



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Third Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 10, 2022  
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-3-5

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 30th Legislature  
Third Session**

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),\* Acting Deputy Chair

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)  
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Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)  
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)  
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**Also in Attendance**

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)

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

### **Participants**

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Hon. Jason Luan, Minister

Clay Buchanan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Disability Services

Cynthia Farmer, Deputy Minister

Olin Lovely, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Tracy Wyrstiuk, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Services



9 a.m.

Thursday, March 10, 2022

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

**Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Chair:** 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 Community and Social Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

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.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, colleagues here. I'm pleased to introduce my colleagues at the table with me: to my left, Cynthia Farmer, deputy minister, and Toby Schneider, ADM for employment and financial support services; to my right, Olin Lovely, ADM for financial services and senior financial officer, and Clay Buchanan, ADM for the disability services division. In the gallery I have Tracy Wyrstiuik, ADM for strategic services; Maryna Korchagina – I apologize if my pronunciation isn't so accurate – ADM for preventive community services; of course, Robyn Cochrane, director of communications; Allen Wong, my own chief of staff; and Robin Anderson, chief of staff for the deputy minister.

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

My name is Jackie Lovely, and I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and the chair of this committee. We'll begin, starting to my right, with introductions.

**Mr. Hunter:** Morning. Grant Hunter, Taber-Warner.

**Mrs. Frey:** Good morning. Michaela Frey, MLA for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Smith:** Good morning, Minister and staff. Mark Smith, Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Amery:** Good morning to everyone here. Mickey Amery, Calgary-Cross.

**Ms Renaud:** Marie Renaud, St. Albert, and this is my staff, Mary Ellen Green.

**Mr. Feehan:** Richard Feehan, Edmonton-Rutherford. Good morning.

**Mr. Eggen:** Good morning. My name is David Eggen. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-North West and the acting deputy chair this morning.

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

Now we'll go to the members participating remotely. Please proceed.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning again . . .

**The Chair:** Sorry, Minister. We have remote participation, just two more introductions.

Go ahead, please.

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

**Mrs. Aheer:** Good morning. Leela Aheer, Chestermere-Strathmore.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much. I'd also like to note the following substitution for the record: Mr. Eggen is substituting for Mr. Sabir.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to have your camera on while speaking and your microphone muted when not speaking.

Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours have been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times.

In brief, the minister or a member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but time may be combined between the member and the minister. After this rotation of speaking time we'll then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus. The member and the minister may each speak once for a maximum of five minutes, or these times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or message to the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee, I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone have any opposition to a break? Hearing none, we will proceed.

Ministry officials may be present and at the discretion of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

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

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block time and the three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

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

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 21, 2022. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An

electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

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

I'd like to now invite the Minister of Community and Social Services to begin his opening remarks. Sir, you have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, colleagues, again. I'm pleased to be here to provide an overview of Community and Social Services' budget. Community and Social Services has always been the social safety net for vulnerable Albertans, and in Budget 2022 we're maintaining core funding to the important programs people rely on for this purpose. This includes income support, AISH, and many others. In addition, we're providing critical increases to priority areas like employment support, and most importantly we'll help vulnerable Albertans and Albertans with disabilities get the skills they need to find jobs and increase their independence.

Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black. As part of Alberta's recovery plan we're aligning all of our supports under the Alberta at work initiative to help Albertans find jobs and employers find workers, but we'll also provide critical increases to key programs, including AISH, disability services, and career and employment services.

Let's talk about AISH first. In fact, an additional \$12 million was added to the AISH budget, to a total of \$1.7 billion. Once again, this is the largest AISH budget in Alberta history, which also enabled the monthly benefit of \$1,685 to remain the highest in the country. With that, 72,000 Albertans are able to enjoy the support that we provide to maintain their independence and to live with dignity.

At the same time we're also improving the AISH process. As part of this effort we have developed an online application process, which will provide a more personalized and improved user experience for applicants. By streamlining the application process, it also enables the staff to have more time to focus on working with people instead of the paperwork. This includes having more time to connect applicants to the right services and the support where they can have their needs met.

Let me share something related to the employment and income support program here. With this budget we have \$816 million committed for the employment and income support budget. During the pandemic the federal relief program led to lower than expected applications to the income support program. Now with that federal program coming to an end, we're seeing more Albertans coming back to our provincial income support program. We're accounting for this rise in caseloads in Budget 2022.

The next part is the career and employment services component in the budget. Folks, a strong economy means more opportunity for employment. That's why we're increasing funding to help more Albertans access the resources they need to find jobs. That means that fewer Albertans will rely on the income support program. It is more important than ever at this time that anyone who wants to work is able to do so. That's why the investment of an additional \$34 million for career and employment services is so critical, as reflected in this budget. Twenty million dollars of this funding is part of the government's new initiative called Alberta at work. Through more practical training, like first aid, and covering the cost of equipment needs and transportation and other needs, we will help more Albertans get back to work.

In addition, \$14 million from this budget will be there to leverage the federal funding for employment and career services. Last year as a whole more than 32,000 Albertans gained independence and were able to leave income support programs as a result of such employment support services there.

**9:10**

Next, I would like to share with you our budget related to disability services. We're continuing to support people with disabilities who are looking to live and work as independently as possible to help ensure persons with disabilities and family support for children with disabilities – we continue to support inclusion, well-being, and employment for Albertans. Budget 2022 provides an increase of \$60.8 million over 2021, for a total of \$1.4 billion in this area. Through this year's investment we will support an average of 16,500 children with disabilities and their families per month and an additional 13,000 adults with developmental disabilities. This government knows that when we support Albertans with disabilities and their families, we also support inclusive communities where everyone has a chance to survive and succeed. We're empowering vulnerable Albertans to reach their full potential through employment.

The next part is related to the homeless and outreach support services. As we work to get Albertans back to work, we also will continue to support some of the most vulnerable people in our province. This includes people who have nowhere to stay, remain in homelessness. Budget 2022 maintains overall funding for shelters and community organizations, ensuring that homeless Albertans are safe and supported. In addition, Budget 2022 maintains funding for home and outreach supports, which include supportive housing, intensive case management, rapid rehousing and outreach support. Recognizing that homelessness is a growing concern for many communities, we have also established a task force to look at this issue and how it's impacting communities large and small and how we can tackle that from a structural difference in terms of having innovative services in place.

The next part is related to domestic and sexual violence. The Alberta government is committed to addressing domestic and sexual violence and ensuring that survivors get the help they need. Funding is maintained for women's shelters in Budget 2022, including 30 women's emergency shelters and the 16 shelters that provide long-term housing and support. We're also keeping our promises to survivors of sexual assault by increasing funding for sexual assault services in the amount of \$1.2 million, completing the platform commitment to increase funding by \$3.5 million within our term. This additional funding will go towards police and court support for survivors and the regional expansion of services.

Next, let me share with you our budget related to the family and community safety part. Our government supports civil society organizations by increasing the stability of the sector and helping Albertans participate with inclusion and fairness in our province. Funding for community support and family safety is budgeted at \$137.6 million. That includes \$100 million for family and community support services, commonly known as FCSS. Another is \$13.8 million for sexual assault centres; \$5.3 million for family violence prevention, including bullying; 6 additional million dollars for the civil society fund; and \$9 million for a low-income transit pass program with Edmonton and Calgary.

Looking forward, Budget 2022 is a well-thought-out and responsible plan that will get Albertans back to work and ensure services are getting to the people who need them the most. The Alberta government has been there for Albertans throughout the pandemic, and we want to be there for Albertans during Alberta's

economic recovery. Budget 2022 allows Alberta's ministry of community services to keep working alongside community partners to provide those supports and opportunities.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Now I'm ready for questions.

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

For the next 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams. You can see it on the screen there.

Members, would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

**Ms Renaud:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Minister, what's your preference?

**Mr. Luan:** In order to ensure you have enough time to get all your questions out, I would go with rotation to give you a full 10 minutes so that I can hear you out.

**Ms Renaud:** Sure. Perfect.

**The Chair:** Sure. All right. Well, proceed please, Member.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you. Before I get started, I just wanted to do a quick land acknowledgement that we are on Treaty 6 land. I want to acknowledge the Métis people of Alberta as well. I also want to thank all of the front-line CSS staff and everyone here today. I know it's been an extraordinarily difficult year, so I'm very grateful for all of the work that is done.

I also wanted to know – I'm not sure. Maybe I can't see it. There is no American sign language that I can see. I don't know. Has that been taken care of? For the last two years I've written letters, asked for ASL translation to be here for budget estimates for CSS. I don't see it. I didn't write the letter. I was assuming the ministry could take it from here. I guess that didn't happen. That's unfortunate.

The problem with block time – I'm just going to put this on the record, and it's fine. I don't have a problem doing this. I was expecting it. The problem is that there is less accountability, which this government is known for. They're able to pick and choose which questions to answer. So we will be watching *Hansard* after, as I hope everybody at home will as well. I will endeavour to ask all my questions. I hope there will be answers in good faith.

Let's talk about AISH. In 2019 the Notley government did something that was actually a game changer for disabled, vulnerable, and low-income Albertans, and what that was was indexing benefits. That was indexing AISH, income support, and seniors' benefits to inflation. What that did was remove some of the need for people to have to advocate and beg for increases every single year and, once again, demonstrate why living in poverty is not a good idea. I was incredibly grateful to see that. Not only that, but we caught people up with an additional \$100 that covered the three years where benefits weren't indexed under the Notley government.

One of the first things the UCP did when they came to power was stop that. We know, several years later, that we see people falling further and further into poverty. You know, I know I am tired – I know my colleagues are tired – of having to give examples to this government about the damage that has been done. Now, I can see in the budget estimates that there is likely a plan to index benefits before the election next year, and it's incredibly sad that with the kind of surplus that this government is crowing about, they didn't have the courage to do it right now and take care of the grinding poverty that is everywhere.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, the questions need to flow through the chair.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. I am talking about indexing AISH benefits, which are in the budget estimates.

**The Chair:** Yes, but please address the comments through the chair.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm going to give you an example. One of the things that has really bothered me is the comment made by this minister a little bit earlier, and that was that AISH benefits are the most generous in the country. That is incorrect. Now, some of your language was correct when you said that it was the most generous . . .

**Mr. Smith:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, the conversation needs to flow through the chair, please, and I do have a point of order. Please proceed.

**Mr. Smith:** I refer to 23(b), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." If the member wants to question the minister, then perhaps she could refer to a specific budget line or something in the fiscal plan that will actually tie what she's saying to the matters under discussion.

**The Chair:** Please proceed.

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes. I think that she was well within her purview in asking. I would suggest that the minister's choice to go with 10-minute blocks creates a space which we have to work in. If you just have 10 minutes' worth of questions without context in a 10-minute block, then it just loses all significance. I think that the point of order is not valid, and I suggest that we proceed.

9:20

**The Chair:** I've made my ruling. Members, the reason that we're here is for main estimates, and I think you all probably heard me at the beginning of the meeting when I said: "I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. This committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023." That's how I opened the meeting, and that's going to be the purpose of our discussion.

Member, your time is ticking. It's six minutes and 46 seconds. Please proceed with your questions.

**Ms Renaud:** We're talking about AISH benefits. If you look on page 52 of budget estimates, it's pretty clear. [interjections]

**The Chair:** So let's get to the point.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Yeah. Let's get to the point.

We're talking about AISH benefits, Madam Chair, that the minister noted in his opening statements were the most generous in the country. That's what I'm addressing. That's what I'm talking about right now. Here is my comment about that. We're at \$1,685 a month. That's what people are living on. Now, we know that there is a low-income measure in Canada, that's just over \$24,000 a year. The low-income measure, for example, in Edmonton is just over \$21,000 a year. Now, keep in mind that a one-bedroom apartment is, like, about a thousand dollars, and inflation is nearing 5 per cent. We know that people just are unable to manage. We've got oil prices that are almost at – what are they? – \$100 a barrel right now. We've got a balanced budget and a surplus. We know food bank usage is up. Food Banks Canada HungerCount 2021 shows us that

it is up 20 per cent nationally. Disabled Albertans are struggling and falling further behind every single year. The consumer price index is 3.2 per cent. I don't think there's anyone in this room that hasn't noticed the price of food when you go grocery shopping. It's higher.

So here is my question, Minister. When you and your government chose to deindex income support benefits in 2019, citing numerous misrepresentations and economic conditions as the rationale, no information was given to Albertans about what conditions would need to be evident for these benefits to be reindexed to inflation. My question: what will it take for the UCP to reverse cuts to AISH and income support, tie them again to inflation this year, this budget?

The next question. AISH was increased in the '22-23 budget estimates by \$9.3 million, which is just under 1 per cent over the '21-22 budget amount. The CSS annual report 2020-21 – that is, the last annual report – on page 35 states that the 2019-20 average annual AISH caseload growth was 6.2 per cent. Before that, the average annual caseload growth was 6.3 per cent. Certainly, these caseloads were temporarily impacted by COVID in the last fiscal, and by the looks of it, this government is projecting that COVID will also impact this fiscal year. How did the government arrive at less than a 1 per cent increase to AISH given the current situation and the government's own data and the projected population growth of 1.4 per cent, that is clearly in your budget documents? Is this government planning on altering any aspect of AISH eligibility in fiscal '22-23?

