you don't mind.

**The Deputy Chair:** And you, indeed, will be after Mr. Xiao, whom I welcome to the proceedings as well.

Next on our list is Mr. Sandhu. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Good morning. I'm looking at the budget in 2008-2009 for Seniors and Community Supports. Supposedly, they used \$69 million less than budgeted. Can you please describe the reason for the less money used, the \$69 million?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Yeah. That, Mr. Chairman, relates very closely to the answer that I just gave, but in terms of where the reduced spending came from, about \$21 million came from the seniors' benefit program, \$6 million from the seniors' dental program, \$4 million from the seniors' special-needs assistance program, and a total of about \$37 million from AISH, both financial and AISH health benefit programs. It was essentially all from programs where the take-up was simply less than we had anticipated at budget time.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Just a supplemental. You budgeted \$69 million. You were supposed to use more. Is there no impact in, you know, using less money for the services to Albertans?

**Mr. Bhatia:** No. In this case this was simply a matter of in some cases who was eligible for the program. As I indicated a few minutes ago, in the case of Alberta seniors' benefit if there are fewer people whose income is below the thresholds for the program, there simply will be fewer people eligible for the program and therefore less spending. In other cases – the dental program, for example – there are also income tests for eligibility, but then the ultimate spending also depends on how many people need dental services and claim dental services under the program.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you.

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

Someone who cannot vote today but is here out of personal, professional, and political interest is the intrepid Ms Pastoor. The floor is yours.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be following along the line of the previous questions, and you will not be surprised at where I'm coming from on this one. My mantra, of course, as I'm sure the department is more than aware, is that I believe that AISH should be indexed, as are MLA salaries. I probably will keep hammering away at that because I have the precedent of my colleague Laurie Blakeman, who, I think, took 20 years but finally got midwives into the health care system. So as long as I'm around, I guess you'll be hearing it.

It follows along the line that, you know, on page 94 AISH financial assistance was unexpended by \$31 million. I guess part of my question would be: when was the last time that the criteria was changed so that you ended up with less people in the system, and if you have this unexpended money, why are you not looking at having AISH indexed, as are MLA salaries? It's two years in a row that it's been unexpended. You know, there seems to be a trend, and I hate to see that kind of money go back into general revenue when people could do with a little more.

**The Deputy Chair:** Ms Pastoor, I'm looking forward to the answer as well, but as we all know, it is related to last year's numbers of this department. I do not expect the deputy minister to comment on

MLA salaries being indexed although we haven't accepted those raises. Anyway, I just wanted to make that point.

But to Ms Pastoor's pointed question.

**Ms Pastoor:** This year was \$31 million.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. Again, for last year's numbers specifically with the PDD question from Ms Pastoor.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll ask Donna Ludvigsen to comment on the details of the increases that have been made to AISH payments. The government has regularly looked at the level of AISH payments and has made adjustments, including several over the past few years, and the matter of whether a formal indexing approach is taken or not is a policy matter.

Donna, perhaps you could outline the timing of the increases that have occurred recently.

**Ms Ludvigsen:** Certainly. The unexpended funds in the AISH program are again related to the uptake in the program. We had estimated that we would have about a 4 per cent increase in clients, and as the year progressed, we only had a 3 per cent increase in the number of clients. In terms of the increases that have been made to the AISH program to the end of fiscal '08-09, there had been four since 2005. There was one April 1, 2005; April 1, 2006; April 1, 2007; then January 1, 2008. Then there was, again, the increase in the benefit for April 1, 2009, but that's the next fiscal year.

**Ms Pastoor:** Just a supplemental to that. I certainly appreciate the reviews. But we all know that these people struggle on this amount of money. I think when you live in that kind of situation, if you know that you can count on something going forward rather than always wondering every year, as they do, whether it's going to be cut or they won't get an increase – it's something worth having the department look at.

Thank you.

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

On to Mr. Groeneveld, please.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Chair. I think I started, probably, with the Seniors and Community Supports book, and when I got to goal 1, some questions popped up mighty quickly. On page 25 where goal 1 starts, of course, is that seniors in need have access to financial assistance to support independence. I'd kind of like to know what kind of assistance and the total amount of assistance is provided to the seniors by this department. We, of course, realize that dollars are always short, and we always struggle to meet even their basic needs, unfortunately. Could you please elaborate a little bit on the needs of the programs that you mentioned in goal 1 already?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Sure. Certainly, Mr. Chairman. As I mentioned briefly in my opening remarks, there are several programs that provide direct support to lower income seniors. The key program is the Alberta seniors' benefit. In 2008-09 approximately 138,000 low-income seniors were eligible for assistance from this program. Together with the special-needs assistance program the total value was \$276 million.

