



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 18, 2025  
9 a.m.

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The 31st Legislature  
First Session**

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair  
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP), \* Acting Deputy Chair

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\* substitution for Nicole Goehring  
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\*\*\* substitution for Lizette Tejada  
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## **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services

Hon. Jason Nixon, Minister

Cynthia Farmer, Deputy Minister

Toby Schneider, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Financial Services



9 a.m.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

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

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

All right, everyone. I've called the meeting to order. Please pay attention, everyone.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and the chair of this committee.

We'll start to my right, please.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Chelsae Petrovic, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod.

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

**Mrs. Johnson:** Good morning. Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. McDougall:** Good morning. Myles McDougall, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Good morning, Madam Chair. All the way to my left is Toby Schneider, who is my assistant deputy minister, employment and financial services. Directly to my left is my deputy minister, Cynthia Farmer. Directly to my right is Sonya Johnston, who is our senior financial officer and assistant deputy minister in my department. And to the far right is David Williams, who is the assistant deputy minister of housing.

**The Chair:** Good. All right.  
Member Irwin.

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

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

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

**Dr. Metz:** Good morning. Luanne Metz, Calgary-Varsity.

**The Chair:** All right. I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record. Ms Sigurdson for Mr. Haji, Ms de Jonge for Ms Petrovic for a portion of the meeting, Ms Renaud for Member Batten, Dr. Metz for Ms Goehring as acting deputy chair, Member Irwin for Member Tejada.

A few housekeeping items before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

All right. Regarding speaking rotation and time limits. Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services shall be considered for six hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined but only if both the minister and the members agree.

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

Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

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

There's another session happening of estimates, right?

**Mr. Huffman:** Yes.

**The Chair:** So we'll co-ordinate so we don't have our break at the same time as them. That way we'll be able to expedite our break time.

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

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

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

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

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both the questions and the answers without interruption during estimates debate. Therefore, I ask that debate flow through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking times are shared between a member and the minister.

I would now invite the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services to begin with your opening remarks. Sir, you have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for having us at your committee today. I'm pleased to be here to provide an overview of the Seniors, Community and Social Services' budget for '24-25. I should say '25-26, actually. I am joined by a variety of ADMs at the table, which I've already introduced. The rest of my assistant deputy ministers are with me here in the gallery available for questions as well as a variety of members of my team.

Through Budget 2025 our ministry is helping deliver on the priorities of today while preparing to meet the challenges facing Albertans tomorrow. Budget 2025 prioritizes the well-being of the

most vulnerable, strengthens our communities, and builds a foundation for long-term prosperity.

SCSS' budget makes critical investments in programs that support vulnerable populations. Our government remains committed to supporting seniors, Albertans experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, and vulnerable populations. We are working tirelessly to ensure Alberta's government is providing supports to those who need it most when and where they need it, including affordable housing, employment supports, and continuing care.

For Seniors, Community and Social Services, Budget 2025 invests \$10.6 billion to protect and improve the supports for vulnerable Albertans. There is \$833 million more than the 2024-2025 forecast and more than \$1 billion compared to Budget 2024, an increase of 10.6 per cent. Budget 2025 includes nearly \$1.26 billion for employment and income supports, an increase of \$465 million from Budget 2024. That increase is primarily driven by caseload growth due to population growth, indexation of supports to inflation, and \$38 million in anticipation of effects from U.S. tariffs.

This funding also includes nearly \$185 million in investment in career and employment services, which is an \$89 million increase from Budget 2024. This will ensure Albertans looking for work have access to resources and tools to gain new skills to enhance their participation in the workforce, and it will empower Albertans with disabilities to pursue meaningful employment opportunities.

Alberta is proud to have the best disability programs in Canada, and they're only going to get even better. Through Budget 2025 our government is investing \$3.6 billion to support Albertans with disabilities. This is an increase of almost \$152 million from 2024. One of our top priorities is connecting individuals and families with our greatest need to service as soon as possible. More specifically, Budget 2025 funding for the persons with development disabilities, or PDD, program will increase by \$83 million to \$1.3 billion so those with critical and urgent needs get the support that they need.

The family support for children with disabilities, or FSCD, budget will also increase by \$30 million to ensure those receiving services can continue to access critical supports and to continue making improvements to the program. Investments to support Albertans with disabilities include \$1.64 billion allocated for the AISH program, which provides the highest core benefit rate amongst the provinces.

Budget costs of AISH this year accounts for caseload growth, benefit rate increases of 2 per cent, and the anticipated contributions from the federal government of \$200 to the Canadian disability benefit coming into effect in July 2025. The new Canadian disability benefit will provide up to \$200 per month for eligible Canadians with disabilities, and this benefit will be considered as nonexempt income for AISH recipients. This means that overall client income will remain the same. Again, I emphasize: AISH rates are not changing in this budget. AISH clients will remain well above the federal benchmark income of \$1,814 per month that the feds encourage provinces to meet.

For some perspective on that, with the AISH rate remaining at \$1,901 per month, that is \$554 higher than Manitoba, \$533 higher than Ontario, \$515 higher than Saskatchewan, and \$417 higher than B.C. In fact, I would say that we strongly encourage other provinces to raise their rates to be equal to Alberta's ambition.

Our government is also committed to meeting the needs of Alberta's growing senior population. Budget 2025 allocates over \$572 million to support lower income seniors through grants and low-interest home equity loans. That's without even mentioning our investments in continuing care, health benefits, FCSS programming, low-income transit funding, and more. We're spending more on seniors than any government in Alberta's history. Included in that

is a \$47.5 million increase to the Alberta senior benefit, which continues to be amongst the highest in our country.

Our government is supporting older adults by providing programs and services that help them manage the rising cost of living and ensure they can age with dignity and respect in their own homes and community. Our government's effort to refocus the health care system continues the important work by making sure seniors can get the care they need when and where they need it.

We're going to do this through assisted living Alberta, or ALA, the province's new provincial health agency for continuing care. This new provincial agency will provide a comprehensive system of assisted living care with a full range of wraparound services, including medical and nonmedical supports, home care, community care, and social services. Continuing care and ALA are a natural fit with my mandate to ensure seniors and vulnerable populations have access to the care and supports they need. This agency will be a legal entity on April 1, 2025, and fully operational by the fall of this year. The '25-26 total ALA expense budget is more than \$3.9 billion.

#### 9:10

Budget 2025 also continues to provide an unprecedented amount of funding for homelessness initiatives. Last year, we made a record investment to address homelessness in our communities, and this year we're investing even more. Overall we're spending more than \$220 million to support Albertans experiencing homelessness. That includes almost \$115 million to support shelter services in our province. This funds the operation of over 4,500 year-round shelter spaces across the province.

Housing with supports is also critical to combating homelessness, which is why Budget 2025 allocates about \$98 million for housing with supports. That funding will go towards local programs so vulnerable Albertans can move into stable housing with wraparound supports that they need to address the unique and complex issues that contribute to homelessness.

We know how important it is that all Albertans, including those with low and middle incomes, have access to safe and stable affordable housing. Budget 2025 will support the construction of more than 6,300 units through the affordable housing partnership program over three years. The budget also provides \$114.4 million for rental assistance. This is an increase of \$27.8 million from Budget '24, which is a 32 per cent increase. That puts us on track to serve about 14,000 total households by '26-27, which is about 5,400 more households that were in the program when the stronger foundation strategy was launched in 2021.

When it comes to market housing, Alberta is getting shovels in the ground faster than anybody in the country, and our plan to build more homes is working. Twenty twenty-four was a record-breaking year for housing starts, and Calgary saw the biggest drop in rental prices anywhere in the country.

The Alberta Social Housing Corporation, or ASHC, provides operating and capital housing support programming for more than 110,000 Albertans. The ASHC '25-26 total expense budget is \$641 million, which is an increase of more than \$244 million from the ministry's forecast of last year. This includes an increase in capital grant funding of almost \$222 million. Increases in operating funding will support grant rate increases to housing providers to address inflationary pressures at housing facilities and address cost pressures.