My next questions. What is the total number of new applicants for AISH this year, in this fiscal that we're covering, and how many were successful? How many AISH appeals were conducted in this fiscal year, and how many decisions were overturned as a result of those AISH appeals? What was the average time in fiscal '21-22 between the appeals secretariat receiving a request for appeal from the AISH applicant and the receipt of the administrative review or review of decision from the AISH director?

After you answer that question, I would like to know: what is an acceptable timeline? What is an acceptable amount of time between filing an appeal and having the hearing? What is the benchmark that this ministry is using? What is the timeline – what is an acceptable timeline? – for this ministry between having the hearing, the completion of the hearing, and the appellant having the decision in their hand? What is an acceptable time frame between getting the decision and then the first payment? In AISH language, I believe that's commencement of benefits.

We have about two minutes, so I'm going to move on to more specific questions about the appeals secretariat. Madam Chair, for your information, that is line item 1.5 on page 52 of the budget estimates. We see that the panels are budgeted to spend another \$3.6 million, about the same as last year, the same as the budget end forecast for '21-22.

Now, what I would have liked to do – but I don't have time – is that I would very much like to read some examples of what goes on in an appeal hearing in AISH, because I think that most people sitting at this table would be stunned. We don't have time to do that. I hope to have time to do that in the Legislature, because I think it's really important to have context. We talk about numbers of people, percentages, and millions and billions of dollars, but what we forget is that these are individual people that have individual stories that are, actually, most of the time quite heartbreaking. I think it's really important to remember that.

Anyway, these are my questions related to line 1.5 of the appeals secretariat. I would like to know: how many FTEs are included in this line item? What is the total financial amount or financial commitment? Are any of those FTEs shared with any other ministry departments? If yes, what is the time allocation, and what

department? What is the difference between last year's number of FTEs in the appeals secretariat and this year's?

My next question. The AISH and income support appeals are quasi-judicial hearings that operate within strict, confusing, and hard-to-follow rules for nondisabled people. Now, I don't have the kind of disability that would lead me to apply for AISH benefits, and I still have trouble following the AISH appeal process. I have seen all of the documentation that goes out to people, I have watched the process, and I have been a participant – actually, an observer – in AISH appeals. I can tell you that I felt humiliated for the person going through the appeal with the type of questions, what was required, with the lack of information, the lack of support that was provided, the lack of accommodation, and I think it's astounding that in 2022 appellants are not supported more than they are. And I would like that to be on the record.

I would like to know from this ministry: what do you feel are the appropriate accommodations for appellants that go through this process? Other than offering them larger print or captioning, I would like to know what other accommodations are made available to appellants. What personal supports or legal supports, as this is a quasi-judicial hearing, are made available to people that feel the need to appeal?

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

I'm just going to pause there, Minister, before you proceed, and I'll address some of the points that the member had asked about.

Member, you had asked about ASL, American sign language, being in the room. It's something that the Speaker's office has arranged to happen in the Chamber. They have been doing trials with Public Accounts, but it's not something that's been arranged. It would be requested through the Speaker's office. Perhaps if that's something that you would like to do for the future, you could arrange that with the Speaker's office if that's something that's important.

Also, I just wanted to address one more item. Member Eggen, you had said across the table: you're going to regret that. I will not permit unparliamentary language to happen or unparliamentary behaviour in the room, so let's please be on our best behaviour. We want to have a good dialogue and a good discussion with everyone. Thank you so much.

Now I'd like to turn this time over to the minister for his response to the hon. member's questions.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, hon. member, for asking lots of, I'd say, good questions. I'm happy to take my time to address one after another. Let me begin by answering a question about AISH indexing. You were questioning the \$1,685 monthly AISH benefits being the highest in the country. Let me tell you: the fact is a fact. When you are comparing all those cost-of-living numbers, you also need to compare the same numbers in other jurisdictions and how that looks. I don't need to go too far because anybody could google there. If you live in Toronto, Ontario, your average house value there is more than double what Alberta today is.

When you talk about anything else – inflation: it goes across the whole country. But let me put it this way: a fact is a fact. The \$1.37 billion AISH budget in Alberta is the highest in our history, and the \$1,685 monthly AISH benefit is the highest in the country. That's the fact. It doesn't matter how you want to spin around the numbers. I think, you know, facts speak on their own, that part.

**9:30**

The other part I want to be very abundantly clear on is that when we provided those high amounts of benefits, maintained what we call the critical core program to ensure our social safety net, we did



it at a time of economic adversity, with an unforeseen health crisis like a pandemic. We did so with discipline. I want to remind members that – you probably recall – at the time when we assumed government, the first thing we did was take a look at our spending, starting from the Premier. The Premier took a voluntary 10 per cent cut. All the MLAs, including myself and all of you hon. members, took a 5 per cent cut. With that in mind, we negotiated with our partners, whether it's the doctors and nurses and others, in good faith, and I must say that in the end agreement has been reached, and reasonable increases have been accepted by all.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all our partners and thank all of you and thank all of public service that come to the same table. We need to show our discipline and responsibility. It is with that in place plus our rapidly changed environment that created a business-friendly environment that invites investors to come back to Alberta. I can give you a number that has been shared many times in the House, but I'll repeat it here again. Venture capital investment alone in 2018 was \$118 million, and by the time of last year, 2021, it's five times that with our changed government here.

What I'm trying to show you: the picture is that on one hand we stay disciplined with expenses; on the other hand we grow our economy rapidly, but at the same time we maintained the highest AISH benefits for our most vulnerable in the country. That shows a responsible government. I hope that answers your question for AISH.

I'll move on to the next one. Caseload growth: we inherited from the previous NDP government – in our financial details there you will see that the caseload growth from 2015 to 2019 is at 30 per cent. This occurred when our economy was tanking, when the net population growth in the province was in negative term, yet the caseload growth here is 30 per cent. You can see, anybody with common sense, that this is unsustainable. You cannot continue with that trajectory, but since we took government, we took a responsible approach on this. We introduced a measure that we call addressing most urgent and critical cases. Our effort is: we want to be there to make connections to folks and the casework to be in touch with families so that we can get what we call service in planning, so we can hear out what are the most are important, critical issues there, ensuring that people are safe and issues that are most critical get addressed.

With AISH, because it's a statutory benefit, we don't dictate who gets what. The amount is set by legislation, so everyone who is eligible for AISH will receive it. There's no question about that part.

In terms of the AISH process, the time it's taking, as many of you know, AISH has a criteria not only of verifying your disability but also needs other professionals, like doctors, to do assessments to conclude with such, so that takes time. Most of the time what that takes is people collecting the relevant material and the report and submitting that to the system, and then we have our own system to assess that and make a decision based on information available. Depending on how quick that turnaround is, the time varies from case A to case B.

One notable commitment I'm pleased to share with you is that, if you look at our business plan on page 21, we have set a measurable outcome where we can see the difference we're making. For 2022 to '23 the average time for AISH processing we targeted for – I'll just give you some comparisons here. In 2018-2019 the average time it takes to process AISH is 28.2 weeks. In 2019 to '20 that average dropped to 27.7 weeks. Today, as we speak, that drops to 25.6 weeks, and our target for '21-22 is 24.2 weeks.

The other part – I want to answer the question, but it also relates to your other question. You talked about the appellant and the appeal process. How long does it take? All that stuff. I wanted to share with you that we noted that the time it takes for appeals is

taking so long. Part of the reason is new evidence being introduced at the appeal process being heard. Because of that reason – you can imagine that if new evidence is being introduced in the process, it becomes an endless loop. That certainly did not help to make the decision quicker that way. Because of that, we made a ministerial policy change where we eliminated introducing new evidence at that level. If new information is brought in, it brings us right back to an administrative review process rather than the appellant process. Anyway, by improving that, we're also setting up a new target so that the performance measures in the future will be significantly improved.

I would like to invite ADM Tracy to answer further details on the time.

**Ms Renaud:** There's only 32 seconds.

**Mr. Luan:** Oh, 30 seconds left. Okay. Maybe I'll pass on that. Thank you.

Then let's get on to other questions that you have here. We talked about caseload growth. We talked about how we manage that. We talked about setting up a new target for that. We talked about the appeal process. [A timer sounded] I'm running out of my own time right here.

**The Chair:** You have two seconds left. That's it now. Thank you so much, Minister. I appreciate that.

Now we're going to head back over to the hon. member.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. I'm just going to get started, clean up a few things. Didn't actually answer any of my questions about the timing. I wasn't talking about performance metrics, about the time it takes to review an AISH application. I was talking about appeals.

**The Chair:** Member, please direct the question through . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Madam Chair, if I'm not looking at him . . .

**The Chair:** Stop right there, please. Hon. member, please respect the role of the chair. When I'm speaking, please do not talk over me. Let's be respectful of one another in this room, please.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah, let's. Okay.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, please. Please respect the role of the chair.

**Ms Renaud:** Madam Chair, I am following up on the questions.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, please be respectful of the chair. When I'm speaking, please do not talk over me. I wish to have a nice discussion today.

Please proceed with your questions.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. To follow up, you're incorrect about the benefits across the country. Benefits for disabled people are higher in Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Look it up.

I understand that AISH benefits are legislated, but the problem with this block is that you are choosing – the minister is choosing, Madam Chair, not to answer my questions. I'm going to continue, but I would really like it if you would focus on the questions that I'm asking and try to answer those.

9:40

I'm going to go back to the AISH appeals. I would like to talk about the diversity of appeal appointments, the people that are appointed by the minister to sit and listen to the appeals. I would like to know: what kind of work was undertaken by the ministry to

ensure diversity and equity of representation? Are there any people with lived experience, lived experience as it relates to disability, on those appeal panels? I would like an answer to that.

Currently appeals, it's my understanding, are being scheduled into August. They are still virtual. The scheduling turnaround used to be 60 days. I would like the ministry to explain that to me, why it is taking so long, and what is the plan to address the appeal backlog? The minister mentioned a couple of things about ministerial orders. I'm not sure how that addresses the backlog of appeals, but I'd like to hear that. I don't see any increase in the budget, so I'm assuming that's going to happen within the ministry. I look forward to getting some details.

Then, I would like to know: when in the process is the commencement of benefits? Now, this is really important. Commencement of benefits: a lot actually hinges on that for people that have gone through this process. When in the process, from the time that either they're approved or they go through appeal and the decision is overturned, is the commencement of benefit determined, and who exactly in that process determines what the date is for the commencement of benefits? What is the criteria? If you can reference any policies or regulations that guide this, I would appreciate it. How many appeals occurred in the last fiscal year? So how many appeals in 2020-21, which is what we're looking at.

I'd like to talk a little bit about AISH and income support clawbacks. For those of you that don't know what that is, it's just a term – I think the department calls it overpayments. But what I mean is that – let's say I'm an AISH recipient and my husband, his income is calculated when my benefits are determined. Let's say something changes for my husband. He gets more income, I get less AISH, then there becomes a situation of an overpayment or a clawback. After cutting core benefits during a global pandemic while inflation is nearing 5 per cent, the UCP chose to make life harder by clawing back benefits. For example – I'm actually going to skip my example because I'm running out of time, and I sort of gave you one anyway. That's what I'm talking about, clawback or overpayment. How many AISH recipients had their AISH benefits reduced because of federal supports, including employment insurance, as a result of COVID-19? What was the total value of the savings in fiscal '21-22?

My next question: how many AISH recipients had their AISH benefits reduced as a result of changes to spousal income related to COVID? How many appeals for accommodation benefits? Now, if you'll recall, for over the last – actually, it's been more than a year now that this government has systematically reduced supplemental benefits. Income support for a single Albertan is under \$900. Obviously, nobody can live on that, right? You can't afford to live on that. So there are other pieces that allow people to live on it. One of those was accommodation or – I can't remember what it was called – shelter benefit. It was an extra just over \$300 that would actually help people sort of manage on income support.

Over the last year-plus people have been kicked off there. Government will tell you: "Oh, no. It was a change in policy. It was never meant to be permanent. We have to review it every three months," or whatever they're going to say. The end result is that we know that almost 2,700 people were kicked off that benefit, lost over \$300. My question: how many appeals occurred, in this fiscal that we're covering, for accommodation benefits? How many of the decisions were overturned? Now, you may not answer that, but I happen to know that . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I have warned you to direct the conversation through the chair. Please respect my wishes and honour the role of the chair.

**Ms Renaud:** I would like to know how many of those appeals were overturned. I happen to think 100 per cent of them were overturned, but I'd like the ministry to confirm that.