The Alberta seniors' benefit provides a sliding scale supplement to those lower income seniors. It's intended to be a supplement to old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, which, of course, are federal programs, and to provide that core level of

income support. It is, obviously, a program not tied to any particular specific requirement of a senior. It is generalized income support.

The special-needs assistance program, on the other hand, is available to lower income seniors to help them deal with particular needs in their lives. This might include: if a low-income senior's refrigerator fails, they would be eligible to apply for assistance with a replacement, or something like that.

9:00

Then there are other programs, the seniors' optical and dental programs. About 200,000 seniors were eligible for the dental and optical assistance programs. Of these, about 70 per cent are low-income seniors who are eligible for the maximum benefits, and about 30 per cent have slightly higher incomes and are eligible for partial benefits. In 2008-09 about 81,000 seniors accessed the dental benefits, and 28,000 seniors accessed the optical benefits program. The combined expenditure on direct assistance was about \$55 million for those programs.

Another program, which has a little bit broader eligibility, is the education property tax program for seniors. That provided more than \$6 million in rebates to about 73,000 seniors' households in the 2008 property tax year.

All told, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, these programs cost \$340 million in '08-09.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you. My supplementary question you've pretty much touched on already. I'm flipping over to strategy 1.4. The report indicates that the ministry improved the response of targeted seniors' financial assistance programs. You've talked in there about Blue Cross, and you have already talked about the dental and optical assistance.

I see in there that you also work with Employment and Immigration, which touches on federal disability plans as well, which I suspect is a bit of a challenge when you start sorting out the combination of the logistics of two different levels of government. I would like you to elaborate, maybe, just a little bit on that and, you know, on the related department activities that you have going on right now. I know you've covered some of that already, but when we talk about working on two and sometimes, I guess, three levels of government, the challenges that maybe come up there.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, the member touched on several things, one of them being the relationship with Blue Cross. Blue Cross is one of the partners we use to deliver some of our programs. During 2008-09 we completed the process to have Blue Cross take over processing of the seniors' optical program claims. That was one of the improvements in service delivery that we were able to make that year.

With respect to other levels of government certainly we closely monitor developments at the federal level, and we try to ensure that our programs fit logically with federal programs. The one that's referenced in the annual report is the federal initiative to establish registered disability savings plans. Our priority and the federal government's priority is to ensure that those individuals or those families who were able to establish such plans for their family members would not have benefits clawed back simply by the fact that the family or the individual had been able to set aside some savings for their disabled family member.

That was a discussion that happened both across the government, hence the reference to Employment and Immigration, and also between the provincial government and the federal government to ensure that the full benefit of the preferred tax status that the federal government was granting did in fact flow through to our clients.



**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you.

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

I have Fawcett, Kang, Xiao, and MacDonald on the list. Are there any others that care to get on the list at the moment? Yes.

Since we had Mr. Groeneveld, let's go to Mr. Kang because we do want to go back and forth in the spirit of the all-party committee.

**Mr. Kang:** My first question is: how much money was paid out under the special-needs assistance program in the last fiscal year?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Mr. Chairman, the actual spending on the key programs is found on page 93 of the annual report. The special-needs assistance grants were \$20.4 million in 2008-09.

**Mr. Kang:** My supplemental. How many claims were denied, if any? What were the main reasons for the denials?

**Mr. Bhatia:** There's a fairly wide scope of items that are eligible for the special-needs program. I'll ask Chi to respond if we have statistics on the numbers that were denied, but I'm sure he can indicate the types of claims that might be denied.

**Mr. Loo:** About 70 to 75 per cent of applications for the special-needs assistance program are approved. The ones that are rejected quite often are for items that are not eligible as prescribed by the program. The program is intended to deal with specific extraordinary situations that might help the individual to remain at home. So if someone wants to ask, for example, for assistance with the monthly payment for buying a new car, those are the kinds of items that we would be declining. If they come in and ask for assistance to replace washer and dryer machines, those are the items that would be approved. The approval rate is around 70, 75 per cent.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Loo.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kang.  
Mr. Fawcett, please.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Page 16 of the Seniors and Community Supports 2008-09 annual report indicates a program initiative, affordable supportive living initiative. Can you elaborate on the affordable supportive living initiative, ASLI? How much funding has been provided to communities across Alberta for this initiative?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Yes. Mr. Chairman, the affordable supportive living initiative is a capital grant program that enables the ministry to partner with the private sector, nonprofit, and, in some cases, for-profit providers to develop affordable supportive living spaces. The basic parameters of the program are that it will provide up to 50 per cent of the eligible capital costs of the affordable component of a supportive living project in order to facilitate the availability of that sort of accommodation for low- to moderate-income seniors and for persons with disabilities.