On a similar note, Budget 2025 also provides \$5 million for food security initiatives, making our government the first in Alberta history to fund food banks, and \$16 million to support low-income transit programs across the province, including in Edmonton and Calgary.

Moving on to the capital plan, Budget 2025's capital plan invests more than \$1.9 billion over three years for affordable housing and continuing care and social supports for Albertans most in need. Significant projects and programs include \$769 million to support transformational change in continuing care through investments in continuing care capital programs, the Good Samaritan Society continuing care centre, and the Bethany continuing care centre; \$655 million for affordable housing partnership programs to build 6,300 affordable housing units over the next three years; \$150 million to modernize senior lodges; \$130 million for repairing government-owned social housing; and \$92 million for the Indigenous housing capital program.

In conclusion, Budget 2025 is meeting the challenges facing Albertans by continuing to invest in the supports and the services that they need. Budget 2025 responsibly invests \$10.6 billion in the safety and the well-being of seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and vulnerable Albertans. This investment will help Albertans meet their basic needs, maximize their independence through financial, health, and emergency benefits. We will continue to work closely with our partners and service providers to ensure that we maximize funding provided to Albertans.

Madam Chair, I thank you for the opportunity to be here to present our budget. I very much look forward to the hon. members' questions and will be happy to turn it back over to your capable leadership.

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

Now we'll begin our question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block in both the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

All right, so who is starting? All right. Member, would you prefer to share your time or have block time?

**Ms Renaud:** Block time.

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

Minister, are you agreeable to block time, or would you prefer shared?

**Mr. Nixon:** I prefer shared, but whatever the opposition likes.

**The Chair:** All right. We'll go for shared time, then. Sorry, block. We're going to do block time.

Member, you'll have up to 10 minutes to ask questions and make comments to the minister. Once you've done so, the minister will have up to 10 minutes to respond.

**Ms Renaud:** So if we're combining the time for block time – I'm sorry, we're going to go 10, 10, 10?

**The Chair:** I'll read it, so then you can choose and be fully informed. If you go with shared time, the timing is 20 minutes during which time you can go back and forth with questions and comments and responses; however, neither participant can speak for longer than 10 minutes. Or, if you prefer to go the other way, Member, you may speak for up to 10 minutes to ask questions and make comments to the minister.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah. Got it. We're good.

**The Chair:** Which one do you prefer?

**Ms Renaud:** Block time.

**The Chair:** Block time? Okay. All right. Member, you have up to 10 minutes to ask your questions.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Thanks. As I said last year, it's unfortunate that I don't see American sign language here. It's unfortunate that, you know, the ministry is not . . .

**The Chair:** Member, I'll just remind you that . . .

**Ms Renaud:** Through the chair. Through the chair.

**The Chair:** Through the chair. Yes.

**Ms Renaud:** Maybe next year the chair can arrange to have ASL here at this committee meeting because there are a number of Albertans that require it to understand the proceedings.

Before I begin, thank you to the officials and ministry staff for being here and for answering questions. This ministry, Madam Chair, is about to undertake some massive changes to AISH by detouring some people currently on AISH to this mysterious AISH employment program they call ADAP. Now, you can refer to this in the ministry's business plan. New AISH applicants will automatically be routed to ADAP if this ministry deems they're able to work. It's unclear how that's going to happen because we don't have details. They are fundamentally changing the definition of severe disability behind closed doors, and they're withholding information about core benefits. This ministry is wrapping these changes in employment while failing to recognize that the Alberta job market is not accessible.

Let's talk about the current state of the Alberta economy and job market. Now, competent governments have to make certain economic assumptions to help their planning and create budget estimates like those in front of us. I'm going to proceed assuming that this minister and his officials have responsibly used his own government's assumptions to build out this business plan and set the target so the people of Alberta and His Majesty's Loyal Opposition may question the accuracy of the estimates that we have to vote on.

Through the chair, I refer the minister to page 9 of the Budget 2025 fiscal plan, energy and economic assumptions. I note the following government of Alberta assumptions about decelerating GDP, which we assume this government is using to design fiscal policies related to that particular ministry. "The outlook assumes that Canada will be facing on average 15 per cent tariff on all goods, with the exception of energy products." It goes on to say, "These measures are expected to dampen Alberta's trajectory of growth. After expanding an estimated three per cent last year, Alberta's real . . . (GDP) . . . is forecast to decelerate." Next Albertans were told:

with job gains lagging behind the increases in the working-age population and labour force, the unemployment rate will still stay elevated in the near term [and] it is forecast to average above seven per cent on an annual basis over the next two years.

Seems pretty clear. The Alberta economy, like economies everywhere, is about to go through some things. Economic threats to our sovereignty will result in a softening economy, fewer jobs, more unemployment. That's clear.

Now, if you read through *Hansard* from last year's meeting on March 20 of 2024, the 3:30 block, you will note that the minister referred me to Public Accounts Committee when I questioned the minister about the inaccessibility of Alberta's job market. Fortunately for him, I got back on PAC and was able to do that. The last ministry up was JET, Jobs, Economy and Trade. Now, the primary function of that ministry is to support businesses, help build a skilled workforce, and attract investment, increase trade, promote

safe and healthy workplaces, and all of those things. Madam Chair, if you need a reference, I refer you to fiscal plan page 85. Last month I asked JET officials – the DM, the ADM – if they had begun any work at all alongside this ministry to address alarming unemployment rates of Albertans with disabilities given the upcoming focus on . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. member, excuse me, please. Hon. member, may I just intercede? Please don't finger point at the minister.

**Ms Renaud:** I will not point my fingers anymore.

. . . the unemployment rate of Albertans with disabilities, given the upcoming focus on employment with the creation of ADAP, which is really AISH employment. Their answer was simply no to all of those questions. No. No conversations, no adjacent work.

We probed further to see if perhaps there were any metrics on things like apprentice seats, specific sector investments for job creation such as the massive aeronautics investment they made recently or the airport investment in upgrades, which I assume will include accessibility, small-business ownership numbers, start-ups by disabled Albertans, anything, any metrics at all, Madam Chair, and the answer was: no, there's nothing. I refer you to fiscal plan, page 85, expenses related to JET. There is no data, no metrics on job creation, no outcomes for people with disabilities anywhere. There is no work going on to meet the needs of people with disabilities in terms of employment.

Now, community and social services, this ministry, has a long and storied history of funding, and I quote – this is how they call their funding – career and employment services for under- and unemployed Albertans, including Albertans with disabilities, so not just Albertans with disabilities. Now, we have no idea if the government of Alberta investments are increasing employment rate and related reductions in poverty depth for disabled Albertans because we have no data, no metrics, just funding announcements.

**9:20**

Now, I suspect we're going to hear this minister point to a massive new investment in career and employment funding any time his ministry's record – dismal record, I might add – on unemployment growth is raised. Let's unpack that. The most recent Seniors, Community and Social Services annual report – I refer you to page 36. "In 2023-24, Seniors, Community and Social Services invested \$93.7 million in Career and Employment Information Services." It goes on to explain specifically what that funds, and it goes on to say that it supports "persons with disabilities to provide accessible equipment and tools, and strategies to disclose disabilities with employers and to gain employment experience." There is nothing in there about: got a job, maintained a job, still has a job.

Based on this information we know that a portion of the almost \$94 million already invested in employment services for marginalized Albertans includes disabled Albertans, but they don't tell us how much of that \$94 million was actually invested in people with disabilities. Now, Madam Chair, you might ask: why is that important? This minister has increased line 2.4 in budget estimates 2025, career and employment services, by \$89 million. That's what the minister was talking about in his opening statements when he said that he was increasing that line by \$89 million. How do we know it's even working? We have no information on the previous investment. We have no stats. We have no data. We have no idea if this is working. None.

But there is a target. If you look in the minister's business plan, there is a target to demonstrate the ministry's effectiveness in helping Albertans get work after receiving the funded supports.

Guess what that goal was, Madam Chair. Take a guess. Sixty-five per cent. That is their goal. That's what they aspire to: 65 per cent success. Now, keep in mind that we have no idea which of those 65 per cent successfully employed people with disabilities. We have no idea. The fact is this ministry has invested an additional \$89 million into career and employment services, a budget line item that at best sees 65 per cent success according to the government's own documents and has no history of data collection or even communication with adjacent ministries. That should alarm everybody.