My next question: how many people left AISH rolls? We talked about how many people were added to AISH, so how many people left AISH rolls for the following reasons – you might want to write these down because there are a few of them – how many left for death for whatever reason, natural death, disability related? How many people no longer receive AISH benefits because they died as a result of COVID-19? How many left AISH as a result of turning 65? How many left AISH as a result of full-time employment or moving past the level of, I guess, acceptable earnings? How many people moved out of the province? How many people lost AISH benefits because of a reconsideration or a review? What was the total number of people that left AISH rolls? All of these people: what was the total number of people that left AISH? How many AISH applicants were denied benefits in the last fiscal year? Finally, how many appeals – actually, I'm going to skip that last question. There are a number of questions there.

I've got about four minutes left, so I'm going to move on to another topic, which is FTEs in Community and Social Services. Madam Chair, for your information it's in the budget documents – I can't recall it – in the fiscal plan, moving forward, where they talk about reductions in FTEs. For a ministry with about \$4 billion in spending – these are huge programs, huge, front-facing programs that impact people's lives. We know that includes things like AISH and income support. Now, none of this work is done without the hundreds and hundreds and, I would say, thousands of front-line staff that are doing this work.

But since the UCP formed government, in 2019, they have collectively cut – now, this includes the amount that is projected to be cut in this budget – 514 full-time equivalent jobs. That is a 16 per cent reduction in the workforce. Sixteen per cent. This is a growing ministry, as you'll hear. You heard the minister earlier say that AISH is the highest it's ever been. Well, of course, it is, Madam, Chair. You know that because we heard the minister say that there are over 70,000 people on AISH, and that's the highest number of people on AISH we've ever had as a province, so naturally it makes sense. Would there have been – and keep in mind that this number would have been quite a bit higher had they not stopped the move to privatize direct operations. The UCP is on track to cut another 102 jobs, so I would like to know very specifically: where are these jobs coming from? Was there any risk assessment whatsoever completed in any programming area whatsoever to determine if removing these positions would have any negative impacts on services?

The reason I'm asking that is that I think that the ministry staff are well aware, as am I, that there have been ongoing workload assessment model assessments done in a number of different programming areas. I was informed that the workload assessments have been ongoing, and I would like to focus specifically on the AISH program assessment. As you know, Madam Chair, there are a number of service regions in the province; for example, yours, Camrose, is the central region. Now, it's my understanding that every single region in the province – and I think there are six if I'm not mistaken – is in trouble. Now, they have a rating scale, like, a red, yellow, green. I'm not sure if there's another colour, but every region except one is flashing red. That's dangerous. That is dangerous. That means caseloads are not manageable. The work isn't being done the way that it needs to be done, and that doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of the stress that the staff are under.

Right now we know that in Alberta average caseloads for AISH generalists are between 350 people and 400 people. That is not

sustainable, Madam Chair. That is not sustainable, so I would like to know: what is this ministry doing to address the caseload pressure? More specifically, what is the work that is being undertaken as a result of the workload assessment model that has been completed in the region? I would be concerned if I had five of the six regions flashing red and then the sixth one flashing yellow. That's alarming.

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

Now we will turn the time over to the minister to answer.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So many detailed questions. What I'm going to try to do is that I'll go right to the answers that I'm aware of. I will make sure I leave a little bit of time for my ADM to go even further for more details. Let me go right to the direct answers to your questions about the total number of full-time equivalent staff for handling the appeal process. We have 20. So you've got that one. The other one that you're asking about, the total number of appeals for 2021: it's 703. Those are the hard facts.

9:50

The other part is – I think you lumped so many things that are interrelated. You talked about the full-time equivalents of the full ministry staff and what the impact is to the workforce. I can let you know that currently we have 2,547 full-time equivalents. I also want to take this opportunity to say that during the responsible spending exercise we had, the department took a very thoughtful process that through natural retirement and people leaving jobs where we are not filling the positions, we realized – let me get that number for you. Through that natural process, a thoughtful, considerate process, we eliminated 102 positions. When we did that, it was not at the expense of closing any programs or closing any services.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my staff, thank the 2,547 of them – actually, it's more than that; that's just full-time equivalents – for being there for Albertans at this most difficult time, pretty clearly what the pandemic has challenged us to be. Another part: I want to give credit to my executive team. Many of them are with me today here, and through their reports they've done a fantastic job. Their management-to-staff ratio has increased from traditionally 1 to 11 to today 1 to 14. All of them have taken extra, extra work in making this happen, so I want to give them my heartfelt thanks. They're supporting me today, as you can see.

Another piece of how we increased efficiency without adding more costs is that we restructured the department. The department used to be seven regions. But as a result of that reorg we cut that into two. Many functions have been consolidated, and that saves administrative work there.

On top of that, I also want you to know that – in my opening I referenced that we're using a digitalized, modernized process for applications. It not only made it simpler for applicants, but it made it easier for staff. That reduced errors, reduced the back and forth. You can imagine that if you're still using paper, faxing in and faxing out, it takes forever to get the required material back versus digitalwise: you eliminate the errors in transaction; you significantly increase the proficiency on that. It is because of all of those efforts, as you can see, being responsible and reducing unnecessary costs and introducing an innovative new process, that we are maintaining a high quality of service with a reduced amount of staff. That's that part.

Now let me shift to the subject you mentioned about shelter benefits, I believe, and I also recall that you have repeated a similar question on this in the House. Because of that 30-second time you really can't go too far, but I'd like to take time today so that you get a full picture of what we're talking about here. As I mentioned

earlier, all the statutory benefits stay static. We don't change that. The additional supplemental benefit is also being regulated by ministerial orders. The one you referenced about shelter is part of many parts of the so-called supplemental benefit, including special diet, medically needed equipment, refitting residences, and so forth.

**The Chair:** Minister, if you could direct your comments through the chair as well, please.

**Mr. Luan:** I will. Thanks for the reminder.

With that, the shelter additional allowance, that 320-some dollars you mentioned, is in that context. The ministerial regulation on this one stays the same since 2018. This is when the previous government was in place. There's no change on that at all.

What has happened is that in 2019 the Auditor General had a report. In that report it identified some inconsistencies. We have seven regional offices making interpretations of policies. There are some inconsistencies happening there. In responding to the Auditor General's report, we implemented a new way of doing things, clarified the policies, and stayed true to what that is. Many of those supplemental benefits are time limited for special circumstances. It's not an add-on to ongoing benefits that, you know, extend from your statutory benefits. I just wanted to make sure that you got that complete story today.

Let me move on to another part. I think you have a number of specific questions for appeals. Before I ask Tracy to get ready for some of the detailed questions, I want to assure you that when you mentioned about, "What's the recruitment process for appointing people to the appeal panel?" – you referenced about: what's the diversity ratio on that? Let me tell you this. As a member of an ethnic minority myself I am with you. We will make sure that our appointments no longer reflect our cultural differences but reflect all kinds of diversity in there, including disability, people with lived experiences, and so forth. We are in the process of recruiting for that, so I welcome your work. Join me to make sure that we truly reflect the diversity of Alberta.

Now, the next one. I'm going to ask Tracy, if you don't mind, to come to the podium to answer many of the detailed questions on the time it takes, from when to start to when the decision will be made. Thank you, Tracy.

**Ms Wyrstkiuk:** Thank you for the question. I appreciate the opportunity.

**The Chair:** If you could kindly introduce yourself, please.

**Ms Wyrstkiuk:** Absolutely. I'm Tracy Wyrstkiuk, assistant deputy minister for strategic services in the ministry. Just a few of the responses in relation to the appeal panels. Yes, we do use an open and transparent process. We currently have about 80 members. Many of them do have lived experiences with disabilities. We have a wide range of competencies on that panel, everything from lawyers to community leaders that help us with those fair and impartial panels.

Right now the current standard is six months for an appeal to be heard on AISH. We know we're working towards reducing that time. We have around 17 standards where we track our appeal panels in relation to how quickly we respond to a notice of appeal, to how quickly we get the decision out from the hearing, which is two weeks. Of those 17 standards, we're continuing to work towards improving the time it takes to hear an appeal. We are looking at some digital improvements to our appeal panels to also improve efficiency so that it doesn't take as long. Currently we have 24 FTEs in the appeals secretariat. We did actually fill a number of vacant FTEs in the last fiscal year and also added some FTEs to the

appeals secretariat, so we are actually taking active steps to improve appeals at the appeals secretariat.

We did have virtual hearings during the pandemic. We have found that that has actually increased accessibility and accommodates a lot of our appellants, who have been very happy with that arrangement, and has also helped to reduce some of the backlog. The minister already spoke to the fact that we are changing our processes, improving our processes. New information cannot be introduced during an appeal process, which will also deal with some of the issues that we're encountering.

I will say that there was a question about the appeal numbers for 2021-22. The total number of appeals was 1,101; of that, 825 were AISH, 232 were income support . . .

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

That wraps up the time for the minister and his team. We'll now turn it back over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, hon. member.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thank you very much. I'm wondering, Madam Chair, if I could get – I think it was the ADM who noted 17 standards that were used through AISH. I'm wondering if that could be tabled for this committee.

**The Chair:** Sorry. Could you say that one more time? I'm having difficulty hearing.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. The ADM just mentioned 17 standards that are employed for the appeals secretariat, the process. I'm wondering if those documents could be tabled for the committee.

**The Chair:** That'll be tabled in the Chamber for the benefit of all, if they decide to do it.

**Ms Renaud:** Sorry?

**The Chair:** It'll be tabled in the Chamber. The Chamber is the proper forum for that to happen for the benefit of all members.

10:00

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Well, I'm going to move on and talk about homelessness. I think that we've all spent a lot of time, sadly – when we have the mental images of homelessness, we think of the large cities. Sadly, it's a devastating picture, but I would like to focus today on issues that rural and remote communities are facing as it relates to homelessness.

Madam Chair, imagine my surprise in a conversation with the mayor of Wetaskiwin, when we were talking about homelessness, when he let me know that he found out that the city of Wetaskiwin would be receiving some funding to address a very real problem. You may have heard in the news that they had – there was a bit of an encampment. The conditions were awful. They found out on Twitter, I think, or a press release that they were getting some money from the UCP to set up a warming trailer. Now, I'm not – it's great. I'm glad that they did receive some funding, but I'm a little concerned at how it rolled out when we know that communities all over Alberta are struggling, and they're looking for partners not just to fund but to help find solutions.

Now, the problem with this same community – and I'm just using Wetaskiwin as an example, because it's happening all over. I've been out to Athabasca. I've been out to Lac La Biche. I've been to Camrose. I've been all over, and I've talked to people about what's going on in their communities. I'm going to use the Wetaskiwin example because I think it is a good one.

The mayor also told me that not only did he find out by Twitter or a press release that he was getting money for a shelter or a

warming trailer that would be staffed by the Mustard Seed, but he also told me that he has no idea what's going to go on past March 31. In this budget there's no information. There's precious little information in terms of objectives and metrics for us to go back and look at. Madam Chair, I'm sure you'll agree with me, but when you look at this, he doesn't know what's going on past March 31. That doesn't seem right. It seems to me that if you have a community like Wetaskiwin, that has struggled with enormous stresses, that you would want to work with them to ensure that there is no gap and there are no problems, but that is not the case.

The strategic plan notes that \$49 million will be spent on homeless shelters and other supports for the most vulnerable, so I would like a detailed list of where that will be spent and what the anticipated outcomes are.

Now, I'm going to go back to my Wetaskiwin example, Madam Chair. One of the things – and I'm only going to mention this because this is just one of the dangers of poor planning that this government has demonstrated again and again that they're all about. With very little thought, I think they were likely reacting to some really horrific news stories about what was happening in Wetaskiwin, they made some money available for these shelters. Boom: they were there, staff were there, thankfully. We're in a pandemic; I was very grateful that there was something, but there was no ramp. There was no ramp to get to this trailer. No ramp. We knew that there were people in that encampment that actually were wheelchair users who needed a ramp to get into the warming shelter.

Of course, there is a ramp now, and that ramp was built at a cost of \$25,000. That's ridiculous, and that's what happens when you fail to plan and you fail to communicate with the community that you're supposed to be helping. That's a problem.

Some of my questions are: key objective 1.2 on page 21 of the ministry business plan is the only mention of homelessness in the entire CSS business plan. The objective indicates that the UCP will develop a co-ordinated community response to the homelessness model with consideration of provincial Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force recommendations and in partnership with service providers, civil society, and on and on it goes. Once again, this is the UCP putting up a task force in place of action.

Now, I'm not saying a task force is a bad idea. I think that any time you get bright people together that have all kinds of ideas to solve problems, that's a good thing, but you can't stop the work in place of a task force. My question about the task force. We know that it's made up of 16 women and men. All are from Calgary and Edmonton save someone from Lealta, which is a business from Lethbridge, and representation from the Enoch Cree Nation. What about representation from rural and remote communities? Perhaps I'm misunderstanding or someone represents a few different communities. That could very well be. I'm happy to be corrected about that, but I would like to know why there is no rural or remote representation.