In '08-09 31 projects were funded, for a total of \$84 million, and that supported almost 1,200 additional units. In addition, \$36 million was provided to 29 projects to modernize and improve almost 2,000 units. There have been programs in the past that were predecessors to ASLI. Over the years, from 1999 to 2009, over \$415 million was provided to assist in the development of about 8,500 spaces.

9:10

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you. Mr. Chair, my supplemental question. I was just wondering if you could provide some information regarding the monthly rates that residents pay for these units, and what assistance is available to Albertans who are unable to meet or pay these monthly fees.

**Mr. Bhatia:** The maximum rate charged in the affordable supportive living spaces is \$1,650 a month, the same as the maximum that is regulated for long-term care spaces. In terms of assistance if an individual or a couple with lower income is occupying one of those spaces, then there is what's known as a supplementary accommodation benefit available to them, which supplements their Alberta seniors' benefit and ensures that they have a modest amount of discretionary cash after paying their monthly rent.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fawcett, for your patience. I know you were waiting for a while to get on the list.

Back to some folks we've heard from before: Mr. MacDonald, followed by Mr. Xiao.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions will be from vote element 1.0.5 on page 93, the Cabinet Policy Committee on Health. Why was the Cabinet Policy Committee on Health over budget by \$101,000 in 2008-09?

**Mr. Vandermeer:** What page is that?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Page 93.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Okay. I'm going to ask Dana Hogemann to respond to that question.

**Ms Hogemann:** In 2008-09, I believe, it was the first year of the cabinet policy committee, and the department was granted an allocation of \$147,000. The overage was due to the change in MLA honoraria for committee membership in 2008-09.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay. Was the total amount of \$248,000 used to pay honorariums to MLAs? Could you provide a breakdown of what the \$248,000 in actual expenses was used for?

**Ms Hogemann:** I can provide that information in writing. I don't know the split offhand.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thanks.

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

Mr. Xiao is actually the last person I have on my list. I would be happy to hear from members. I see three more. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Xiao.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everybody. I have a question related to Seniors and Community Supports. On page 94 of your annual report it identifies \$746 million in spending on disability supports, and that includes, you know, \$596 million spent on AISH, which includes financial assistance of about \$443 million and health-related assistance of \$152 million. I just wanted to know: how many Albertans receive this funding, and what is the eligibility criteria for the AISH clients to receive this type of funding assistance from your department?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, during 2008-09 a little over 37,000 adult Albertans with disabilities received assistance under the AISH program. The key eligibility criteria are that an individual must have a severe handicap that is permanent and substantially limits their ability to earn a livelihood.

Secondly, there is an income test and an asset test. The income and assets of the individual and their cohabiting partner must not exceed the limits allowed under the program. They must also be a permanent resident of Alberta. If they're institutionalized, then they're not eligible for payments while they're not in the community. And in order to be eligible for AISH and to determine the amount of assistance that they receive under AISH, they have to apply for all other relevant programs like, for example, the Canada pension plan disability program.

In addition, AISH recipients are eligible for a comprehensive list of health-related benefits. This would include prescription drugs, optical care, dental care, emergency ambulance services, and so on. In addition, under our aids to daily living program they don't have to pay the copayment that other individuals have to pay.

**Mr. Xiao:** My second question is still related to disability supports. The Alberta aids to daily living grant shows a total expenditure – originally you had budgeted for \$92 million. The actual spending is \$97,181,000. So the overspending is about 4 and a half million dollars. Can you explain what type of assistance is provided through the AADL program and why this program is overexpended?

Thank you.

**Mr. Bhatia:** About 80,000 Albertans benefited from the AADL program. It is intended to help Albertans with a long-term disability or chronic or even terminal illness maintain their independence either in their own home or in a lodge or group home. It does that by providing them the medical equipment and supplies that they need.

There are five broad benefit areas, including hearing and communication aids, medical and surgical supplies, mobility and large equipment. That would be things like wheelchairs and bath lifts. Another category is prosthetics and orthotics as well as things like respiratory equipment and supplies. It's quite a broad range of supplies and services to enable them to maintain a degree of independence.

The overexpenditure was essentially because demand under the program exceeded the amount that we expected at the beginning of the year. Again, the program is determined largely by demand and eligibility, and eligibility is primarily whether there is a medical need for the equipment.

**Mr. Xiao:** I think I have one last question, which is on a different topic. It's regarding the pharmaceutical programs. I know this is related to health, but besides whatever the health system can offer, what other programs do you have that can assist those seniors who have considerably low income to deal with the issue? Once you get to that age, you need a lot of medication. Can you just elaborate on this?

Thanks.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Mr. Chairman, as we've indicated, the actual pharmaceutical program is, of course, within the purview of the minister of health. Our program, AADL, provides equipment. I'll just ask Chi Loo to supplement briefly, though.