Now, it isn't just people with physical disabilities that are unemployed at significantly higher rates than their nondisabled peers. Once people have used up all their savings, private insurance settlements, cannot find and sustain work for themselves, they are often forced on AISH and CPPD. People with physical disabilities make up 42 per cent of AISH recipients, and then people with intellectual, developmental, people on the autism spectrum, brain injury, chronic illness, and invisible disabilities make up 27 per cent of AISH's caseload. Chronic illness and others, often things like stage 4 cancers, make up the rest. All of these AISH recipients have completed an extensive and invasive assessment and adjudication process proving they are permanently disabled and incapable of financially sustaining themselves through employment.

Barriers to employment are significant for people with disabilities. Barriers for people with developmental disabilities are even more steep. Imagine trying to get a job if you're schizophrenic. It's not easy. Government estimates on page 193, line 4.2, PDD supports to Albertans, tells us that we will spend approximately \$1.3 billion supporting people with developmental disabilities. Now, out of that, we also take a chunk out to focus on employment. We spend a lot of money on employment. We spend about 12 to 15 per cent on employment although the government doesn't break it out. You'll see that they only use, like, one line to talk about PDD. They don't collect any data, so we don't know if, let's say, they're spending \$156 million out of this PDD line specifically for employment, but we have no idea if it's working. We don't know how many people are working. We don't know how many people lost their jobs, had to find new jobs. We have no data whatsoever.

For example, we'll hear this government point to successful programs like: well, we fund the Rotary project. Now, don't get me wrong. Rotary project is excellent, Madam Chair, and in over the 20 years they've been operational, they've employed or found employment for developmentally disabled adults 850 times. Now, if you divide that over 20 years, what's that? Like, 45 jobs? That's not enough to meet the demand. It's an excellent project, but it's not enough to meet the demand.

I am coming to the end of this block, so I am going to . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Ask a question?

**Ms Renaud:** . . . put this down. Coming to the end of this block, my question is very, very simple.

**An Hon. Member:** There were a lot of questions in there.

**Ms Renaud:** I have a lot of questions. I thought it was important to paint a picture of what's actually happening here because this . . . [interjection] Well, members find it funny.

My question is very simple. Who did this ministry consult to develop the ADAP program?

**The Chair:** That's it?

**Ms Renaud:** That's it for the next 14 seconds or zero seconds.



**The Chair:** Okay. Very good.

Now we'll move over to the minister for 10 minutes.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks, Madam Chair. The hon. member never misses an opportunity to be wrong yet again. What is extraordinarily irresponsible, I think, of the Official Opposition, in particular that member as the critic responsible for disabilities, is the ongoing fearmongering when it comes to AISH and ADAP, which I think I'll elaborate on at length because I think it's very unfortunate she does that.

She started with asking who we consulted so far. I do want to be clear, Madam Chair. ADAP will not take place in this budget year. It will start in the following year. The NDP seems to want to have it both ways. First, they say that they don't want us to come out and launch a new program without consulting; now they say that they want us to have programs when we launch it fully done, without consulting. I'm confused which one they want. We're going to go with consulting and working with the industry, which is significantly supportive of the direction we're headed on ADAP. But I do want to stress that it's not in this budget year. We will be taking the year to get it done.

So far just myself, not officials, who have also consulted widely, I have met on ADAP with the Alberta Council of Disability Services, the Robin Hood Association for the handicapped, Skills Society, Signature Support Services society, W.J. Stelmaschuk, YWCA Edmonton, EmployAbility society of Alberta, the Good Samaritan Society, Mountain Plains Community Services Society of the North, Transition Rehabilitation Association of St. Albert and district, Inclusion Alberta, Catholic Social Services, Winnifred Stewart Association, Rehabilitation and Employment for Developing Independence, Parkland Community Living and Supports Society, the Quest Support Services Inc., Foothills Advocacy in Motion, McMan Youth, Family and Community Services, Easter Seals Alberta society, Drumheller and Region Transition Society, Universal Rehabilitation society of Alberta, Above and Beyond Care, Community Living Alternative Services, Vecova, Canada institution for the blind, Prospect Human Services, BGS Career Ventures, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and, of course, Alberta's Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, just to name a few of the people I've consulted with directly and have met with in regard to ADAP, again, which will not take place in this budget year.

I do want to start, Madam Chair, by correcting something the hon. member said, which is very much inaccurate, in that AISH would be in any way changing or leaving government. AISH is a statutory program, legislation that has been passed since 1979. I don't want to make you mad at me, Madam Chair. I wasn't even alive in 1979. It is a program that will remain in this province. We continue to fund it significantly. It has the highest payments in the country, something that the Official Opposition seems to forget. I said it in my opening remarks. I think it's worth reiterating that our \$1,901 for AISH is \$554 higher than Manitoba, \$533 higher than Ontario, \$515 higher than Saskatchewan, \$417 higher than B.C. We have the highest payments in the country. We are going to continue to maintain those payments as a priority. Government has made sure to fund it.

In fact, ministers with my last name are the only ones who have ever indexed it as well. The Official Opposition did not index it when they were in power. My little brother, when he was minister, came along and brought in that indexation, and I was happy to continue it when I was minister. I want that to be very clear, Madam Chair, that AISH is not going anywhere despite the fearmongering of some on the other side of the aisle.

ADAP is in my mandate. We have a mandate from the Premier to focus on making sure that our disability programs do not disproportionately impact those who are facing disabilities and want to be and can be in the workforce. AISH will continue to be there to care for people that need it, but we are going to go out of our way to create a program that also provides sustainable benefits for individuals but encourages and allows those individuals, without punishing them – underneath the NDP's programs people were punished for participating in the workforce, something that we will change as we get ADAP up and running.

Now, I do think that one of the greatest examples of why we would do ADAP – and I want to stress again that it's not in this budget – is from an e-mail that was sent to the Premier. We get a lot of e-mails like this. This is just one example, Madam Chair, of people who are on AISH and what they are asking us to look into. This is an individual who has a commerce degree and prior to the onset of her disability was employed as a project manager and an accountant. There's a quote from her e-mail. I'm happy to table this in the Legislature: "It's not healthy to sit in a room all day and do nothing. It's a waste of resources and brainpower. I want to work. I'm capable. I would rather earn my money than be handed it and trapped in a room all day. Please help people feel useful, productive, and proud of themselves."

That is what we're going to do with ADAP, Madam Chair, but we are not – and I stress this – not going to stop AISH from doing its important work for people who cannot go through meaningful employment of some kind as this person writing this e-mail can. But what we aren't going to do is the NDP's way of clawing back those poor people's wages when they go to work. We'll make sure that their lives are better.

9:30

This is also widely supported by advocates. I know that, unfortunately, the hon. member just the other day, both in a TikTok and in the Legislature, was extraordinarily disparaging of this individual I'm going to quote, the Alberta's Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, whom she referred to as "a hostage." This is an individual who faces a significant disability. He's a practising lawyer and also advocates for the disability community in our province, and she referred to comments like how he looked in different areas like that, which I found very disappointing.

**Ms Renaud:** That's incorrect.

**Mr. Nixon:** The hon. member just said, Madam Chair, not through you, by the way, that that's incorrect, but people can check *Hansard* in question period from a few days ago, because it is correct. He said:

I strongly believe in empowering persons with disabilities to reach their full potential, and I also strongly believe that all people deserve to pursue their goals and aspirations without barriers. By creating this program, the province is making it easier for Albertans to find success. ADAP will truly help to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact of this new program.

Jacob McGregor, who is also the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, is also in a wheelchair and faces disabilities, works in, actually, political staffing of all things. He said:

Today is a tremendous day that has been a long time coming. ADAP means faster access to more appropriate support and will be a significant step toward making Alberta the most [successful] province in Canada. This will encourage participation and connection in our communities, while maintaining predictable,

vital supports for every Albertan who needs them. We look forward to helping shape this groundbreaking program in the future.