Also, there are no other measures, which is likely why this government, under the budget for homeless shelters, line 5.2 of government estimates, cut homelessness support outreach services. The government will tell you: "No. We're doing all of this work. We're really focused on creating a model that houses people rapidly." All of the things that they say, but the reality is that there is less money for homeless outreach supports.

Page 21 of the CSS business plan, initiatives supporting outcome 1, notes \$89.6 million for homeless support outreach services, line 5.4 of the estimates. This amount is less than the forecast and an actual reduction of \$200,000 from last year's budget. We know that the number of people needing homeless supports has not decreased,

so please explain this budgeting process. I don't understand it. With the huge growth in the number of precariously housed, homeless, and people using more than 30 per cent of their income, in addition to the population growth and poverty explosion, Albertans really need an answer. Can you please justify this reduction in spending? It's not a big reduction, but this reduction will impact people's lives, particularly in communities like Wetaskiwin.

Page 21 of the business plan, initiatives supporting outcome 1, notes that \$48.7 million is allocated to homeless shelters. There is no increase from last year's budget, but the forecast was \$24.7 million higher than budget. Is it the goal to actually hide actual in-year spending? Madam Chair, I mean, that's concerning to me. When I look at the government budget estimates, in good faith, I assume that's what the government plans to spend, but that is not the case. We know there's additional spending that's going to happen in homeless supports. We heard about it in the fiscal plan, but we don't see it in the ministry's business plan.

We also know that there is \$1.6 million that's dedicated to Jessie's House, which is a women's shelter in Morinville, but we don't see it in the ministry budget. We don't see it in the projections in CSS. We hear about it through the provider. We hear about it briefly in the fiscal plan, but we don't see it in this ministry's budget. So again I'm questioning: is it to artificially make the spending look flat? Is it to make it look like there's a savings? Is it about doing more with less? I don't really understand, so if the minister could explain that to me, that would be wonderful.

You know, I want to go back to a couple of other comments that the minister made just before I started speaking. He talked about the FTEs and, you know: it's all good; we're not cutting any programs. I never said that this would result in less programming. What I said was that it results in an enormous amount of stress on staff, an enormous amount of pressure on caseloads that have exploded. For an AISH generalist to, on average, have 350 to 400 people on their caseload and then lose a colleague and have to take on some of that caseload: that's not reasonable. Perhaps I'm misunderstanding something, that caseloads are shrinking or there's a different way to deliver services. I'm happy to hear about it. But just removing another hundred FTEs from a ministry that's already overtaxed: I would like to know what that plan is.

Finally, Madam Chair, one of the comments that I've been meaning to make for a while is repeatedly heard from this minister, that AISH benefits are generous, and they're, you know, among the highest in the country. I think we've already established that that's incorrect. There are two places where there are higher benefits. But to say to someone who is living in poverty – and we know that \$1,685 a month requires people to live in poverty. That's just the way it is; it's poverty. And to expect people to be grateful for that and to be proud that that's what we're giving people and it forces them to live in poverty: that bothers me.

I think maybe we should rethink about the way we frame it, that, no, it's not great. It's okay, but it's not great. People are still living in poverty. I think maybe crowing about it is maybe a tack that I would urge the minister and his officials to rethink, particularly when they're putting it in print, because people with disabilities are paying attention. When they see that they're, you know, supposed to be grateful for this: that's just unacceptable to me.

I'm going to stop there and turn it over and, hopefully, get some answers.

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

Now I'll turn the time over to the minister.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the questions. Boy, I have lots of different views on how the question

was framed, but you know in answering this question I'm going to provide you with our perspective, a responsible government perspective on how we handle all those issues.

**10:10**

Let me begin with the question of homelessness concerns in Wetaskiwin. I can tell you, hon. members, that, through you, Madam Chair, I've been to Wetaskiwin many times, including the summer breaks that we had. We have a fantastic local MLA, Minister Wilson, who is also the Minister of Indigenous Relations. I'm very pleased to see, through him, not only city council but the surrounding Indigenous leaders from various reserves in the area, social support agencies, Health. We're all there, including that temporary camp that Minister Wilson and I visited a couple of times, too. Let me assure you of this. The local groups, through Minister Wilson, the local MLA, have been working diligently to collaborate on that. As you can appreciate, homelessness is such a challenging, complex issue that requires many stakeholders working together to make a difference.

In the course of that, I believe there was a change of service provider from one who used to be there to the ones that the group decided to have currently – I believe the Mustard Seed is what they choose to be today. I must say that when you are dealing with complex issues, when you work with a group of collaborative forces like that, the best is to leave those decisions to their hands to decide who is the best operator for such. So I applaud them for working together to find solutions that are workable to their community.

Contrary to what the opposition member questioned about our funding decision, Minister Wilson is part of the cabinet. Minister Wilson is also the local MLA. Every step along the line when we had our opportunities to give financial support there, he was the first to know, and he actually published – I saw his weekly newsletters there, and one was picked up by the local newspaper, too. The community are very thankful that the local MLAs and this government work hand in hand with them, provided funding not only during the pandemic for temporary shelters but also solutions for the long term.

Rest assured, you know, there isn't a single silver bullet to solve a complex problem like that. I've been in social work for over 28 years, before I stepped into the political realm. I am a firm believer that the best practice is government working together with community and providing the right support and resources there and to enable empowering the community to find local solutions to mitigate the issues here. That is precisely what I saw happening in Wetaskiwin. I want to take the opportunity to thank Minister Wilson and thank the city council, thank our police, RCMP, social service agencies, and the shelter operators for continuing to work together on that.

That work is also related to the task force that the hon. member mentioned about this. If you recall, when we announced the task force, it was at a time when we also announced \$21.5 million for additional shelter support, particularly during the winter season and before the fifth wave of the pandemic occurred. The reason we did that is purposeful. Throwing money at an issue alone is not a solution to the problem. We must have different ways of thinking how we best can utilize our available resources and come back with the most responsible and responsive answers to the challenges in front of us.

In addition to the \$21.5 million, part of that money did go to Wetaskiwin – I believe it was \$600,000 there – to help them with their crisis at hand. But also in this task force we asked for representatives from police to shelters to social service agencies to health treatment and recovery representatives and through orders of

government, from federal, provincial, and municipal. This is an opportunity that we thought: Alberta can lead the country.

Homelessness is an issue across the whole nation. We've been adding resources over the years and are coming from different angles, different components of this, yet there is a lack of co-ordinated approach that, you know, puts the issue at the centre of how we are helping people to get out of that challenging, difficult situation that results in nowhere to live, to stay. I am so thankful that we have that task force, have representatives from a vast majority of stakeholders, also including experts.

Your question about rural representation. With many others, this issue was rising on the day we were deciding who to put in there to lead this task force. As you can imagine, the number of recommendations goes to more than 25, 30, 50. When you have a functioning group, you can't make decisions when it's getting too large. Instead, what we did is that we created many specific round-tables. There's one specifically . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister. That concludes your time, and it concludes the first portion of questions for the Official Opposition.

I see that hon. Member Loewen has joined us. Please introduce yourself. Let's start with that.

**Mr. Loewen:** Okay. MLA Todd Loewen, Central Peace-Notley.

**The Chair:** All right. Now we'll move on to the independent members for 20 minutes of questions. Would you like to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Loewen:** I'd like to go back and forth, but it's up to the minister.

**The Chair:** Minister, what's your preference?

**Mr. Luan:** Can we try the block time, five and five? Then we can re-evaluate. I want to make sure you get in all your questions.

**Mr. Loewen:** Yeah. My comments are fairly short and quick, so I don't think it will be too bad at all. I'm happy to do that.

I'm just going to start on the business plan, page 23. The question is: what is included in other revenue? Why does it look like it's decreased by about half?

Also on page 23 – and I'll just kind of read them slowly so you have time to find them – what is included in premiums, fees, and licensing, and why is it not included in Budget 2021-2022?

Again on page 23, why was the funding for homelessness and outreach support services cut or dropped by \$60 million? It appears that between the '20-21 actual and the 2022-23 estimate is where that drop is.

Again on page 23, what is included in services provided to other ministries? What changed, and why did it decrease?

Again on page 23, what is included in the capital investment line item disability services, and why did this investment double in the 2022-2023 budget estimate?

Again on page 23, why did disability services as a ministry expense increase so dramatically between the '20-21 actual and the '22-23 estimate?

Again on page 23, why does investment income revenue disappear from the '22-23 budget estimate? What was included in investment income?

Those are my questions.

**The Chair:** Member, are you surrendering your time, or do you have anything else?

**Mr. Loewen:** No. I'm going to let the minister go.

**The Chair:** Okay. All right. Thank you so much.

We'll proceed to the minister.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, hon. member. I like your high efficiency. Let's keep up with that. Great questions. Thank you so much.

Let me address some of the questions you raised earlier about how you saw the budget. You felt, for instance, that the homelessness part is a decrease rather than an increase. The fact is that it's not decreased. It's maintaining that same level. What you might have interpreted that as: in the forecast amounts there are COVID-related one-time expenses there, so that might give you that appearance. But the reality is that for sustainable, ongoing funding it remains the same.

**10:20**

For capital investment, that is related to addressing what we call complex needs, you know, for some people with disabilities. Because of the severity of their disability, their behaviour, it sometimes requires additional – this is where we do have folks still living in Michener Centre and in supportive housing in Calgary, what I call graduation programs there. I visited them there. It's people with the most severe conditions so that not only is their own safety in question, but it sometimes includes the caregivers. It takes quite a bit of skill, including accommodation, the structure of the facility. You need to take safety and everything else into consideration. The capital budget we're talking about there is about renovation, keeping up to the costs. Also, I believe there's a proposed expansion for Calgary. We're expanding the capacity there to keep up with the demands. That's the capital investment related to that.

The disability sector. You were asking why we see an increase. In my opening remarks we talked about how for that whole section we do have a \$60.8 million increase. That's largely related to addressing families with children with disabilities and other areas. Part of those commitments is our platform commitment. We committed to an increase of \$3.5 million to enhance support services there, particularly related to what I call our innovative way of addressing the increasing demand, which is empowering families. I think, hon. member, you probably support us in this way.

Families with children with disabilities: I had the luxury of doing a summer tour, visited many of them throughout the province. I do recall your region and those regions. We met with Inclusion Alberta. Through them, we empower families to become part of managing, deciding on the kind of support services for them. In our platform commitment we agreed that we'll increase that portion of support.

Hon. member, I think you and I will know this by heart. When we speak of – when parents get involved, when parents understand the needs of their kids, when parents become part of the key stakeholders, working with our ministry, working with professionals to find the most relevant support services for their kids, that's where efficiency, effectiveness all score high. That's part of the reason you saw the added support that we're addressing there.

Let me keep going about the other part. I think you referenced the question of licensing. I'm not sure I completely got that question. If you don't mind repeating that part.

**Mr. Loewen:** Yeah. No problem. I appreciate your answers so far. You did mention something about empowering families, and I agree with that, and I appreciate that comment. I do have a grandson that's disabled, so I think the support that comes to families to be

able to keep those children in their home is very important. So I appreciate that. I wanted to mention that.

But going back to the premiums, fees, and licensing line item, I asked what was included in that and why was it not included in Budget '21-22. I'm just looking at my notes here. The actual was zero in '21-22, and then the budget was \$257,000. I just wanted a little clarity on what's included and why the change in the budget there.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you for that good question. This is one that's addressing some of the very specialized needs for the complex clients that I referenced earlier. Now, when they are directly cared for by us through Michener Centre and others, as you can imagine, many of them require specialized services. That requires licensing and permission in doing so. We're doing that on behalf of our clients, and they contribute to those costs.

I'm going to turn this question over to Olin and then Clay, my ADM, here. They are more expert on those detailed questions.

Olin, do you want to . . .

**Mr. Lovely:** Olin Lovely, SFO. Madam Chair, the premiums, fees, and licences: that was quoted to that line item as opposed to other revenue, where it should have been. It's for clients paying for some services in our direct operations.

Thank you.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Nothing to add, Minister. Olin answered the question.

**Mr. Luan:** Okay. Good. Thank you.

Hon. member, you're good on that one, through the chair, of course?

**Mr. Loewen:** Yeah. That's great. Thanks.

The only other question was on other revenue on page 23, where it decreases. What is included in other revenue, and why did it decrease by over half?

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you. Another great question. You know, in this department we handle delivery of the statutory benefit. With that, there's also another function our ministry plays – I don't know that many people know this – fraud investigation and appeals and all that. We want to make sure that we get the money to the right people's hands, not where there's fraud in the system, which is not supposed to be there but got in there. What you saw here is a reflection of that. When we succeed on appeals investigations – where overpayment occurred, with the recovery of a benefit that, you know, they are not entitled to – this is a part of the work where we show we are a responsible government.