**Mr. Loo:** With respect to the seniors' side, in the program that's in place in the year that we're talking about today, the prescription

costs for seniors are 30 per cent of the drug up to a maximum of \$25. All seniors, regardless of their income or financial capability: that's what they have to pay. Indeed, for some low-income seniors that copayment may be a bit of a challenge for them. The special-needs assistance program will consider providing assistance with that copayment.

9:20

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

I have Pastoor, Olson, MacDonald, Groeneveld, and Kang. I'm not sure if that'll take us till quarter to or not, but let's find out. Ms Pastoor.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The \$159 million for the PDD budget: could you give me a breakdown on administration versus direct staffing? Is the Michener Centre included in there? Does that include their operating funds? Does it include the operating funds for group homes?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Okay. Was there a page that was being referenced there?

**Ms Pastoor:** No. I just know the number. Sorry.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Okay. All right. I'll ask Jim Menzies to respond to that.

**The Deputy Chair:** Jim, if you can provide that now, then that's fine. Otherwise, it may have to come in writing. Let's give him a minute and see.

**Mr. Menzies:** I'm not sure where the \$159 million comes from. Is that the central community board you're talking about?

**Ms Pastoor:** It's the PDD budget, is it not?

**Mr. Menzies:** No, the PDD budget for 2008-09 was just a little over \$560 million.

**Ms Pastoor:** Okay. Well, if that's the PDD budget, then change the number in my question to the same.

**Mr. Menzies:** Okay. Sorry. So you're interested in . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** In fact, let's have you rephrase if you can. That's indeed why, members, we need to refer to a reference line. I'll give you a minute, Ms Pastoor, if you want to rephrase your question.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you. Okay. You're saying that the PDD budget is \$560 million.

**Mr. Menzies:** In total, yes, for the community boards.

**Ms Pastoor:** In total. Okay. Then I'm asking for the breakdown of those numbers, administration versus direct staffing. Does that include Michener Centre? Does it include the operating costs for Michener Centre and the operating costs for group homes that would be under the PDD program?

**Mr. Bhatia:** I'll ask Jim to supplement in a moment, but the financial statements include a reasonable amount of detail for each

regional board. That's found toward the latter part of the annual report, pages 140, 160, in that area. In those financial statements there is a breakdown of the types of programs that each board delivers, community living supports versus employment supports and so on.

**Ms Pastoor:** It doesn't break it down by admin versus front-line staff, though, does it?

**Mr. Menzies:** I'll supplement. In the financial statements for each community board, which begin on page 101 with Calgary, in the statement of operations for each board, there's a category called supports to delivery systems.

**Ms Pastoor:** And that's admin?

**Mr. Menzies:** That's administration, but it's a combination of PDD's own administrative costs as well as the administrative costs of the contracted agencies in the community. So it's the total amount that we pay to administer the program within the PDD community boards as well as in the contracted agencies. In terms of that total amount I'm not sure that I have a total. I can certainly provide that in writing, but I would refer back to my previous answer: the administration component for PDD is about 25 and a half million dollars.

**Mr. MacDonald:** That doesn't include the agencies.

**Mr. Menzies:** That does not include the agencies. That has the agency piece split out. What that includes is the typical administrative functions that you would think of: finance, executive, management. It includes contract administration activities.

**Ms Pastoor:** And that's done by the ministry.

**Mr. Menzies:** That's done by community board staff. In addition to that, \$67 million is spent by the community boards for the direct operations such as Michener services in Red Deer, Eric Cormack and the group homes that the Edmonton community board operates, and graduated supports similarly in Calgary. That totals up to \$67 million. That, too, is PDD staff costs, but that's for providing services directly to individuals who live in those operated facilities. Those aren't administrative costs; those are direct service costs, but it's government staff.

Then that leaves you with \$471 million, almost \$472 million, that we provide to community agencies to deliver services to individuals. Now, that \$472 million amount includes the contracted agencies' administrative component as well. In terms of a breakdown almost \$81 million of that is community agency administration. Then the balance – I can't do the math in my head – would be for direct, front-line services to individuals.

**Ms Pastoor:** Okay. The operational costs for Michener?

**Mr. Menzies:** That's included within the \$67 million. The amount would be a little bit over \$48 million of the \$67 million for Michener services.

**Ms Pastoor:** Okay. But then there's a breakdown within that – right? – between operational and actual service delivery.

**Mr. Menzies:** Yes. If you want to go down into that level of detail, about \$5 million of that cost would be for what you'd call support

services within the Michener services environment. The balance is front-line, face-to-face, direct support to individuals.