I can go on and on on the support for ADAP, but as a result, the fact is that it's not in the budget this year because we are taking time to consult to make sure that program is right. These are programs that will end up existing as in the case of AISH, which has already existed for basically half a century in our province. We will continue to make sure that in whatever we come forward with, ADAP has that same level of quality, but it's designed to make people's lives better.

Just before I move on from that, there's also one other thing I want to stress, because there are, again, members on the other side of the aisle who are creating fear on this issue for political purposes in regard to health benefits. One of the number one things that we've decided to do with ADAP – we had heard loud and clear that we need to do this, that one of the biggest barriers to employment for individuals who face disabilities who are still in some capacity able to work is health benefits. The employer cannot provide those health benefits underneath their insurance programs because the disability or the illness is present, which creates financial challenges to be able to make that work, and individuals are nervous to leave out of that AISH program to go into that workforce because they could lose their health benefits.

This is very important to the Premier and very important to me, and we will make sure now that once you're on ADAP or AISH, you will remain with your health benefits for life, and no worry about that. Now, that helps with some of those employment barrier issues, but it also provides some level of security for individuals as they go through that process, because things can change. The reality is that you may be able to work for a period of time. Because of the nature of whatever is taking place, you might not be able to.

Lastly, the hon. member brought up how much we're spending on employment supports. You know, she quoted the numbers. We have 65 per cent success in that area when we work on that. That's actually pretty high, considering the population that we're working on. That includes people with disabilities. Every contract with employment support organizations that we enter into includes performance standards, and the partners that we work with are held to account on that by the department. We anticipate the need for more investment in the future as we launch into ADAP in 2026, but for now this budget reflects almost doubling the investment inside that employment support space, with a heavy focus on the disability sector to make sure that we can help people meet our objectives.

Yes, the hon. member is right. We are seeing tougher unemployment numbers, which are putting pressure elsewhere in the budget. We are thinking much further than just the 12 months, and I think that's probably the difference between the government and the Official Opposition, that we are thinking long term, about making a long-term sustainable program that helps people during both high unemployment times and low unemployment times. What this government will not do is what the NDP did when they were in power, which was take people who want to work, want to participate in the workforce, force them only into AISH with no other alternatives, and essentially lock them into their houses and say that they cannot participate in society. That's something that is fundamentally rejected by Alberta's government and by the United Conservative Party, and I certainly hope that members will pay attention.

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

We'll move back over to the member for your next block of time.

**Ms Renaud:** Who knew that estimates could be so entertaining?

Okay. A couple of months ago this ministry severed contracts with a number of tiny little organizations that support people with intellectual disabilities 15 months early to save \$440,000. Now, that would be out of line 4.2 in the budget estimates. The ministry said that they were cutting indirect supports. This is a code. In the funding for PDD there are different codes, indirect, direct services. That's just the way these contracts are done.

Now, this ministry cut Disability Action Hall in Calgary, Self Advocacy Federation in Edmonton, SAIPA in Lethbridge, and Inclusion Alberta, which is provincial, citing they were indirect support. They're cutting indirect supports, Madam Chair, so they could direct all of the money to direct supports. Makes sense?

Now, let me quote *Hansard* from March 20, 2024, at 5:20, Families and Communities consideration of main estimates. Mr. Buchanan, ADM for disability services stated: "We spend approximately \$850 million on direct support and another \$170 million for indirect supports. Again, that total amount goes out to our service providers; that's in contracts."

Here's my question. The ministry severed contracts with some organizations that provide indirect support to save \$440,000 and is not touching \$170 million in indirect service contracts, with approximately 150 other contractors. Make that make sense. It doesn't make sense unless there was some other reason these little contracts were severed. I don't know about that. That was my first question, and that was for the self-advocates.

My next set of questions and comments are around ADAP or the Alberta disability assistance program. Madam Chair, you know, I'm sure that you would appreciate some clarity. I can guarantee that the New Democrats do not lock people in their homes nor condone locking people in their homes.

Here's the other concern that we have. You know, I spent some time outlining the economic conditions that we're all facing as Canadians. We already knew the job market for people with disabilities, whether it's physical, developmental, or otherwise, is tough. People are unemployed at twice the rate their nondisabled peers are. We know that it's a tough economy, tough job market, yet this government seems to think it'll all be wonderful when we open this new program; we'll just send people that way. They'll be employed. They won't be locked in their homes. It'll be fabulous.

Through the chair, this is not the first time a Conservative government has tried to slash disability supports using the lure of employment. This government is targeting a larger group with even less information than the last time it was done in 2013-14. Now, we saw a two-page memelike ADAP announcement online February 4 of this year, and this ridiculous announcement was essentially devoid of substance and any kind of consultation process.

Madam Chair, the minister stated that ADAP isn't even in this budget. It absolutely is. I point you to page 146 key, objective 2.2. It is pretty clear about the creation of the program, and we know the changes are already under way. It doesn't make sense. I refer you to page 146 also of the budget ministry business plan that introduces, like I just said, the creation of ADAP, a program where people with disabilities are required to demonstrate their inability to work because of a permanent or severe disability that are suddenly going to be reassessed by this government for employment. Just so that we are all crystal clear about what is happening here.

Right now, Madam Chair, there are about 10,000 people – there are actually more than 10,000 people, but let's go with 10,000 – on AISH that do actually work sporadically. Now, this minister in his comments earlier said that previously, until these changes were introduced, people had no ability to work and, you know, retain earnings and they were trapped in their home and it was horrible.

Well, actually, I don't know if the minister doesn't realize this, but his own program, AISH, actually had the ability where people

could work and keep up to \$1,100 a month without clawbacks, and that encouraged people to lift themselves out of poverty. It also encouraged them to go further, and then it would be clawed back based on an equation. It would encourage them to eventually, if they could physically, work more and get off AISH. AISH already had the ability to do that. For the minister to go over and say, “We’re introducing this program because we want people to work” is really unclear and not quite accurate.

Now, the core amount of ADAP: I don’t speculate or imagine, Madam Chair, that this government or this ministry is introducing a new benefit program like ADAP or an AISH employment program to spend more money. My guess is that they’re looking for some kind of savings. It’s really kind of odd that this minister has not told disabled Albertans, who likely will be moved to ADAP, what that core amount will be. Will that core amount be less? It’s a really simple question.

9:40

Now, we’ve already established that the Alberta job market isn’t accessible, yet we’ve not heard a word from this minister about any kind of plans whatsoever to listen to the Premier’s Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities or to listen to the disability advocate, who have been very clear, some of them for 20 years. I’ve been around that long. I’ve heard them talk about it that long, about the need for accessibility legislation to open up pathways to employment. They’ve been really clear about that. I don’t hear anything about that coming from this minister.

We know that this new program is going to reroute AISH recipients and future applicants to a core program, a different program, we suspect, that will have a low core amount but that will be wrapped and draped in the premise of employment. Which person with a disability does not want to be employed? There are very few. Finding the right job or the right career is actually the goal of many disabled people. There just aren’t the pathways, and that’s just the reality.

My questions are this: when can Albertans expect accessibility legislation? Very clearly, when can we expect accessibility legislation? After Prince Edward Island we’re the very last province to have it. Without this framework we can’t establish or identify if our investments into things like career and employment, like this minister boasts about, or the changes to ADAP – we can’t possibly identify if they’re actually making positive changes and we’re properly spending taxpayer dollars because we don’t have a framework to measure it. We don’t know how far we’re going. We don’t know if we’re making advancements. My first question was: when can we expect accessibility legislation?

Next, when will we have clarity on the massive AISH changes? When I say massive, I’m not talking about money. I am talking about a massive, foundational shift in AISH, that is the definition of severe disability. This government, this ministry, Madam Chair, is fundamentally changing this program. They made it possible in 2019 by moving the definition of disability out of the legislation, and now they’re coming at it. Severe disability: what will it be? We’re not going to know because that’s going to be done behind closed doors, likely an order in council of some kind that will enable this ministry to say: “You get AISH. You get AISH employment, which is now ADAP,” which is all fine and good if people could work and there were the pathways to successful, sustainable meaningful employment. But that is not the case as I’ve demonstrated to you.