On one hand, we offer, as you heard me say earlier, you know, a social safety net, some of the core benefits that maintain dignity and respect for anybody. It doesn't matter what kinds of barrier you enter into; we're there for you. But we don't encourage irresponsible government spending of taxpayers' money. I think, hon. member, you are one of those, I firmly believe, that has no tolerance for that. You'll be pleased to see that we're demonstrating with discipline, we're demonstrating with professionalism that not only can we provide services with care but with responsibility.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Minister, and I just want to say thank you to yourself and to your staff for being here today and answering questions. I appreciate the good work you do, and if you end up in the Peace Country again, I'm happy to introduce you to my grandson Ezra.

Thanks.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you so much for your offer. You know, when the new summer comes, I sure hope that we're getting back to normal days. I do want to travel around. I do want to meet with people that we're serving. I think the northern region, in many pieces of my ministry, is an area of great priority for me, particularly for remote areas, isolation. Generally speaking, when people try to access services in that condition, it's a heck of a lot more difficult than, let's say, in my constituency of Calgary-Foothills, in the urban centre. All the services are located within 20 minutes to 40 minutes distance. I'm fully aware of the accessibility, and I make sure that folks, like in your area, equally enjoy the support that we're providing for all Albertans. Thank you for that.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you.

**Mr. Luan:** Back to you, Madam Chair. Do I still have some time. . .

**The Chair:** Member, there are still seven minutes and 45 seconds left in the time.

**Mr. Loewen:** I will cede that, and you can carry on to others.

**The Chair:** Okay. But, Minister, if you just wanted to . . .

**Mr. Luan:** If you don't mind, Madam Chair, with this quick, rapid back and forth, sometimes it's hard to get all the information out on the table. If you don't mind, I do want to talk a bit more about how this ministry is, you know, trying to function as a social safety net but also as an empowering mechanism to help Albertans reach their full benefits.

Madam Chair, through you to all members, when I opened my remarks, we talked about that Budget 2022 not only maintained all the core benefits that we provide, whether it's AISH, whether it's income support, whether it's support for people with a disability, support for families and people who are fleeing from domestic violence. We maintained the core funding there, but please notice that the new dollars we're adding, the \$34 million that we added to this, are specifically contributing to the function I talked about, the empowering mechanism.

**10:30**

When I travel around the province and meet with families, meet with people with disabilities and others – Madam Chair, I want to share a couple of those stories because they made a huge difference to me and impacted how I do my day-to-day work with this ministry. When I travelled in Edson, a small town near Jasper, we had this conversation with Anne. She gave me permission – I can share this – because there are some implications. By sharing this story, we can empower more people to be successful.

Anne is an employer for a bottle depot there. In a casual conversation about something else Anne said, "Hey, Minister, I had this fresh, new experience that really taught me quite a bit that I want to share with you." I said, "Go ahead." What she was saying is that when operating the bottle depot – as you can appreciate, it's a tedious job, and for many people it's not highly attractive – she keeps losing people. When you hire someone and their mind is not on the job, you need to supervise them quite a bit. Then she said, "In the long run it's quite costly when you keep losing people and are always trying to find somebody." Then she said, "Something changed when I hired" – I'm going to use the name Frank just for protecting his personal privacy. It's not Frank, but it's a person with a disability.

Anne said, "What a change when I offered the same job to Frank." This is his first job that he had through a free-market, fair competition. He had previous experiences of subsidized work

placements and so forth, but this is the first one he got through a fair market competition. “Boy,” Anne said, “since I hired Frank, this changed his life. He not only realized that he can make meaningful contributions to society, have an overwhelming sense of self-pride; he treated that job like a new life. He’s always the first one when the doors open, always the last one. You need to remind him to go home.” Anne said: “Minister, I never needed to worry about that. Why didn’t I learn this some time ago? This is way better for me as the employer.”

That really inspires me when I’m talking about why we’re putting \$34 million of extra money to help people through employment to realize their full potential. This isn’t simply about money. This is about helping people reach to a level that they have a sense of purpose in life, where they can see their contribution to society, and they have a overwhelming sense of better mental health, too. It is that that I wanted to take the opportunity to share. With this Budget 2022, Madam Chair, through you and to all hon. members and through you to Albertans, our government committed not only to provide the core benefits to maintain that social safety; we’re also functioning as an empowering mechanism to give people the first chance. When you want to get a job, to be successful in your life, we’re there for you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

If there’s nothing else, then we will proceed to a break. I understand there’s fresh coffee, so, everyone, enjoy your five minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 10:34 a.m. to 10:40 a.m.]

**The Chair:** All right. We’ll move to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from the members. Would you like to combine your time with the minister? Where is the minister?

**Mr. Smith:** When the minister is here, I would be glad to combine my time with the minister, whichever way he wants to go.

**The Chair:** Minister, what’s your choice?

Member, please repeat.

**Mr. Smith:** Good morning there, Mr. Minister. I guess maybe we should start by asking: do you want to go with block time, or do you want to do back and forth? How would you prefer to do it, through the chair?

**Mr. Luan:** Just to be consistent, I don’t mind if we try the rotation first. If that satisfies all of our colleagues, give your questions in the time slot, and then we can rotate. Let’s give it a try first.

**Mr. Smith:** That is absolutely fine. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Luan:** Yeah. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Please proceed, Member.

**Mr. Smith:** Okay. First, I want to just start by thanking you for being here and all of your staff for being here today. You know, it takes a lot to be a minister, and it takes a lot to work with the minister and for a minister on behalf of Albertans. Life can sometimes get messy, and our ministries are there to try and deal with it. I just want to say thank you for the work that you do on behalf of Albertans.

You know, prior to being an MLA, I was a social studies teacher. I thought I knew about government, and then as an MLA I began to realize that there was lots that I didn’t know. One of the things that I have learned over the last seven years of being a member is that

every ministry is important. Some ministries are perhaps a little more sexy, some perhaps have a little more money behind them, but every ministry has a responsibility to the people of Alberta. They are important, and I’m not sure that there’s one any more important than the ministry that we have here today.

I’m eventually going to get to take a look at the budget estimates here, and I’m going to be referring to page 49 of your budget estimates. But I want to preface my questions with this observation. I mentioned that life can get messy sometimes. I think it’s the case with all of our lives. We can find ourselves in crisis, and we can be vulnerable. We can find ourselves where perhaps our income is no longer there and we’re wondering how we move ahead. You know, there are times when sometimes as Albertans we wonder: where are our basic needs going to come from? As an MLA I’ve realized that people do come to you when their lives are in crisis.

**Mr. Feehan:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** We have had a point of order called.

Please proceed.

**Mr. Feehan:** Standing Order 23(b). Madam Chair, this very member objected to statements of context earlier on and has failed to address the actual point of why we’re here.

**The Chair:** This is true. You have raised a very good point, Member.

Member, please proceed to your questions.

**Mr. Smith:** I would be glad, Madam Chair. I will be dealing with page 49. Maybe if the minister wants to turn to page 49 of the budget estimates, then he will see that in the budget estimates it shows an increase of about \$35.6 million from Budget 2020. I want to address that increase in the budget, but when I address it, I want to realize that the people that come into my office are people sometimes whose lives have gone into crisis, and they are wondering where they’re going to stay. How are they going to address the fact that they have no place to go and it’s 35 below? We see an increase of about \$35.6 million in the budget from 2020. I would like the minister to address: what is the reason for the increase in that overall budget?

You know, we live in a society where, at least in my town, sometimes when people are in crisis, we look at the civil society to address that and sometimes a government to address it and sometimes a combination of both of those groups. Small towns are often very different than big cities. Sometimes people can face these kinds of crises without having to go to the government, but sometimes they really need to have an MLA step in on their behalf. I know that there are times as a teacher I used to have to do that, but as an MLA, I guess, when I first started, I didn’t realize that I would have to do that.

We see an increase in the budget. How has the ministry been able to use that increase to meet the needs of the people that I serve? Can you elaborate, or on a related note, why was the ministry’s 2021 budget higher than the 2021-22 forecast as per the estimates on page 49? Through you, to the minister, Madam Chair, can you elaborate on how supports are being maintained? We know people have required additional supports since the onset of the pandemic, but can you provide a few of the areas that you focused on with that increase from 2020?

Thank you. I’ll pass my time over to the hon. MLA Mr. Amery.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you to my colleague, and thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister and department staff, for the time here today and the work done in the past year. I know that there



have been tremendous pressures in every ministry but certainly in this particular Ministry of Community and Social Services, where the challenges of the pandemic have created heightened obstacles for all vulnerable populations.

To the minister, through the chair, of course: one of the particular challenges has undoubtedly been the difficulty in navigating through the pandemic with respect to employment for Albertans with disabilities. I know that the Ministry of Community and Social Services has both an obligation and also a commitment to assisting Albertans with disabilities in finding employment, and I want more information about this particular issue. I'll refer you to your business plan, Minister, at page 22 under initiatives supporting key objectives. I would like to ask you, through the chair, if the minister could please explain how the \$33.6 million investment in employment partnerships in this 2022-2023 fiscal year will specifically work to benefit Albertans with disabilities find employment. If you can go into a little bit of detail with respect to that, I'm wondering if you can elaborate, Minister, on the type of programming that this funding supports and how this money will integrate further with respect to Alberta's recovery plan as well.

I would then like to direct the minister to page 134 of the fiscal plan, which shows the AISH budget and an increase of \$12 million from Budget 2020-2021. I know that the minister has spoken in some detail about the increases to AISH earlier today, but my questions focus a little bit on something more in particular. I want to know from the minister, Madam Chair, how this budget addresses caseloads and cost pressures for the AISH program, specifically. If the minister could go into some detail about that, that would be helpful in informing the members of this committee here as to what is being done to address those obvious caseload pressures that you're dealing with. How much of the AISH budget goes directly to clients? How much of that goes to administering the program? I think it's important that we know the difference there.

In addition to that, Minister, through the chair, will AISH clients see any changes to their benefits as a result of Budget 2022? There is some funding for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD, initiatives, that are being maintained at \$25.2 million. I also understand that you brought back the FASD WRAP program after the previous government cut it. Can you talk a little bit about these programs and what they entail and why you decided to bring it back along with some of the initiatives that are behind the re-introduction of that after the former government cut that program altogether? How are the FASD service networks making a difference in the lives of people affected by FASD? What was the motivation for bringing it back? Can you talk a little bit about whether or not the impact that you're seeing now or that you intend to see was some of that motivation for bringing it back?

10:50

Minister, in the last 30 seconds I'm going to try and get my last questions in. Page 19 of the business plan, at the third paragraph, talks about the pandemic and the significant impact that it continues to have on vulnerable Albertans. Can you please provide a bit more information on how CSS has reacted to the emergent needs of the pandemic? And do you expect to take on additional pandemic-related costs in 2022? If so, where is that reflected, and what do you foresee that to be?

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member. If you could save that last question for the next round, that would be great.

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

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, colleagues. Great questions, particularly many detailed ones. I'm happy to

address them all. But before I begin, I want to also offer my appreciation for your collegial support. Without all of you we can't be where we are today: not only balanced our books but added more into my budget so that we continue to take care of the most vulnerable in our community. So thank you for that. Going back to – I'll try to address all the questions you raised, hopefully, within 10 minutes. If not, I'll use a future time to get back to you.

Page 49 articulated that there is a \$35.6 million increase from Budget 2020. This is our effort to demonstrate that Budget 2022 ensures that Community and Social Services programs remain fully funded. This includes AISH, income support, disability services, and helping people experiencing homelessness or domestic violence to get the services they need. A point of note that you ought to know is that with the budget that we currently have, 90 per cent of the money we're talking about here goes directly to individuals. This is what we call a statutory benefit that the ministry just, you know, flows directly to the hands of people. Rest assured; money is well spent in that regard.

Services that we're providing here continue to be delivered on a sustainable approach. This is something – I believe, hon. member, you and I share that common belief. Yes, we need to provide services, but we also need to be mindful of sustainability. Money doesn't grow on trees. We need to work hard to generate revenue, and then we spend wisely. You will see that throughout this budget in terms of our discipline.

On your related note talking about how the ministry's 2021 budget is higher than last year's forecast and why it is such, I want you to know that when we show you the forecast amount, that also includes the pandemic, the one-time funding that we allocated. Generally speaking, almost every line item we read it like that. You will see that part. What we're talking about here is ongoing sustainable funding, which, you know, we maintained most of that, including adding \$34 million in addition to that. I hope that answered the question you raised.

Getting back to the second question on the business plan, page 22. You're asking a question about: with our employment support programs where specifically will those things be spent? Hon. member, I'm happy to share with you that \$20 million of the new dollars that we're talking about will be part of what we call the Alberta at work initiative. This is a crossministry collaborative work not only from Labour but from Advanced Education and us working together for this.

Of course, our components of that contribution directly aim at people who are currently receiving income support or AISH, who I call vulnerable Albertans. They tend to have more barriers than others. Some of those barriers are very specific to our client group, so our intention is that the \$28 million there will be used in a targeted way through our ministry working in partnership with nonprofit organizations.

We're going to allocate the money through that partnership agreement, specifically targeted to training skill development like WHMIS – that stands for workplace hazardous materials information system training – first aid training, covering the costs of equipment needs for work, covering costs for transportation for some of our most vulnerable clients that have mobility issues. Those are tangible, specific support functions as an enabling force to help our clients to fully participate in the workforce.