**Ms Pastoor:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, Ms Pastoor.  
Mr. Olson.

**Mr. Olson:** Thanks. I have a couple of unrelated questions, if I may. I'm referring to performance measure 1(b) on page 29, and that relates to the assessment time for special-needs assistance for seniors' applications. I'm noticing that that has ticked up a little bit over what your target was, so we're at 13 days with a 10-day target. I'm just wondering if you could comment on that. I take it that it's not seen necessarily as the beginning of a trend. In fact, over the past five, six years it has generally been trending down. Given that the nature of this program is that people need help in a hurry, I'm wondering if you can just comment on that and maybe give a little bit more detail as to what the reasons were.

**Mr. Bhatia:** Mr. Chairman, we do have a target of keeping the response time on this program as short as possible for the very reasons that the member indicated. We had been running around 10 days, but in '08-09 there was an increase, and it was probably simply due to a slight increase in the number of applications over the previous year. Typically, the applications are for reimbursement of an expense, so usually the senior has managed to make the payment and acquire whatever the critical good or service was. It is important to reimburse them as quickly as possible, but given the volumes that we were dealing with, 13 days was the time that it took us.

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you. My second, unrelated question just relates to the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, now passed, proclaimed. Can you just give us a bit of an update as to its implementation? Is it fully implemented now? What's the status?

**Mr. Bhatia:** I'll ask Dave Arsenault to supplement, but there has been a very significant effort by the ministry to ensure that the provisions of the act are made available quickly and thoroughly to Albertans. This has involved a significant education effort, working with the medical profession, the legal profession, and others to ensure that the options available under the new legislation are widely known in the relevant professional communities and also that information about the new options is disseminated widely.

I'll ask Dave Arsenault to supplement.

9:30

**Mr. Arsenault:** I would say that the act is fully implemented. We have now 90 applications under the new act that are going through the process in terms of what's there, including the reviewer's role of going out and meeting with the individuals, ensuring that they're comfortable. You know, the assessment trainers have been trained. There are about 90 that have been trained across the province, so it is rolling out. Work continues with Alberta Health Services in ensuring that all the procedures and forms are being used as they should be. So we're moving forward quite nicely on the new act.

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Olson.  
Mr. MacDonald, back to you, please and thanks.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have questions that are related to page 116 of the annual report. We have

in each respective region the breakdown of directly incurred expenses, and the research provided to the Public Accounts Committee this morning indicates that PDD administration would break down to 5 and a half per cent of the budget, and agency administration is 14.3 per cent. Can you tell me why agency administration is such a large expense when you compare it to PDD administration?

**Mr. Bhatia:** I'm going to ask Dave Arsenault or Jim Menzies to supplement in a moment, but the first thing that you need to think about is the overall structure of the PDD program, which is that the government provides a grant to the PDD region, and then the PDD region contracts with service providers. Not all but in most cases the service providers have the relationship with the individual families. So the PDD region is overseeing relationships with a couple of hundred service providers. The service providers are overseeing relationships – I can't remember the number in this fiscal year, but now it's with a little over 9,000 individuals, less a number that are served by direct operations such as Michener.

We really have a pyramid of government to regions, regions to service providers, and service providers to families. There is a lot of detailed oversight and administration that needs to occur at the service provider level. So administration here is defined quite broadly. It includes all of the management and support with service providers as they oversee the individual relationships with families and individual clients.

I'll just ask Jim to add any comments on the absolute level of administration.

**Mr. Menzies:** Certainly. The percentages you've quoted sound about right, off the top of my head. Just to really reiterate what the deputy minister said, you're really talking about two different kinds of business, if you want to use that phrase. The community boards operate a certain kind of operation, which is related to contract administration primarily, whereas the service providers are providing support directly to individuals. So they're different kinds of operations.

Also, in the service sector there is quite a wide variety of shapes and sizes of organizations, from very large to very small. Generally speaking, the smaller the organization the higher percentage the administration is because there's a sort of core amount of administrative spending to run an organization of any size.

There are a number of factors, but the primary driver is that it's just a different business that they operate than the community boards, different administrative needs.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay. Now, on page 24 of the annual report, program expense, it indicates that there was \$570 million spent on PDD, and if you look at the number of clients, which is 9,123, that averages to \$62,500 per client. Why is there such a wide range of average annual costs per client between the respective community boards? Why does it fluctuate? For instance, the average annual cost per client in the central region is over \$74,000 while in Edmonton it is only \$57,000.

**Mr. Bhatia:** I'll ask Dave or Jim to supplement, but there are a couple of general reasons. One is because the individuals served by the PDD program vary very widely in the amount of support that they need. If different regions have a different mix of clients in terms of their degree of need, then the average cost per client will vary from region to region.

Secondly, the different regions do have different mixes of direct supports versus agency supports: therefore, community living versus

the larger direct operations, Michener in particular. So there are some differences in the mix of business between the regions.

If Dave or Jim can provide additional detail in answer to that, I'll ask them to do so.