Who will be consulted on the further changes to ADAP? Now, the minister listed a whole long list of service providers, some of whom I know and some of whom I’m pretty sure had no clue this

was coming. We’ll publish that list later and double-check that that was actually the case.

My next question is: what metrics will be used to evaluate employment rates for disabled Albertans: disabled Albertans with physical disabilities, disabled Albertans with developmental disabilities, disabled Albertans with mental illnesses? Where can we find those statistics? I have spent the last year on PAC, Public Accounts, asking almost every relevant ministry that appeared before us if they had done any work whatsoever with this ministry or themselves in general to identify or create any pathways for employment, any kind of data collection, any kind of measures whatsoever. I got goose egg after goose egg. So I’m truly hoping, Madam Chair, that this minister has some answers about – now, they’re talking about employment for people with disabilities. They’re going to move people off AISH to this new program. Well, let’s hope they’ve got the jobs for them, and let’s hope they’ve got the framework to tell Albertans that it’s actually working, because I don’t see it.

Finally, the reason I took so much time at the beginning talking about the Alberta economy is that there are some changes coming. We all know that as Canadians, as Albertans. Yet this is the time that this ministry wants to introduce uncertainty to people who are very vulnerable and already have a really tough time navigating the Alberta job market. They’re going to throw thousands more people into a job market that is not accessible to them, and we have no antipoverty strategies. We have really no employment strategies for people with disabilities. We’re certainly not an accessible province. So my question: what antipoverty strategies will this ministry introduce and fund in Budget 2025? I’ve not been able to find anything in any of the documents.

I would like to add, you know, that for a \$10.6 billion spending ministry this business plan, in any kind of targets, is actually kind of pathetic, Madam Chair. I would suggest that in the public sector this would never ever pass muster, ever. It’s unacceptable.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, I’ll tell you that what I think is pathetic is continuing to fearmonger to some of the most vulnerable people in the province. You know, we just went through a block of time a few moments ago where we made very clear that there are no changes coming to the AISH program – AISH is going to remain here – not anything in the context that the hon. member has irresponsibly presented and continues to present. We are not changing definitions of disabilities or any of these things. It’s just outrageous that she continues to do that but not surprising. That’s what I’ve seen from the Official Opposition for the entire time that I’ve been up in Edmonton.

She opened with talking about slashing budgets to people with disabilities. Madam Chair, my budget this year for disabilities is \$3.6 billion. Now, that happens to also be an increase of \$152 million this year. That budget is bigger than every budget of every minister in this government with the exception of Health; myself; postsecondary, I believe; and Education. That shows you the extraordinary amount of investment that Alberta taxpayers put into this space. We’re going to continue to. The fact that we’re increasing it and continue to invest in that space shows the importance that the Alberta government is placing on this issue. To be clear, no cuts coming to disability services. Just the opposite: increases to this important area, particularly when it comes to things like employment supports.

The member asked about accessibility legislation. This ministry is not responsible for accessibility legislation. Municipal Affairs is the lead on it. I don't know if she had an opportunity to participate in Minister McIver's estimates, which I believe are done, but that would have been a great time to ask the minister about where he is at on accessibility legislation. My ministry will provide him all the support that he needs, but this will be led by Municipal Affairs. If she didn't get an opportunity then, I'm sure she'll take an opportunity in question period.

She also asked in her monologue there to say: listen to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and listen to Alberta's Advocate for Persons with Disabilities. Well, Madam Chair, through you to her I would say: why don't you do the same? Take your own advice with your comments on ADAP. I'm going to quote it again. From Alberta's Advocate for Persons with Disabilities: "I strongly believe in empowering persons with disabilities to reach their full potential. I also strongly believe that all people deserve to pursue their goals and aspirations without barriers. By creating this program, ADAP, the province is making it easier for Albertans to find success. ADAP will truly help to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact of this new program." Exactly who she said to listen to: that's who we're consulting and listening to.

The chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, who she just said in her comments to listen to: "Today is a tremendous day that has been a long time coming. ADAP means faster access to more appropriate supports and will be a significant step towards making Alberta the most accessible province in Canada. This will encourage participation and connection in our communities while maintaining predictable, vital supports for every Albertan who needs them. We look forward to helping shape this groundbreaking program." That's who she asked us to seek advice from. That's who we're seeking advice from.

She referred to the list of stakeholders that I read into the record just a few moments ago. I won't do so again, for time. Again, happy to make clear that I've had round-tables, in fact, specifically on ADAP with these individuals that we've spoken to, but my department is also meeting with a large number of stakeholders. Madam Chair, you may be interested. My department has something like over 6,000-plus stakeholders. I do my best to meet as many as I can, but I have an excellent team of assistant deputy ministers and their teams who support us in making sure that we widely consult, which is why we're taking the time to make sure that the permanent ADAP program is consulted on. It will not be implemented until the following fiscal year, though. We'll take the time in this fiscal year to get it right and to make sure that we make Albertans' lives better.

She referred to people who are working on AISH. I want to stress, Madam Chair, that this is exactly why we are doing this: because the individuals that she refers to will make less net income underneath the AISH program than they will underneath the program that we're going to create. The final version of what we create will be: individuals who are participating in the workforce will be better off financially. That is why it is being created. Their health benefits will remain. If they are sitting in a situation where they have a disability that is causing some level of health deterioration, maybe they will eventually have to go back to AISH, but we are not going to stop them from being able to participate in meaningful work, which is what the current program does and what we're going to change.

9:50

I want to reiterate one other time, though, for anybody who is on AISH that the program will remain. It is being paid \$1,901 this year. It will continue to be increased by the indexation rate set by Treasury Board in the coming years, and individuals should not fear losing their benefits despite what the member continues to say.

Now, in regard to adjustments to PDD scope. The member referred to some minor adjustments to contracts for some agencies. For example, Calgary Scope Society, who is one of the agencies that she's referring to, in this budget will receive \$28.4 million. There are some adjustments on advocacy to the government. We feel that we're better to invest in direct, front-line services to those organizations. PDD is not actually set up to do advocacy funding. It's set up to actually provide services to individuals. The services that they provide are going to continue.

Inclusion Alberta is another organization that's been referred to in this context. They're going to receive \$5.14 million this year. I'm not sure, Madam Chair. Maybe the hon. member is going to vote against them getting their money in a couple of days. We'll have to see. But we continue to fund those organizations for the important work that they do.

We are very comfortable with the advocacy structure that we've set up. We would suggest that individuals work through those advocates. Again, I don't want to spend too much time on this today, Madam Chair. But, you know, the hon. member has called Alberta's disability advocate a hostage and said that he looks, quote: like a hostage. I don't even know what that means. But that is the office to do it. We're going to continue to fund that office and support the important work that they do. We're going to continue to fund those PDD organizations and other organizations for the work that they do with the disability community. I just want to stress the amount of money that is being invested in that area.

I should also point out in this budget this \$1.24 million that we budget for the office of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities. We are going to continue to do that work.

Now, antipoverty measures: a \$10.6 billion budget focused primarily on helping people. Let's talk, first of all, just about income supports, which are hundreds of millions of dollars that are caring for tens of thousands of people, and investments in affordable housing, which I listed in my opening comments. If you don't want to talk about the big-number ones, let's talk about stuff like that investments in low-income transit passes inside this budget will be \$16 million. I don't know, Madam Chair. Is the hon. member going to vote against Calgary and Edmonton getting their support for their low-income transit passes? We'll see. It'll be interesting.

We've done social sector wage service enhancements, as another example. We can list a long list of where we're investing in caring for individuals, but what we need to do is start from a position of fact, not from made-up facts by the Official Opposition, who starts their segment of questions here in saying that there are cuts to disability investments when the budget itself has a \$152 million increase on disability investments aside. I mean, we can't go back and forth because the Official Opposition doesn't want to, but I'm curious whether or not they're going to support that \$3.6 billion investment or continue just to make up facts inside estimates.

One other thing I actually should say is that there's a \$14.2 million increase in staffing in disability services in this budget. We're hiring another 35 additional positions in both FSCD and PDD. We continue to make those investments going forward.