Last year, for your record, there were 32,000 Albertans through those support services who were able to find jobs and live without relying on an income support program from us, whether it's a regular one or the AISH one, so that is worth noting. We're not talking about something pointless and wishful thinking. This is real work, real people getting benefit out of here.

Moving on to the next question, you're saying that in the \$12 million addition we added to AISH, you wanted to know more specifically what that's for. Hon. member, great question. As you know, during the pandemic federal benefits have supplemented Albertans. That relieved a little bit of our caseload pressure, but with the ending of that federal program we are fully anticipating the rise of caseloads in that regard. Part of the \$12 million increase here is budgeted for that purpose of managing the return of a higher caseload. This is another piece of our specific action and commitment to demonstrate working practical, realistic, and disciplined. We anticipate the rise of caseloads will come. We budgeted accordingly.

The next item for the question you asked: funding for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD. Hon. member, you are absolutely correct. It's very unfortunate. With the previous government they discontinued the funding for this. Through our campaign we heard from Albertans loud and strong that this is a program that is making a huge difference. In fact, in FASD Alberta's work is leading the country in many ways. When something works, we ought to maximize its benefits to Albertans rather than cutting them off, so we committed to bring that back, and we did. I'm very honoured to say that I announced this \$1 million addition to this in Red Deer along with our service providers there.

We have received nothing but accolades of positive feedback from families, from agencies who work on this. For myself, I'm a social worker by profession. FASD issues surfaced years and years ago, and through early days our learning, professional learning, knowledge transfer for this to today, seeing it's being vastly transferred, the knowledge and support services to family: it's a wonderful thing to see because there is something preventable. If during pregnancy you drink, you really damage the unborn child before it's born, and then you bear the consequences for the rest of their life. It's a very costly consequence not only for the individual but for the caregiver, for the family, for the community, and for the province as a whole, but it's preventable. Having an FASD program being operated and creating the prevention impact there, to me in the long run, has saved a lot for government and for taxpayers. I believe that for all the members that are sitting as a Conservative government, this is something that we get in no time. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, the previous government doesn't have the same stance on that part. I'm glad we've made a return on that one.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

11:00

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds left.

**Mr. Luan:** I think I may now be able to address your last question for the business plan on the pandemic. Very quickly, we did spend \$19.5 million for homeless shelters as a one-time funding for capacity 24/7 support, expansion of services for that. We did add \$2 million to women's emergency shelters and another \$1.5 million to operate Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton, as you all know. In partnership with the federal government we made an additional \$11 million in funding through the critical workers benefit program. As you can see, during the most difficult time in our province we did our part to help Albertans.

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

Now we'll move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Please remember that discussion should flow

through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time is combined.

Please, proceed, hon. member.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. No, I don't want to combine. Okay. Thanks.

I'm going to talk about some of the items in disability services. I'm going to focus on PDD, which is persons with developmental disabilities, and FSCD, family support for children with disabilities. Of course, one of the first things I did was had a look at open data just to get a sense of what the wait-lists were like for FSCD and PDD. As far as I could tell, it was not updated since 2020. I'm unsure why that is, if this government is no longer reporting wait-lists. Clarification would be helpful. I think it's incredibly helpful to know the wait-list numbers when you're looking at the projected budget amounts, so that would be good.

The other thing is that I understand it is now policy of PDD to, I guess, use a set of criteria when deciding who is most in need on the wait-list. Last year, I think, during budget estimates, Madam Chair, we agreed that there were about 2,000 people waiting for services in PDD, yet this government only assesses people with, I'm assuming, the highest need to get new supports or new dollars. I'm wondering if the minister or the ministry could explain or table what criteria are used to decide who is most in need and how many people left that waiting list. Why is there no open data on wait-lists for both PDD and FSCD? How many people are on the wait-list, all wait-lists? I'm talking about whatever stage they're in the process for FSCD. In addition, of PDD – it doesn't matter if it's a service provider or not – what are the total numbers on both of those wait-lists? What is the criteria used to fund people off the PDD wait-list?

My question to the ministry is that given the fiscal reality that is now, I'm just curious: has there been any discussion, any consideration whatsoever, to raising the wages of non-union PDD staff, so disability workers? That would be people that are providing supports through PDD and FSCD, actually, to people in the community. Any thought to increasing their wages, which have not been increased, as I understand it, since 2014?

My next question is, more specifically, about FSCD. I would like to know how many multidisciplinary team panels – that was a review of a funding decision, whether that was a decision to extend, renew, or stop supports under FSCD, doesn't really matter if they are specialized or not. How many multidisciplinary panels in this last fiscal? In terms of the budget projection or the budget estimate that we see, how many panels is the ministry budgeting for? Those are my questions.

Next I'd like to talk about – I noted that there is a plan to build for complex behaviours, a residential support for people that receive PDD supports. If you flip to page 169 of the fiscal plan, I note complex needs residential build PDD clients: there's a total over three years of \$20 million. I would like to know specifically what that is for. We heard first mention of it last year during estimates or in the budget documents. I'd like to know the progress that's been made, where this will be, who is the builder, who is the service provider, and what is the projected number of Albertans that will be supported in this project, in terms of total capacity.

My next question is about the hubs that were funded. There were four additional hubs in addition to Calgary and Edmonton to support family-managed support contracts through FMS and PDD. In those four new hubs I would like to know how many new people with FMS contracts are being supported in each one of those four hubs.

I'm going to run out of time real quick. I would like to know how many new service dog teams are now operating in Alberta. From last year to right now, how many new service dog teams are in operation? I don't mean renewals. I don't mean, you know, that

they've been retested. I mean new service dog teams. I'm assuming that's going to be taken from your approved service provider list, so that would be quite helpful to have that list.

I will stop there. I am out of time.

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

Now we'll move back to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, hon. member, for all those questions. I'm going to go very quick so that I can capture as much of the answers for you.

For the PDD and FSCD waiting lists, let me clarify that for you. For PPD, yes, there is a waiting list. For FSCD, there is no waiting list. So you want that to be clarified to begin with.

For PPD, wait-lists existed even long before this term of government. Your previous term had the same challenge that we have. We inherited this from the previous government. But, yes, you are right. In terms of how we can address this without leaving people in crisis, we established this critical and urgent needs sort of approach so that we don't leave anybody who is at high risk of losing a place to stay or have a person with safety issues and so forth. Those will be taken care of right away. That's a brand new way of how we are mitigating the challenges of that by engaging the service at the early days and acting on the top priorities for the critical urgent needs ones first, then continuing to work out the rest of the planning exercise to help people meet the needs. That's the difference we're talking about.

You mentioned about the numbers of people who are currently on waiting lists. Here are the numbers as of today. In December 2020 there were 1,935 people on that waiting list, and in December 2021 we have 1,412, which is representing approximately a 27 per cent decrease as a result of our innovative ways of how to approach this issue. I hope that is an answer that you can join me to applaud, to thank our workforce, thank our agencies for working with us and in partnership with us in providing the critical support services while meeting the increased demand.

You referenced the sector salary for our partner agencies. Let me tell you this. As a social worker myself, as somebody who chaired the immigrant sector in my previous life, I think that is an issue that we need to address, but I'm pleased to tell you that my ministry is working very closely with the Alberta Council of Disability Services and others, including our partnering ministries like Labour and Immigration and Advanced Education. We're working closely with them to see how, through our employment support services and added money we have, we can make some improvements in that area. I want to thank you for continuing to raise that question, and I want you to work with us in the coming year so that we can continue to make improvement in that area.

**11:10**

Just so you know, from an operational point of view, we only have the grant to work in partnership with community partners. We don't dictate how much they pay for their employees. Just so you know that part.

**Ms Renaud:** You fund it.

**Mr. Luan:** Yeah.

Let me move on to your other detailed questions regarding open data release timing. By the end of March the open data release will be coming into force, so for whatever numbers you're looking for, by then I hope that you will see that. This is our demonstration as a government: maintain transparency, maintain responsibility, maintaining a fair and transparent working with all in the sector here.

Your next question is related to multidisciplinary approaches or teams. Let me assure you that as a social worker myself I've been into what we call case conferencing occasions like what you referenced here and asked. It is an opportunity that for families . . .

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

Now we will move over to the government side for their next round of questions.

Please proceed.

**Mrs. Frey:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's funny. I think the Member for St. Albert completely read my mind. I was actually going to talk about service dogs, too. Hopefully, we can get some more answers about these very helpful furry friends, that help so many people in our province.

Fun fact for the committee: I represent an individual who had the very first owner-trained service dog in the province. Credit where credit is due, I have to say that this was a very good step taken by the former government to allow owner-trained service dogs in Alberta. As we know and as the minister knows, service dogs are not only very expensive, but there are very long wait-lists to get on them, and there are profound benefits to having a companion animal, not only for things like seeing eye dogs, of which we had many furry guests in the Legislature this week, but for other things such as PTSD, anxiety, and other disorders. Service dogs have an amazing impact on individuals and on families as well, especially with young children.

Minister, I have a few questions for you around service dogs. How is your ministry increasing the number of service dogs in Alberta? I would like to know how many of those dogs that are in Alberta are currently certified under the owner-trained program.

Also, I was curious. In rural Alberta we know that we have a lack of testing available for those dogs. Right now, for example, if you have an owner-trained dog in Medicine Hat or Brooks or anywhere else that you would like to see certified, somebody comes from Edmonton to certify your dog, which is obviously a barrier to access to that service. I think we can all agree on that. I'm curious, Minister, what we are doing as a government to ensure that these services are more accessible to my constituents, who maybe are not as close to Edmonton or don't have the ability to travel to Edmonton. As we know, these people are also probably on supports like AISH or PDD, so they cannot afford the extra trip, which is, as I know from driving that highway very often, not a short one. I was just curious if you could expand on that.

As well, I also would like to know: in this discussion around service dogs there are also a lot of people who moved to Alberta from other provinces who bring their service animal with them, but it's not common that that certification that's been offered in B.C. or Saskatchewan or Ottawa or Ontario or wherever or even Montana – I had somebody come up from the States as well, where the province didn't actually recognize that dog as being a service dog because that certification was a red tape thing. In my opinion, it sounds like red tape to me. If the dog is certified, the dog is certified. So I'm curious if you've looked into any other ways where we could maybe certify out-of-province dogs to be used in Alberta.

Also, I'm curious if the ministry has considered other animals. We know that dogs are not only the only furry friends that can help. In the U.K. – I'm learning this today – they've started using miniature horses, and equine therapy has actually been very helpful for rehabilitation. I actually have a constituent in the gallery today, who came to watch estimates today, and I know that he is a rancher himself and has many animals and also many children. So I'm sure that he knows the benefits of having animals around children and what that can do for them. I'm curious if you could elaborate on

that as well to see, maybe, if we've considered certifying other animals through the owner-trained program.

But for the most part, Minister, I think I would just like to give you an opportunity to highlight the work that's being done on the service dog file, how we are enhancing the owner-trained process if that's being done. I'm also curious. The Member for St. Albert asked some very good questions about service dogs as well, so I just wanted to give you another opportunity to elaborate on this very important service for Albertans that I know that my constituents appreciate very much.

I guess the other part of my questions. I have way more questions here, but I'd also like you to, in the same vein – in Medicine Hat right now I have a constituent who started a fantastic group called Cypress Canine Society. The Cypress Canine Society is a group of grassroots individuals who started their own process as an advocacy organization to help people who are trying to access the service dog system. I don't know of a better word for that because it really is a system – it's quite long; I think we can all agree on that – to access service dogs in Alberta. I'm curious if you could talk about the civil society fund and civil society in general and how that relates to the service dog sector as well to help people with disabilities and to help people in your ministry.

I have 15 seconds left, so I will just resign that.

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

We'll turn this time over to the minister.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thank you, hon. member, for your passionate questions and lots of good questions there, too. I echo with you that, you know, service dogs are providing, allowing some of the mandatory statutory services, but they are a good companion. They serve more than just that one purpose. In fact, two days ago CNIB brought service dogs into the Legislature. I was fortunate to meet many of them there, and one of the trainers is my constituent Debbie. We had a great conversation there.

I want to thank you for raising such a good question. In the eyes of people living with disability, particularly for blind people, guide dogs are a saviour for their safety, for their day-to-day function. It does a tremendous support there. That's one reason our government is continually committed to supporting this element in our budget.

Before I get into details, I want to clarify that service dogs are accredited through legislation. There's a very stringent process to get them trained and certified because it relates to safety. That needs to be noted.

In terms of your question of what we did to speed up or create some new ways that more can be considered, for more service dogs to be in service, I wanted to acknowledge that we did open up beyond what you call the accredited agencies who provide services within the ministry or the ministry-approved list. We also allow owners to have the option of taking their dogs to go through the same rigorous accreditation and to be certified in that way. The lady Debbie, that I mentioned to you, my constituent, is one of those. She shared quite a bit of her experience and perhaps some challenges, and she wants to see some improvement into our system.