**Mr. Arsenault:** I think the other factor that enters into that is the aging in the population that's served in each region. With this clientele as they age, their needs also go up. That's another factor that would see differences between regions.

**Mr. MacDonald:** And Michener Centre would be the reason why it's so much higher in central, right?

**Mr. Arsenault:** Yes.

**Mr. Menzies:** If I could add as well. Because of the Michener factor in central they see a bit of a higher cost in community services there as well because higher needs individuals at Michener who have chosen to move from there to the community have tended largely to stay in the central part of the province, so there's a double effect there.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Oh, okay. Thanks.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you for that series of questions, Mr. MacDonald.

I would like to go to Mr. Groeneveld next, please.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to go just a little bit over to the Auditor General's report because I certainly don't want these people to think that we don't read their stuff when they come here, for goodness' sake. It was referenced in opening remarks about page 341 of the Auditor General's report, the outstanding recommendations regarding PDD contract monitoring and evaluation. This certainly is a concern, probably for all of us, as we move along. Could you please provide an update of the department's community boards' progress in addressing the recommendations that the AG's department has made?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Again I'll ask others to supplement, but there have been a number of steps taken to strengthen the contracting processes with the service providers. We are using standardized processes across the community boards, including a standardized contract template. That will help to facilitate monitoring in the future.

I'll ask Dave and Jim to supplement on that, though.

9:40

**Mr. Arsenault:** Basically, as the deputy has shared, we have developed a common template. We've worked with the association that represents service agencies in terms of working through that, making changes. We are just completing the first year of using the new contract, so we will be evaluating that process. The report that the Auditor General did on the work that's been done, I think there was some satisfaction with how we had moved forward on that.

**Ms White:** I'll just supplement from our perspective. We have seen that the new contracting templates have been put in place. There's been a process to audit some of the service providers. Monitoring practices and policies have been established. What's left for us to see to assess that this recommendation is implemented is just actually the boards being able to monitor the new contracts. So probably in another year we'll take a look at where the boards are at and how successful they've been at monitoring against these new

contracts. That will be the last piece that we'll need to see to assess implementation.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you for that addendum.

Mr. Anderson, welcome to the meeting. I wondered if you wanted to get on the list or not. Okay. So we have three people left and only three minutes. We may have to have a couple of these read into the record.

Without further ado, Mr. Kang, followed by Mr. Xiao and Mr. MacDonald.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is: what was the backlog of seniors waiting in hospitals for space in a long-term care facility in the last fiscal year?

**Mr. Bhatia:** Well, Mr. Chairman, that would be an issue, again, within the purview of the ministry of health.

**Mr. Kang:** Okay. A supplemental question. For the cost . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Of the tunnel?

**Mr. Kang:** I know the cost of the tunnel as of today. If you could provide the cheque, Mr. Rodney, that would be great.

**The Deputy Chair:** And if it had to do with last year's estimates in this ministry, we would permit the question, but sadly it doesn't. So we'll give you one more.

**Mr. Kang:** Okay. So you won't be able to provide the average daily cost to the province for an individual taking up a bed in a hospital while waiting for a long-term care bed? Maybe that's related to health care as well.

**Mr. Bhatia:** That's primarily health care because it is a cost in an active treatment hospital.

**Mr. Kang:** Okay. Can I keep on going?

**The Deputy Chair:** Well, you know, I'm wondering if we can respect Xiao and MacDonald, and then we'll have the list completed. Thank you.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you.

**Mr. Xiao:** We'll ask about the tunnel on your behalf.

My question is on the Auditor General's report of last October. In your report you reference three outstanding recommendations related to the Alberta seniors' benefits program: determining future needs for Alberta seniors' benefits, the effectiveness of the Alberta seniors' benefits program, and information to determine benefits for the seniors' program. I just wanted the Auditor General to provide an update on the progress that has been made based on your recommendations.

Another question because time is limited. My second question was: how many seniors received this benefit from the Alberta seniors' benefits program in 2008-09?

Thank you.

**Mr. Saher:** Mr. Chairman, in relation to the last question, which is a good question, I think it might be more appropriate for the department to respond formally with the progress they believe

they've made with respect to these recommendations rather than the Auditor General doing that.

**The Deputy Chair:** Yes. Absolutely.

Did you want to do that in writing later? What's your preference, deputy minister?

**Mr. Bhatia:** I think we can respond briefly right now. As I mentioned earlier, we monitor closely federal income support programs and related programs to ensure that our programs are appropriately complementary, but we also do undertake analysis where appropriate to assess whether the seniors' benefit program or other programs are meeting the needs of seniors in an aggregate sense.