I'm trying to see if I missed any other questions the hon. member had. [interjection] No, I don't think she asked that question.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah, she did.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, she can have some of my time back.

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

**Ms Renaud:** Well, thank you for that. You know, it would be really great if the minister – I can write down the questions, and we can keep track. There were a couple.

**Mr. Nixon:** We can go back and forth.

**Ms Renaud:** Yeah, we can go back and forth next if you like.

I mean, there were a few he didn't even answer, but, Madam Chair, perhaps he could just be reminded for next block. I wanted to know: when are we going to find out what the core amount for ADAP is going to be? What's the plan for accessibility legislation? Other than the rhetoric I didn't hear any answer about why three – they call themselves self-advocates. It's not a self-advocacy organization. People with disabilities call themselves self-advocates. They get indirect supports, just like the \$170 million to 150 contractors. My question was: why did the three get cut, and why did the other ones not get cut? But, hopefully, we'll get an answer.

Anyway, I'm going to shift gears a little bit and talk about family supports for children with disabilities and persons with developmental disabilities. These are the two disability programs that actually fund people to hire staff to support them. Now, the FSCD for children is a little different. It also has specialized supports that enable early intervention for things like occupational therapy, speech and language, and those kinds of things. FSCD and PDD are legislated supports for Albertans with disabilities. Roughly translated, if an applicant meets the legislated eligibility criteria, they get support. But what has been happening since 2021 is that people are applying for supports, they're being approved for supports in terms of they meet the eligibility criteria, and then nothing happens.

They're hearing messages like, "Well, you know, you just need to wait for a caseworker; we don't have a caseworker," or "Yeah; we're just in planning," or "We'll get a contract out for you." Whatever the reason is, what is happening is we're hearing that families are – some of them are ending up waiting for three years, four years. PDD is kind of a black hole. We don't know. I think some people have actually died while on that wait-list. They've been older people waiting for PDD supports and just didn't get it because they weren't deemed to be urgent and essential. Some people wait for years, as I said. Some die on the wait-list. Albertans know – let me back up.

When we fail to fund people when they're eligible, particularly for FSCD – that's family support for children with disabilities. When we fail to meet that challenge immediately – and this is actually a program created by Conservative governments. When we fail to meet that, we are missing the most important time, which is early intervention. You don't have to be an expert in this field to understand that when you get these supports to children and their families, you are teaching them skills that will guide them through their lives, that will actually reduce the need for support later on.

But we are missing that boat. We are completely missing it, because in 2021 we saw there were 4,400 children and families waiting for service. Now, the ministry – I'm not pointing, but the ministry – decided that they were going to stop updating open data so that Albertans could not see how many people were waiting for service. Why is that?

You know, while FSCD saw a small increase in Budget '25, when adjusting for population and inflation, it was actually cut by \$3 million. Now, I see that PDD is increasing by \$70 million –

that's line 4.2 in estimates – but there's no information about where that's going. Is it for direct, or is it for indirect? We know only about 80 per cent of that PDD money is direct, that directly supports people. Up to 20 per cent of that money is indirect. Now, I'm not saying it's not essential, but it's indirect. Is it for special projects? What's it for? This minister likes to toss around accusations like that we're cutting this group because it's indirect, but we're leaving these guys because it's okay. Maybe he could clarify for that.

Here's my question. Will this amount that was increased, \$73 million, be – I just heard the minister say that he's going to hire 14 more staff, so is this \$73 million to address the wait-list? Is it for staffing? Is it for changes to the program? What is it for? That's my first question.

My second question. What is the current number of children who have met FSCD criteria, been approved, and are waiting for services? How many children and families have applied but are still waiting to be assessed? And what criteria is being used to triage FSCD wait-lists when funds become available?

My third question. This ministry is planning to spend \$1.3 billion on PDD supports in Budget '25, line 4.2. That figure includes contracts to service providers and families. The family contracts are called FMS, family-managed supports. What is the total amount spent on indirect supports in the PDD contracts with service providers and with FMS, the family-managed supports?

My fourth question. This ministry has an active fraud investigation unit. Does this unit undertake any work related to the delivery of services versus individuals alleged to be abusing the system? How many total investigations were done last year, and for what? What is the projection for the capacity of that unit for this budget year?

Question 5. How does this ministry assure the public that for-profit organizations that have procured contracts with this ministry, the department of persons with developmental disabilities, or family supports for children with disabilities do not pay their CEOs or owners of the private companies? It's not just nonprofits that provide these supports. What assurances does PDD have and can assure the Alberta public that CEOs or owner salaries are not out of line with acceptable limits?

**10:00**

Finally, my sixth question. I'm seeking clarification on Budget '25 estimates on page 193, lines 4.2 and 4.4 respectively: (a) what are the estimated annualized costs for FSCD and PDD, (b) what is the net projected family and individual uptake for FSCD and PDD respectively, (c) what is the average FSCD agreement cost, so that would be the procured contract, and that is per child or per family, and (d) what is the average PDD individual cost? Again, that is not per service provider; that is per individual. I know they're grouped together sometimes for service providers, but I am looking for the average cost for the individual, whether it's delivered through family-managed supports or through a service provider. Hopefully, the minister will remember those questions and come back to them.

Now, in addition to those, I have a couple of other questions, with three minutes remaining, that I would like to add to the list. You know, the minister – this is, like, I think the third time I've heard him sort of go on about that I should speak to, I should talk to, Madam Chair, the Minister of Municipal Affairs about accessibility legislation. Well, let me provide some clarity. Maybe you didn't know that building codes and building guides and standards are all really great things that we have, and those are things that are updated provincially and federally on a regular basis, but they're guidelines. There is no consequence for not meeting them. Now, there are safety standards. Those are a little bit more in terms of consequences, but those are a piece, a teeny little piece, that address

a built environment within a larger piece of accessibility legislation that looks at all areas of life. Built environment is certainly a very important piece of accessibility legislation, but it's not everything.

Going back to the disability advocate and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, who have been saying this for 20-plus years, the province of Alberta, just like all other provinces in Canada, needs accessibility legislation not just to deal with the built environment and barriers in the built environment, which would open up employment for people with disabilities, but we need accessibility legislation in all areas, which includes procurement, communication, and information technology, so that we would automatically, let's say, have ASL here at this committee meeting or live transcription when we need it or that during an emergency we wouldn't have to sort of scramble and find ASL because it would just be a natural thing that we do. We assume that all Albertans, no matter how they communicate, have the right to understand information.

That's what accessibility legislation does. It begins the work. Likely, it will take more than a decade to do this work. The vision is barrier free by 2040 or 2050. It takes a lot of work, but you have to start. It's worrying, Madam Chair, that in this budget I don't see anything – anything at all – although we know the Premier's council and we know the disability advocate, going back years, have been crystal clear that we need to catch up to the rest of Canada and have this legislation.

Here's my other question. Now, we know that there are a lot of changes going on with AISH to create ADAP. I mean, you'd have to sort of live in a hole not to realize that, that you can't create this new ADAP program without making significant changes to AISH. My question is this: how many sole-sourced contracts has this ministry entered into, I guess, last year that would, you know, impact this budget, or how many are they looking to enter into or any contracts for the design, delivery, or alterations of AISH and ADAP with Deloitte? That's a very specific contractor. I'd like to know how many contracts this ministry has with Deloitte and what the total value is.

My other question is that the February – actually, no. I'm going to skip over that one for now. The ministry has not dealt with the Ombudsman recommendation. If the ministry has, I'd love to hear that, but I don't see anything in the budget documents.

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

We will return over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks, Madam Chair. The member is going to have to get a little bit more specific on contract questions. This ministry has thousands of contracts. I think what she said is that she was asking whether or not Deloitte has a contract with AISH in regard to AISH. If not, she can clarify afterwards. But I'm not aware of Deloitte.

I'm just looking to my assistant deputy minister. Do we have a contract with regard to AISH?