Let me tell you this. I'm with you. You know, when we can make changes within our means to make it easier, to make it speedier, to have more supplies of guide dogs than perhaps we currently are limited to, it is always a good thing for Albertans, so I'm with you. I know, MLA Frey, when I travelled this summer with you, meeting with your constituency, you've been very actively engaged in your community. If you have some other stakeholders like Debbie, that I have in my constituency, that do have specific ideas on how we

can improve upon our system – I think you mentioned about reducing, perhaps, the red tape part – I'm on it. I'm for it, so let's work together on that one.

**11:20**

I'll just give you some numbers in terms of the service dogs we currently have. For the fiscal year 2020-2021 we had 50 ID cards issued during that year, and for that 26 additional ones are dogs certified under the owner-trained option. As you can see, that one is there. For the service dogs given certification trained by qualified organizations, there are 31 of them. I'll just give you some comparisons from a historical point of view. For the total licences issued during the fiscal year of '18-19, it's 70. From '19-20 it's 100. From '20-21 it's 57. What we're forecasting for 2022 is 55 in total. So 282 licences will be issued in that way. That is regarding the service dogs part.

I believe your second question related to the civil society grant. Now, I do want to answer your question on that one before I run out of time. We have \$6 million in this current budget for the third round left for that \$20 million commitment for civil society, and we're anticipating that by September we'll roll that out.

**The Chair:** Sorry. Minister, are you able to see the timer that we have on the big screen here? Oh, it's just off right now. There's a big blue screen at the bottom that the committee clerk puts up. We'll keep track of the time for you if you want to watch the screen. Then you don't have to worry about keeping setting it and turning it on. We'll manage that for you.

**Mr. Luan:** Please. That would be very helpful.

**The Chair:** Let's turn this time back over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, Member.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. Just given this block system, obviously, not all questions are being answered. I'm going to circle back and remind the minister of some questions. There are a lot, but some are questions that it really would be great to get answers to today.

One of my questions was that this year there are a projected 102 FTEs that will be eliminated in Community and Social Services. I would like to know where. Where are these FTEs coming from?

Also, there is a complex needs residential build, PDD, with \$20 million to be spent over three years on page 169. I asked a series of questions. I would really appreciate some answers. Who is the builder? Who is the provider? What is the capacity?

I would like clarification. The minister, I believe, said that there is no wait-list for FSCD. I would just like clarification on that.

Out of the new dogs that the minister listed, I think he's forecasting 55 new dogs. I would like to know, out of those 55 new dogs, how many came at an expense to the owner. How many were charged by a service provider that's on the approved list that charges for a dog? It can be anywhere between \$25,000 and \$45,000, so how many of those 55 dogs will come from for-profit providers?

Also, I would like to know if there has been any change to the intake policy at Michener Centre. How many people are residing at Michener Centre right now? What is the projection for next year?

I'd like to know, if there have been any changes overall to direct operations in Alberta, how many people are no longer being supported by direct operations. How many have left?

I would like to know what the respite capacity is in direct operations. It's my understanding that some of the folks at Rosecrest or families supported through Rosecrest and not necessarily living there – I think that a year ago there were probably 50 families that relied on Rosecrest or Hardisty for essential residential respite for

really, really medically complex children and adults, actually, so I would like to know what the capacity is for respite.

I would like to know how many people that are sort of PDD eligible or PDD funded currently reside at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and how long, on average, they have resided there.

I'm going to go on to the civil society grants. Now, I think it's really important to note that, you know, once this government's mandate is done, this will be about \$20 million that has been taken away from the Community and Social Services budget, put into the Premier's civil society fund to fund a number of things. We have seen precious little information. I know it's because of reporting periods, but it would be really nice to know when we can expect to see some results, whether that's financial results – where was the money spent? – what the outcomes were. How did it make life better for people who receive social supports? That is my question there.

I'd also like to touch on, very briefly, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I would like to know how many ministries in total were consulted and what particular piece of legislation they were consulted on. I would like to know what consultative process took place between the ministry and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities in preparation for this budget.

Now, I understand there have been some changes and staffing changes at the disability advocate's office, which is great. I would also like to know what the casework is like. In the last fiscal year how many new people were assisted through the disability advocate's office? Can you tell me: are you able to group those new calls or new interactions in the service sector, for lack of a better word, whether it was PDD, AISH, income support, FSCD? If you could sort of outline that for us.

Then if you could also tell me, if the ministry could tell me: are there some targeted times for, like, a return phone call? You know, that's often the best indicator of not enough staff working in the office, if things get a little out of hand, and based on what my office is hearing, things are getting out of hand. It would be really helpful if the ministry could shed some light on what are some, I guess, acceptable turnaround times.

Then, well, I'm wondering, too, if the ministry – this is kind of all over the place – if you could tell me about the RFP that was done for the warming shelters for homeless supports. The minister mentioned that they were able to work quickly to get the money out. Where was the RFP?

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Oh boy. When we get to five-minute intervals, it's easier just throwing in questions and harder to get all the answers because we can hardly get answers within one line there, but I will do my utmost best. Perhaps after this round we'll resume combined time so we can get to the questions that you wanted.

Let me go back to 102 full-time equivalent position eliminations. It was across all divisions. There's no specific one team or one function being eliminated. Like I mentioned earlier, we took a thoughtful, careful approach.

**The Chair:** Sorry. Members, I'm having a little difficulty hearing the minister, so if we could just have the conversation, maybe, move outside the room. This is the minister's time.

**Mrs. Frey:** Apologies, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to ask my deputy minister to give more specifics about how we achieved that 102 full-time position elimination.

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you. Cynthia Farmer, deputy minister. To meet our targets, we will be looking across the department. We will be looking at our attrition rate, which was approximately 4 to 5 per cent in terms of staff leaving. We have a number of modernization tools that will be introduced shortly. One, as the minister has already talked about, is the AISH application process, which will be a lot friendlier for, we believe, Albertans. We've tested it with Boyle McCauley, and we've tested with some agencies just to ensure that that would help to lessen the load in terms of paperwork but also that will help in the staffing component.

We're also introducing, in the first quarter to second quarter, an income support application form that Albertans can do online. That will also help us in terms of paperwork and data entry. I'll be honest, Member – and we've shared this with the minister – in terms of our systems we really are having a full push ahead in terms of modernization tools and in trying to eliminate some of the work in terms of the repetitive work. That's the way that we'll be approaching it, but we will also be approaching it in terms of – we are looking at client-centred in terms of clients that are across different programs, so between two divisions, if there are some opportunities there. That's our intent to deal with the staffing challenges.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Deputy.

Let me carry on before I run out of time. You asked a question about respite; during the pandemic that was on hold. That one is that we have no more services on that for the time being.

11:30

Civil society grants: you were talking about wanting to have some outcomes. At the end of the day, what was accomplished? Let me tell you that I'm sharing that aspiration with you. We will look forward to have an aggregate. Each applicant receiving funding from us, they are obliged to have a program report. With that, there are specific outcomes required as to what they will report to us. I can commit to you that we will look at the congregated data and show what the overall result will be for that one. Thank you very much.

You also mentioned about the advocate's office. Thank you for concurring with us by selecting a public process and getting the most suited person for the new job. We're very pleased with the new advocate. His personal, lived experience plus his work as chair for the Premier's council on persons with disabilities is really shining through.

Just to assure you that, in addition to that, we are expanding offices. We are changing from currently only one office in Edmonton. If you look at the needs, the inquiries for caseload across the whole province, we're having a Calgary office established parallel to what Edmonton has. In that way we are strengthening the capacity for that office to reach more people.

You asked about the total number of cases we've heard through that. Last year we had a total of 3,531 concerns that were dealt with through this office, so that's a strong indication of great work done there.

Before I run out of time, I do want to have an opportunity to say thank you to the first advocate, Tony. He did a great job for the first. At the end of his term somebody else had the chance. It isn't a statement that he didn't do a good job. He did what he was asked.

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

If we could please move back to the government side for questions. Do I see hon. Member Gotfried? Please proceed.

**Mr. Gotfried:** Great. Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you to the minister. Thank you to the minister for being with us today and all of his able staff as well.

Minister, on page 23 of the government's fiscal plan, it outlines the Alberta at work plan, which we've had an opportunity over the last few days to speak to several of your colleagues about as well. That plan is to create pathways for all Albertans for greater participation in the province's economic recovery, which we're very grateful and blessed for and with thanks to much of the good work of our government in making that possible as we move through this postpandemic period. You know, it's clear to most people that the workforce challenges that we face in creating opportunities for all Albertans of all abilities to find gainful and fulfilling employment in this economic recovery is a real priority for all of us.

It's equally important, I think, that we're now facing, in a lot of the work that I've been doing across many sectors, some workforce challenges in attracting people back to work. That makes that even more important to us. I'm looking for you to outline some of the ways that CSS is going to support vulnerable Albertans to better participate in that economic recovery.

I'll give an example. My wife had a cousin who sadly passed away a number of years ago. At one point in time he was visually impaired, legally blind, but was working in a dark room in a hospital. Now, when that was digitized, he lost his job. Instead of us finding another opportunity to train or retrain him in the new technology, he then became reliant on AISH, after having gainful employment and also having an opportunity. This was a number of years ago. Those are the kinds of stories we have to make sure that as we develop our economy, we create these opportunities and upgrade people's opportunities to participate even though technology is moving ahead.

I've got a few questions that I'll ask. Number one is: what are the changes that CSS clients can expect from the investment, from the commitments made in Budget 2022? Maybe I'll go a little bit more specifically on how much funding is required to implement some of the changes that you've committed to and some of the enhancements and opportunities, particularly around out the Alberta at work program, which, again, addresses all Albertans. Again, we need to make sure that we are ensuring a high level of participation of all Albertans. I know that that's one of your personal goals and certainly one of this government.

One of the other long-stated goals that we see from the government is to reduce red tape, and I know that we're well on our way to achieving that. What specifically has your ministry done to address the issues of red tape? I know that you've mentioned some concerns there in the past about the red tape being taken away but also making sure that there's still accessibility for all of the CSS clients and then those that you support. So I guess a little bit of an update on what the ministry is doing in terms of streamlining program delivery and increasing efficiencies while still making it easy or maybe even easier for Albertans to navigate a hopefully more user-friendly system.

Also, I know that Service Alberta has been focused on, across all the ministries, making services digital by default by moving to increase the number of services online, ensuring that the access to those services is something that is not a barrier for people or not an impediment to their participation or to their utilization of some of those tools. I guess I'm encouraged by that move and many of your ministry's moves to streamline that, make it easier for clients. But

I'm also concerned about those experiencing challenges or some difficulty in accessing online services that could be due to disability. We had CNIB in the Legislature just a few days ago, telling us about some of the challenges that their clients face in terms of access to technology and disability. So we want to make sure that that is not a barrier or impediment.

Then we have the whole issue of the broadband Internet, where we may have rural or remote clients who lack appropriate or stable Internet access. That's one of my other concerns. I guess what I would like to hear from you is what your ministry is doing to ensure that they can access services as we continue to modernize that system while not creating any barriers for people who are just maybe not tech savvy, again lack that access to the Internet, lack access to some of the technology that they need to participate, and that we still have options for them to pursue and to proceed and to access and to ensure that they have the ability to participate in society and in our economy as much as they possibly can.

Those are probably a mouthful there. I know that trying to answer these questions in five minutes is tough. I think I've got 10 seconds left, so I'll cede that back, and I seek your response, Minister. Thank you very much.

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

We'll turn it back over to the minister.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, hon. member, through you, Madam Chair. Your passion to serve Albertans, your concerns about accessibility, your concerns about how we can make life easier for Albertans is well represented. Thank you. What an honour to be a colleague working side by side with you.

I'm going to quickly get on to the questions you raised here. Regarding the employment support services, how we're going to spend that money, \$20 million of the \$34 million will be part of the Alberta at work initiative. Hon. member, you mentioned your wife's story of her relative losing a previous job. It's a real issue that we recognize. On one hand we have a booming economy. We have created so many new jobs, almost returned to a prepandemic level. On the other hand we have people, like you just mentioned, who have skills that are a mismatch from what the current needs are. That was one of the reasons why our government took a specific commitment to establish this Alberta at work initiative. It is by helping employers find employees and helping employees to retrain and repolish their skills so that they match with the new opportunities.

The specific example you use about digitalization, I have a real case I want to share with you. I met with a fellow in Edmonton. He himself is an IT guru, but his son is a person with a disability. Through trying to help his son, he created an opportunity for a number of other youth under 25 years. They started a digitalization service of government legal documents. I met with them in person. What an inspiration when I see that. They are all receiving AISH, but through this opportunity they are able to earn an additional \$17,000 a year. I asked them: what does that mean to you in real life terms? It is way beyond the money. They felt a sense of contribution, a sense of pride for themselves. That is part of the reason that motivates us to have this additional resource available, to empower more people so that they can be successful like that.