In 2006 we issued a request for information looking for expertise to do a detailed analysis of the relationship between lower incomes and the basic needs of seniors. The University of Calgary was the successful respondent, and they did do an analysis based on the expenditure data from Statistics Canada. What they looked at was how the income levels of Albertans receiving the ASB related to the Canada low-income cut-off measure and, in fact, found that the seniors' benefit program was generally sufficient to allow seniors to have a level of income that was at least consistent with that low-income cut-off. That gave us some evidence that the positioning of the seniors' benefit in the mix of income supports for low-income seniors was appropriate.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald, I'm sad to report that since we are out of time, the option would be to read any questions you have into the record. Or are you looking at the clock at a different angle than me?

**Mr. MacDonald:** I'm looking at the clock and seeing 15 minutes left in our time.

**The Deputy Chair:** Oh. You know, I've just seen from prior practice when you were in the chair that we had cut-off before, at quarter to. But if it pleases the committee, since you have the last question, shall we just entertain that right now?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Do you have any other matters on the agenda?

**The Deputy Chair:** Yes, we do, indeed, but that's okay.

**Mr. MacDonald:** No. I can read these into the record, Mr. Chairman, and we can get a written answer straight away, hopefully.

**The Deputy Chair:** I don't know that the other business will take much time, so why don't you go ahead and do your question, and then we'll be done.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay. Thank you. I would like to compare starting at page 117, please, of the annual report and then going to page 138 and then page 159. I'm looking at the Calgary Region Community Board. I'm looking at the size of the administration, and I see there are four positions. Then if you go to page 138, you see the central region. There are eight positions. Of course, the central region would have less clients. When you look at the Edmonton Region Community Board, there are three executive positions. Why is there such a range of executive positions in these respective boards? It seems that the board that's spending the most

money, has the largest budget, has the least number of executives in place, and they also have a pretty good track record with managing their money. Why this range?

**Mr. Bhatia:** I'll answer in part, and then I'll ask others to supplement. I think that in the central region in their executive structure you're seeing a reflection of the very large direct operation at Michener. For example, the fact that they have at this level a human resources manager is because they have a large direct staff. I think that's one of the differences you're seeing.

As to other differences among the regions, I would defer to others.

**Mr. Arsenault:** I think we would have to go back and look at that. I think that, as the deputy has shared, these are Crown agencies that set up their own admin. But we can go back and try to respond to that question for you.

9:50

**Mr. MacDonald:** I would really appreciate that. Could you please also tell the committee if the Edmonton, central, and Calgary boards have all been under expenditure in their governance budgets?

**Mr. Arsenault:** Yeah. I can do that.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** With that, we are concluded the business portion of this meeting apart from other business. I will sincerely thank the Auditor General and ministry officials for being here. I trust that people on both sides of the table, that meaning all of the parties and you and, indeed, constituents in Alberta who happen to be listening and/or reading it in the future in *Hansard*, are satisfied with how things went today. I will ask you folks if you would feel comfortable in exiting through the door on your left.

We'll have committee members remain at this point, and we will review points 5(a) the meeting schedule and (b) conference attendance. That will be followed by the announcement of the date of the next meeting and adjournment. We'll just wait for our officials to take their leave, and we will continue and conclude.

Okay. With that, we'll continue. First of all, the committee schedule has government departments booked, as some of you are quite well aware, on not only April 7 but into April 14, 21, 28, and into May 5. There is indeed a possibility that session will end prior to the completion of this schedule. I have a simple question. Is it the committee's wish to hold these meetings as scheduled on April 14, 21, 28, and May 5, or do we reschedule with these departments when we reconvene session in the fall? Comments?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, my preference would certainly be to reschedule into the fall.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. I'm seeing heads nodding. All in agreement? Anyone opposed? That is, indeed, our arrangement, then. Thank you.

Also, this week's briefing materials included a list of government agencies, boards, and commissions. Last year the committee held two days of out-of-session meetings with three such entities. I would now like to ask the committee if they would like to schedule similar out-of-session meetings this year. Let's start with yes or no. Do you want to have an out-of-session meeting or a couple of days of meetings?

Mr. MacDonald.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. I think we should carry on with our examination of the financial statements of various agencies, boards, and commissions.

**The Deputy Chair:** A question I might have, just looking around the room and not seeing anyone wanting to get on the list, is: is it possible that we would be able to schedule all of those for the fall? And maybe that begs the question: should we now take a quick look at that list?

I know, Mr. Chair, that last week you asked members if they would examine the agencies, boards, and commissions list and see who they wanted to see. Let's just put it this way: if there is no one that we need to see, then we don't need to have an out-of-session sitting.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Chairman, is there anything that pressing that we would need to meet out of session as such? Because there is certainly an added cost to doing that, and some of us travel from the other end of the province. You know, depending on what the others think, can we . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Well, you know, sitting in this chair here today, I do see and can almost feel that people need a little bit more time to discern even just their feelings or to have an educated opinion on the subject.