**Mr. Schneider:** No.

**Mr. Nixon:** No? The answer is no.

She also asked, Madam Chair, I believe, about a breakdown of direct services versus indirect services. I think that's what her question was. I can give you a breakdown by zone. The north zone for FSCD and PDD contracts: average percentage of a contract on direct services in the north is 85 per cent; indirect services 15 per cent. To the south it's 82 per cent indirect and 18 per cent. Provincial-wide it's 83 per cent direct and 17 per cent indirect. Average cost per case on PDD: \$7,559. Average cost on FSCD: \$1,146. There you go. There's the answer to that question.

Now, there were some comments made, Madam Chair, about workforce. I would draw the committee's attention to the WAM requirements in this space. For those of you who may not know what WAM is, it's a workload assessment model that's used in government to determine staffing for these types of scenarios. In PDD the WAM benchmarks are 90 to 105, right, Deputy? Have I got this right?

Our caseload is 50,113. That would require us, under WAM requirements, to have 130 to 152 staff. We currently have 146 staff in this space, right inside the WAM requirements range. On FSCD it's the same benchmark as PDD, so again, 90 to 105. Caseload in that space is 16,910. That position requirement would be 177 to 207 positions. We have 193, so again well within WAM, in fact, on the high end of it. The deputy does inform me she's also working on hiring some staff in that space in this budget but to maintain that level. Well within WAM requirements, which I think is important to note.

There were lot of questions about PDD. I think a lot of people who don't spend a lot of time near this file may not be as aware of the significant investment that the Alberta government puts into PDD and should put into PDD. This budget will deliver \$1.3 billion in funding for persons with developmental disabilities in the PDD program. That's an increase this year of \$83 million. That increase – the member asked – is due to expected growth in caseload as well as the enhancement of services, so cost per case. We're expecting a caseload increase in this space from 13,815 to 14,355, and the cost per case is expected to increase this fiscal year from \$7,414 to \$7,559, which, again, can be attributed to increase in complexity of needs within this space, which is what most of that \$83 million is slated for inside the budget.

FSCD numbers were asked about as well. Again, the FSCD budget this year is increasing by 12.9 per cent, so by \$30 million for the program, taking it to \$264 million, so just over a quarter billion dollars that will be invested in it. That increase is due to, again, higher utilization; \$9.2 million of it is expected to deal with cost per case increases. That average that I just said before is going to go from \$1,094 to \$1,146, and \$30.2 million is also expected from an increase in caseload growth due to higher utilization in this case, right? Okay. That's where those two numbers are going to. To answer your question, it's going to increase costs for complexity in cases and increase anticipation on overall caseload.

Fraud. Yeah. Actually, we do a lot of work, Madam Chair, on fraud. The best person to speak to it is the deputy minister because she's passionate about it. She's pulled a bunch of numbers. I think she'd be able to get you that information quicker than me. Deputy?

**10:10**

**Ms Farmer:** Thank you. Thank you very much for the question. In 2024-25 year to date we have as far as 922 new cases with a maximum potential of about \$7 million worth of recovery. We've concluded 243 cases. We've issued 55 charges; 46 were no charges. As far as unsubstantiated cases, 46; overpayment, 93; convictions, 70; also, a court-ordered restitution of \$855,790, and there will be new staff that will be targeted in this area for next year.

Thank you.

**Mr. Nixon:** The other thing: the member rebrought up from her last block changes to funding in the PDD space in regard to contracts. Again, I want to reiterate the organizations that she's referring to continue to be funded to the tune of millions and millions of dollars for the work that they do. They're valued partners. She's shaking her head no. But, I mean, Inclusion Alberta: over \$5 million this year. Scope, for example, which is another organization there: I

think that's getting close to \$30 million. One of my officials could repull that so we can confirm the number for the hon. member.

Our government, again, is focused on getting resources to the front lines. We are investing in advocacy funding, again, through things like the disability advocate, the Premier's council on disabilities, which, Madam Chair, I know you participate in regularly and are a member of, I should say, and understand the value of that. Again I just want to reiterate that Inclusion Alberta is going to receive \$5.14 million and Calgary Scope Society will receive \$28.433 million for the work that they're doing.

There have been minor adjustments to the focus on where advocacy money will go and to be able to make sure that resources are brought to the right spot. All this, again, is part of a pretty significant investment in this budget when it comes to helping people with disabilities. It's a top priority of the department: \$3.6 billion is going to go into it again this year, a \$152 million increase from last year; an increase of \$83 million for persons with developmental disabilities, taking that program to \$1.3 billion; an increase of \$30 million for family support for children with disabilities, taking that program to \$264 billion.

We have made no funding cuts to direct services for Albertans with disabilities. We continue to increase funding. There's been no reduction in department employees for FSCD or PDD. Budget 2025 actually includes a \$14.2 million increase of staffing in disability services. We are currently working to hire another 35 additional positions, including FSCD and PDD caseworkers and support staff, but we are well within our WAM requirements, and the department will continue to keep us within those requirements. Correct, Deputy?

**Ms Farmer:** Yes.

**Mr. Nixon:** We are continuing to move forward with that level of investment in a very important area.

I think we've got all the questions.

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

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. You didn't answer, Madam Chair, the question: what are the wait-list numbers for FSCD and PDD? A pretty simple question.

I'd also like to know how many contracts the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services has with Deloitte. Three questions. Wait-list for FSCD. Wait-list for PDD. For FSCD: how many on the wait-list have been approved? How many are waiting to get assessed to be approved? How many are on the PDD wait-list right now? And how many contracts does this government have with Deloitte?

I think that was the whole minute, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Yeah.

**Ms Renaud:** Perfect.

**Member Irwin:** Does he get to respond?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Nixon:** We'll wait till their block is done. I'm happy to wait for the rest of the block.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. I can keep going. No problem.

All righty. One more question. You know, I asked in multiple different ways what metrics will be used to evaluate employment rates for disabled Albertans. As I spent time outlining for the

minister, there are a number of different areas. There's over a million disabled Albertans right now. It's probably higher than a million. I've seen the government estimates as high as, like, over 25 per cent of the population at some point has a disability. So it's in our best interest to have metrics to know: are we opening these pathways for people with developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, mental illness? What metrics are we using to know that our investments are having an impact and that we're improving the Alberta job market for people with disabilities?

With that, I will wind down my time to one.

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

We will now move to 20 minutes for government caucus members and the minister. Now, Member Lundy, are you up first? Do you prefer shared or block time with the minister?

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will do shared time if it's agreeable to the minister.

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Shared? Okay. The block of shared time is 20 minutes, during which time you may go back and forth with questions, comments, and responses. However, neither participant may speak longer than 10 minutes at a time. Please proceed.

**Mr. Lundy:** Great. Well, thank you again, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, and your team for joining us here. I certainly know first-hand how hard your department works and your staff. I, of course, remain friends with many people that I used to work with, and I know that they're very committed, and they do their best every day to work hard and support you. I always take the opportunity to thank staff for every minister that comes here, and I certainly want to reiterate that today.

I am going to start with some questions on the homelessness initiatives, specifically the navigation and support centres that we've seen in Edmonton. These particular investments, this initiative, it means a lot to my constituents. I've often been heard to say that I'm a proud capital region MLA, and many of my constituents in Leduc-Beaumont, of course, will come into the city for work or recreation. I think this is a very relevant set of questions for my constituents. You know, it's important to understand, on these navigation centres. First and foremost, of course, is providing supports to the individuals. That's extremely important. It's certainly a very worthwhile cause to maximize our ability to help those individuals. But it also adds a little public safety and confidence to people who do come into the city such as from Leduc and Beaumont. They want to be able to take public transportation. They want to be able to walk downtown when they go to an Oilers game. They want to be able to feel safe and secure. That's really important. So I'm happy to jump in here on this very important topic.

In Budget 2025 I want to highlight the initiative under outcome 1, on page 145 of the business plan. I see that in '25-26, \$212.7 million is allocated to support homeless shelters, navigation and support centres, and housing and support programs to assist Albertans experiencing homelessness. As always, through the chair, could the minister please elaborate on what services are provided at these navigation and support centres?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks for the question. The department tells me they miss you, and they hope you're enjoying your political life. I

also have to say, Madam Chair, that the hon. member has done a lot of work helping us with the transition on assisted living Alberta. He's the co-chair of the transition committee and doing a great job there, so I appreciate his questions today.