**11:40**

Part of the money will be also working in partnership with Advanced Education for microcredentials. As you know, hon. member, when you have the right training for those job-specific credentials there, your doors open widely. We're fully participating in that part, too.

I look forward to working with nonprofit organizations. I met quite a few of them in this regard. They are excited that our government opened the door for them. They are absolutely ready to play and to create those job-specific opportunities for training to assist our vulnerable Albertans to get their chance to get a job that is meaningful to them.

You mentioned about accessibility concerns when we talked about digitalization. Thank you for doing that. You know, as a social worker myself, I am fully aware that for the clients that we support, many of them have mobility challenges. Others have language and other disabilities. It is difficult in many ways to assume that the, perhaps, capable, ordinary Albertans can take advantage of what the technology offers, as compared to what they will do. This speaks to why the supportive services is critical and this speaks to the increased funding of \$60 million that we added for support services for people with disability and access to PDD. Granted, all our existing support services will be part of the parade on top of that top-up of \$24 million employment targeted funding.

When we lump them all together, you're talking about \$1.4 billion just for people with disabilities there. So I'm confident that your concerns – I'll make sure that for those who are barriered and have challenges to access the modernized digital tools, we do have in-person support there for them.

Let me see if I'm missing anything. Yes. You mentioned about red tape reduction. Thank you for saying that. Can you imagine . . .

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

Now we'll turn the time back over to the Official Opposition.

Please proceed.

**Ms Renaud:** I'm just going to, again, circle back and ask the same questions that I've asked that have not been answered. It would really be helpful if the minister would just answer the questions. I'm just trying to clarify. The minister made a statement earlier that there was no wait-list for family supports for children with disabilities. I would like some clarity.

I have also asked – this is the third time I'm asking – on page 169, complex needs residential build, PDD clients is \$20 million over three years. I have asked a series of questions. Who is the builder? Who is the service provider? Where is it? What is the capacity?

I also asked about the workplace assessment models that were done and around caseload and the fact that most of the regions were in the red zone. I would like to know what the ministry is going to do about that.

I also asked earlier, and perhaps the minister misunderstood my question. I asked about if there would be an increase for disability workers, or if there was consideration or discussion, not the wages that are paid to people with disabilities, but the workers that support people with disabilities. So maybe there wasn't clarity there.

Finally, I would also like to know the number of people that receive PDD supports that died during COVID. I have tried to find this information in a number of different ways. I know that the information is recorded as I was a service provider at one time and did have to record, sadly, when there were deaths. So I would like to know how many people that were funded by PDD have died during COVID.

I have increasingly heard from people all around Alberta, so I was happy to hear your work around making processes more efficient. But I have heard that people are experiencing really long wait times to get a callback for income support related issues, less so for AISH, more for income support. We've heard as long as 12 business days to get a callback. I would like to know what is an appropriate time for callbacks.

The other things that I really wanted to know about – going back to the service dogs, I'm going to ask this question again. The minister noted that they are forecasting 55 new dogs. How many of those dogs from the approved list came from providers that charged for their dogs, charged between \$25,000 and \$45,000? How many of those dogs?

Also, within the CSS budget I didn't see it pulled out in any of the documents. What is the total budget amount for the total FTEs for delivery there? So if that – hang on. There's just one other question I wanted to ask. Okay. I'm going to let you answer. I'm going to give you the time to answer.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you very much. Let me get down to your questions.

**The Chair:** Sorry, Minister, through the chair.

**Mr. Luan:** Through you, of course.

For the capital plan we have \$8 million in 2021-22, for that complex needs you talked about. It's partially rentals with Michener Centre, but the other part is expanding the capacity in graduated support, which is a direct operation in Calgary there. That's where that is. Through working with Infrastructure, we're doing an open public call for proposal in terms of all the process of who's the bidder, who it will be awarded to, so stay tuned as that process unfolds. It's a public process.

I can give my ADM, Clay, a further opportunity to address further questions there.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, Budget 2021 actually approved \$28.7 million in capital investments to build a community-based residence with 24 units to serve complex-needs PDD clients. That's in Infrastructure's budget. Currently Infrastructure is doing a functional program review. They're going to be going out, and they're going to talk to stakeholders and others to try to define and develop what the design of that facility should look like. They have a consultant hired, and they'll be going out and doing that engagement immediately. They're at that stage.

We will be doing an engagement session as well. The minister will be engaging with stakeholders and service providers to look at the governance model for the facility, to look at the delivery model for the facility as well. That should take place this coming spring. So early days on the facility, on the build, and I just want to reinforce that the minister really wants to engage both individuals and service providers in the provision of these services for this facility.

Thank you.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Clay. Can you also answer the other question in terms of the qualified service dogs and how many new are coming?

**Mr. Buchanan:** With the service dogs I think the question was: how many of those dogs produced were from for-profit and not-for-profit? Unfortunately, I don't have the breakdown. I just have the total figure with me today, between . . .

**Ms Renaud:** If you could get that on a later date, that would be great.

**Mr. Luan:** Okay. We'll honour you that.

**Ms Renaud:** If I could just grab a little bit more of my time, since we seem to be going back and forth, you know, I appreciate the information about the process for creating the PDD build. I just wanted a sense from the officials and perhaps the minister as well.

I guess any time we've talked about institutions – and that's what I think of this as. I'm not saying that's a bad thing; I'm just saying it's institutional. I would just like to hear from the minister or the ministry or both about their commitment to community living.

**Mr. Luan:** I'm happy to answer that question. You know, hon. member, you are a social worker, so we . . .

**Ms Renaud:** No, I'm not.

**Mr. Luan:** You're not. Okay. I thought you were.

**Ms Renaud:** No.

**Mr. Luan:** Okay. We've seen in our history that there days that we swing the services all into what I call institutionalized support services, and there were days that everything is community based. I'm happy to share with you my observation of our current practice with this ministry, and I'm committed to that: it's a balanced approach. We will make sure that we enable community and families to do as much as possible for that community-based support.

I mentioned earlier to you about when I meet with families, when I see their motivation to work with us for a family-managed accessibility program. I can see so much added benefits and leverage to what, otherwise, institution could do.

**11:50**

But on the flip side, when I'm visiting the high complex needs, the ones we're talking about have challenges even maintaining their own safety and oftentimes put caregivers at risk, too. We're talking about a very specialized group of services that we need to support. That is in the institutionalized approach. That's one of the reasons I am supportive of this expansion of the capital plan to expand the graduated program in Calgary, that part, in part to show that there's not just one way to swing, without any balance there.

I hope that gives you enough confidence . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Perfect. Did you say – I missed that part; I couldn't hear – you're okay, you're happy about the expansion of Michener and graduated supports?

**Mr. Luan:** Yeah. What I'm saying is that I'm happy that we have a balanced approach. On the one hand we talk about the remaining part of the \$3.9 billion budget and \$1.4 billion in AISH and disability sectors there. By and large, the community-based supports take a significant amount of the portion there. But we're not forgetting this other specialized area there, too. It's a balanced approach, is what I'm saying.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I'm guessing the zero intake at Michener is gone. Is that correct? It's still in place?

**Mr. Luan:** There's no target like that. We're providing the current services that Michener Centre is providing there.

**Ms Renaud:** Yes. I'm aware. Thank you. I'm just asking about the intake policy, like new people . . .

**Mr. Luan:** There's no new intake there.

**Ms Renaud:** Excellent. Thank you.

**Mr. Luan:** We're serving the existing clients until the time is right.

**Ms Renaud:** Yes, for sure.

**Mr. Luan:** The deputy minister will have more to share with you. Go ahead.

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you for the question. Through you, Chair, for the graduated supports renovations that we're speaking about, we're speaking about two vacant bungalows that were part of the graduated supports. We're doing some renovations right now, and we're looking for a contractor as far as providing the services and graduated supports. So it's not in the graduated supports proper facility. But the individuals that would be moving into that facility are individuals that have been stranded in hospital care. They're individuals that are currently taking up hospital beds for a very long period of time. This is actually a transition for them to move into the community.

I just wanted to provide that clarity, Minister, and to also say that none of our facilities, none of our direct ops are actually – we're not doing any admissions across the board.

**Ms Renaud:** Excellent. Thank you. I appreciate that.

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Deputy.

Through you, hon. Chair, I hope we answered that question. How much more time do we have left?

**The Chair:** You have 54 seconds.

**Mr. Luan:** Oh. I'm going to yield that time to the opposition if you want to have one more question.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh, sure. I can always ask more questions. Maybe back to my first question. What's it going to take to reindex AISH and income support?

**Mr. Luan:** Say it again?

**Ms Renaud:** What will it take for your government to reindex AISH and income support?

**Mr. Luan:** Well, that question has been answered so many times. I'm not going to waste my time.

**Ms Renaud:** No, it wasn't.

**Mr. Luan:** I'll repeat it again. We're committed to providing high-quality services there. We're proud that the current benefit we're providing is the highest in the country. We're working hard to balance our books. When we have more money into our revenue, of course, the doors will be open. We can increase more in health, social services, education, and so on and so forth. You know what? I am so pleased I'm part of a government that demonstrated that not only do we have the discipline . . .

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

The remaining time will go back over to the government side. Please proceed, hon. member.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. I just wanted – go ahead.

**Mr. Luan:** Can I share? Because I find it hard when there's only five minutes, we'll just share the time, so you ask questions, I'll respond.

**Mr. Hunter:** Yes. I had a few, but I don't think we have time, Minister. I just want to ask you the one question. On page 57 you've got your financial statements. There's a revenue line there that basically says: services on First Nations reserves, almost \$53 million. Now, my question is that when – I just want to make sure that we're actually getting our fair share from the federal government in terms of these transfer payments. When the ministry



receives a request for services, whether it be AISH, income support, anything in regard to First Nations, is that then catalogued and then billed back to the federal government in order for us to be able to make sure that we're – that is actually a federal response and federal responsibility. Are we getting our full share? Does \$52.6 million cover that full amount?

**Mr. Luan:** No, we're not. I want to congratulate you for asking such a critical, very important question. To my shock, I've learned, once I'm in this role – you know, we all understand that social services function as a mandate. When the services provided are on-reserve, it's the federal government's mandate. But for the sake of taking care of Albertans, we provided PDD services and FCSD services to people no matter where you are, including on the reserves.

Then what I discovered was that PDD was able to get the equivalent reimbursement from our federal counterparts only on an emergency basis. FCSD was not. It's a question that Minister Wilson and I have partnered together on. We are writing letters, lobbying on behalf of Albertans to keep our federal counterpart accountable: "You cannot say: well it's your mandate. We're doing a service. You only reimburse us a portion of it, not the other piece." There is no such good rationale. They recognize that this is an issue, and we've convened some interactions, meetings, correspondence back and forth, but I look forward to staying on top of that work with Minister Wilson. We need to ask for our fair share there. Otherwise, it is unfair to Albertans.

Thank you for asking that great question.

**Mr. Hunter:** Sure. Minister, do you know what that deficiency is? Are we \$100 million dollars out? Are we \$200 million out? Where are we at in terms of services provided?

**Mr. Luan:** Yeah. I'll have my ADM, Clay, answer that question.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, just to provide some clarity, there is no gap in the services that we provide and in not getting reimbursed from the feds. The problem right now is that with PDD we don't fund it on-reserve, only under emergency situations, which we do get reimbursed for if the band asks us to provide that service on-reserve. The big problem with the federal government is that they don't fund us for PDD services on-reserve. The correspondence that the minister is referring to in writing to the federal minister himself with Minister Wilson was to encourage the federal government to reimburse us so that we can go on-reserve and provide PDD services on-reserve.

For FCSD services, we do provide FCSD services on-reserve, and we'll continue to do that. We made a big push this year to actually provide awareness of the FCSD on-reserve throughout Alberta.

Thank you.

**Mr. Hunter:** Madam Chair, is it okay if I just have a clarifying comment?

Clay, the minister just said that FCSD – is that the acronym? – was not being fully funded by the federal government. Is that correct, Clay?

**Mr. Buchanan:** We do get that totally reimbursed.

**Mr. Hunter:** Though PDD is not, just if it's an emergency.

**Mr. Buchanan:** That's correct.

**Mr. Hunter:** But the other is fully funded.

**Mr. Buchanan:** FCSD is fully funded. PDD is reimbursed if it's an emergency situation.

**Mr. Hunter:** Okay. What is the deficiency number in terms of ...

**Mr. Buchanan:** I don't have the deficiency number with us today.

**Mr. Hunter:** Could that be provided so that we can understand where that deficiency is with the federal government?

**Mr. Luan:** Hon. member, I can pledge to you. Yes. We will get that number to you.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you so much.

Really quickly here, 17 seconds left, but domestic violence. Obviously, with COVID we've seen spikes. I hope that the ministry – actually, I know the ministry is taking this very seriously. I've talked to the minister many times about this, but just making sure that our children are taken care of.

**The Chair:** I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the first portion of time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet on Monday, March 14, 2022, at 7 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Seniors and Housing.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]