Mr. Macdonald usually sits in the chair. Mr. Chair, I wonder if we might table this and discuss it completely, and people must be ready at that time to make decisions on who we will see and, therefore, if we have sessions out of session and when that would be. It appears that folks are not completely decided within and of themselves who they want to see, so we could maybe have a better discussion at our next meeting.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. The meetings that we've held outside session – and we've had well over a dozen – have usually occurred in September or October. I am told the fall session may start this year in September. I don't know whether that's fact or fiction.

**The Deputy Chair:** We won't know it until it's official as well. I think it gets back to Mr. Groeneveld's point that it is not completely pressing. We do not need to decide that today, and we might actually be in a better position at our next meeting.

Before we get to the announcement of that, point 5(b) is conference attendance at CCPAC/CCOLA 2010. For the record Alberta had the great honour of hosting the conference last year. I understand many members took the opportunity to participate in various networking and professional development sessions. I know that in the past I've had the opportunity, and it's been extremely worth while.

This year the conference will be hosted by the National Assembly of Quebec in Quebec City. The anticipated conference dates are at the end of August 2010, the 29th to the 31st. It's been a tradition that the chair – not me in this case; I just happen to be here today – the deputy chair, committee clerks, and researchers attend the conference. I've been asked, and I've said that I would be prepared to go if the committee so chooses and that the chair has indicated his willingness to attend as well. I would open it up to committee members. Do you have any questions or concerns about that, the chair and the deputy chair allowing their names to stand to go?

**Mr. Xiao:** Can we all go?

**The Deputy Chair:** Well, we only have room for so many.

Any questions or concerns? I think that answers the question: do you have more than one person from more than one party attending?

If there are no questions or concerns, then we would need a motion. It looks like Mr. Xiao might be able to.

**Mr. Xiao:** Sure.

**The Deputy Chair:** Perhaps I can help out with some wording: that the chair, deputy chair, committee clerk, and committee research coordinator be approved to attend the 2010 Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conference in Quebec City this fall and that an alternate may be determined by lottery in the event that any of the approved delegates are unable to attend.

**Mr. Xiao:** Great. Sure.

**The Deputy Chair:** Is there any discussion on the motion before we take it to a vote? No? Then all those in favour of the motion from Mr. Xiao? Agreed? Anyone opposed? Well, that was easy.

I would ask members, please, if you are interested. I hope we can carry this on, Mr. Chair, when you're back in the chair; that is, that anyone who is interested could get their name in between now and the next meeting because with the weather some of our members are not here. If they want to get their names into the lottery, they could maybe do so at the next meeting as well.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. It's our past experience that one of the alternates usually winds up going. So if anyone is interested, please.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** I'm interested.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. Actually, I'm going to ask this question: is there anyone on the committee who is not interested in being an alternate or available? Okay. I see three hands. We don't need to know it for the record. If anyone in *Hansard* land is wondering why a person would not want to take the opportunity for professional development, actually that's not the issue. Often it is that people are completely double-booked at that time.

**Mr. Olson:** Mr. Chair, if I could. I'm just wondering about the relationship between this discussion and the letter that came out

from the Speaker within the last day or two. I've responded to that. Is that the same thing?

**The Deputy Chair:** No. There are series of professional development opportunities that the Speaker is so great in promoting.

**Mr. Olson:** But this is one of them.

**The Deputy Chair:** As a colleague I would encourage you to apply through him to anything that you're interested in, but when it comes to the CCPAC/CCOLA, my understanding is that the Speaker would seek our advice on that and that, therefore, we need this process.

**10:00**

**Mr. Olson:** Okay. Perhaps he's got my form with this one ticked off.

**The Deputy Chair:** Not an issue. Not a problem. I would have done the same thing.

Great. Perhaps, Mr. MacDonald, we can decide at the next meeting, as the motion has passed, about the lottery. Some would suggest, for instance, Mr. Chair, that if you couldn't go, then it should indeed be a member of the opposition parties whose name could be picked out. But we can discuss that at the next point.

**Mr. MacDonald:** No. It's never been that way before. It's just been two people going.

**The Deputy Chair:** Great. We will discuss, though, at our next meeting, which is in two weeks. That's point 6. Now, I see two weeks. It's actually three this time, isn't it? Yes. So the notes we'll adjust accordingly.

There are no committee meetings scheduled during the constituency weeks. These are not weeks off, as we all know.

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 14 – correct? – at 8:30 with Children and Youth Services.

With that, I would appreciate a motion for this meeting to be adjourned. That would come from Mr. Vandermeer. All those in favour? All opposed? Carried.

Thank you. Have a great day, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 10:01 a.m.]