The navigation centres provide a lot of services, but some of the big highlights and the most used services would be, first off, ID, which continues to be one of the largest challenges for individuals who are facing homelessness to be able to access other services. So it's critical that we handle that connection to employment and financial support, connection to housing and shelter providers, connection to health supports, connection to mental health and addiction services, as some examples.

The numbers that we're seeing, both in Edmonton and Calgary, that have connected to these services through the navigation centres are significant. Over 5,905 unique individuals have accessed services through the Edmonton navigation centre, getting 20,055 connections to supports; 5,733 pieces of ID have been given by the navigation centre; 4,805 connections to employment and financial supports; 3,575 connections to housing and shelter supports; 2,133 connections to health supports; 1,893 connections to mental health and addiction services. In Calgary, which has opened significantly later than Edmonton's – it's more recent in July 2024 – the centre has helped about 3,800 unique individuals access services; 3,491 pieces of ID; 3,723 connections to employment and financial supports; 809 connections to housing and shelter; 1,382 connections to health supports; and 2,003 connections to mental health and addiction services.

10:20

**Mr. Lundy:** Great. I certainly appreciate you sharing some of those important metrics. You know, obviously, you've identified the ID as a big part, and we certainly hear that. That's a key first step to accessing other government services. I'm really pleased that you were able to present us with some of those numbers.

Through the chair, I'll maybe ask for a little more information. These are new; navigation support centres are relatively new. I wonder if the minister could just comment a little on some of the impetus or decision-making behind them, specifically: what other key objectives in the business plan do these centres support?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, I would say probably outcome 1, which in the business plan is focused on keeping Albertans safe and ensuring they have timely access and consistent access to supports and services to help them meet their basic needs as well as to maximize their independence. You know, the start of the navigation centre process was to deal with the encampment crisis that we saw taking place in Edmonton. It had evolved very differently in this city versus Calgary. Calgary does see encampments, but Calgary's nonprofit sector, in particular, as well as the municipality had taken action for a significant period of time to be able to address encampment challenges in that city, whereas in Edmonton they had built up quite a bit.

The Edmonton Police Service came and indicated to us that they were having significant challenges, showed us evidence of people burning to death inside encampment structures and other major safety issues and asked us to come up with a process to support them in implementing Edmonton's policy to take down the encampments. At that time we set up the navigation centre. The thought process was that it would be temporary and that we would utilize it as a place to be able to help people coming out of encampments to get to appropriate services. But we saw so much success with it that we realized that we had to keep some sort of a navigation component to remain inside our system long term going forward to be able to make sure that we continue to help people as they come in to receive

the services. You know, it still helps if an encampment is coming down and law enforcement or others need a place to be able to connect people to the social services system. More people come in off the streets now than in other ways, from my understanding of it, to get access to the system. There they can get access to everything.

Look, I tell this story all the time. When I used to work front-line street work, we used to have to give out this thing called the Street Survival Guide in Calgary. Somebody would come into the shelter system, and they might have a diabetic issue going on with their foot, they have addiction issues, they need access to income supports, they need access to housing. We would have to sit there with the Street Survival Guide and circle all the locations and then help that guy try to utilize public transit or walking or whatever to get on to all those levels of services. What this changes now is that we can get that individual to one spot. They have access to all of the service providers in one location.

I do think it's important to stress that the navigation centre is not a service provider outside of that. The navigation centre is not responsible for nor designed to provide those services. What it's designed to do is connect individuals to the service provider and be able to make sure that those service providers then go on to do their job. There are a variety of different service providers. I indicated to you in your last question, hon. member, some of the services that are provided. We would not be able to do that without our partner ministries like Service Alberta, Madam Chair, who has done an extraordinary job helping us with the ID component, obviously, our partnership with police services, and the incredible nonprofit sector that works each and every day in the space, that are utilizing that navigation centre to connect individuals to the supports that they need.

**Mr. Lundy:** Very good. Thank you, Minister. I think I've heard you say that you have something like 6,700 stakeholders or partners, so it's important that we start looking at this in a co-ordinated way. These navigation centres are certainly proving a big tool.

I'm going to stay on homelessness, but, through the chair, I would like to talk a little about rural homelessness. I grew up in rural Alberta, and, you know, it's probably fair to say that at that time homelessness wasn't really on our radar, thankfully. But we are starting to see a lot of rural areas in the province having to deal with rural homelessness. I know I've had conversations with several of my colleagues who represent rural areas, and this is becoming something that I know they're working with your ministry with more and more. So I think it's important that we get a chance to highlight that and ask some questions.

Again, I will be referring to the same page 145 on the business plan, the same \$212 million allocation. Through the chair to the minister: are you able to comment on what this government is doing through Budget 2025 to specifically address rural homelessness in the province?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah, the rural homelessness situation has changed. Like you – I grew up in the city, in fact, in a homeless shelter, though I was not homeless. I've lived my entire adult life, though, in rural Alberta. I can tell you that when I first moved out to rural Alberta in my early 20s, you certainly were not seeing the homeless challenges that some of the communities that me and my rural colleagues see now inside our communities.

It's important, though, to note that the challenge is different than what we see inside the large city, particularly, first of all, on scale. You know, obviously, when you're in the larger city, you're going to see larger numbers, and so because of that, some of the solutions that we found that have worked in places like Calgary and Edmonton and even Lethbridge or some of our other larger



communities are not going to work in places like Rocky Mountain House or Bentley, and so we have to have a different conversation on what that looks like.

We are investing in some spaces already, in winter shelter services, in particular in places like Cold Lake, Drayton Valley, Rocky Mountain House, Lac La Biche, Peace River, Camrose, Edson, Hinton, Strathmore, and Spruce Grove, as a couple of examples, but we've had to recognize that, I think, what we've accomplished in the last couple of years was to complete what we – the feedback that we got back during different task forces and committees on homelessness over the last couple of years: we've implemented those measures in the largest cities, things like 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week shelters, things like Indigenous-supported shelters or women-only shelter spaces, some of those key components that we heard back.

Just before Christmas I announced that MLA Wright will be co-chairing with Robin James, who is the CEO of Lethbridge Housing Authority, a great partner of the ministry, and they will be working with Jenn Anderson, our assistant deputy minister who's in charge of homelessness and preventative services to have the latest round of consultation on this issue. One of the focuses – not the only focus, but one of the focuses – will be how we meet some of these rural challenges that we're seeing in places like Ponoka and Wetaskiwin and Rocky Mountain House.

I think that you'll see some of the measures that we've used in the larger cities used there, but we, you know, obviously can't roll into Ponoka and build huge homeless shelters. It just won't make sense for the community, and it's not a good investment as far as scale, and so much of our focus has to be on partnering with some of the existing infrastructure in those communities, making sure that we're getting targeted funding to help those areas and that we're bringing a rural approach to this challenge.

I will say that, as we get to rural communities, like I represent and call home, the work that we've done in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge on Indigenous partnerships in this space is going to be absolutely critical as we work through communities like where I live. We're pretty excited about what's taking place in Lethbridge, for example, with our partnership with the Blackfoot Confederacy, their department of health, who's running our Lethbridge shelters, doing an incredible job down in that area. Enoch, who's going through work here in the city of Edmonton is going to be critical, particularly at places like Rocky Mountain House, one of my communities. It has five reserves just outside of town. We can't move forward on this in a meaningful way without great partnerships with the nations, and they've stood up to the plate every time that we've asked them. I think you'll see some of those measures come in place.

You asked also how people can participate and get supports to rural. You know, I continue to really encourage rural members as well as their municipal councils to participate in that process that's being led by Justin Wright and Robin to make sure that we're getting that feedback so that we can come out with a very good plan in the next couple of months that's very focused on the unique needs of rural Alberta.

**Mr. Lundy:** Great. Thank you, Minister. I certainly look forward to MLA Wright's committee and his work.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like to cede my time to Member Singh.

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

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will request shared time, if it's okay with the minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Singh:** And thank you, hon. Member, for ceding your time to me and having the discussion around the homelessness at a great length.

My questions are similar there. Again, good morning, Minister. I appreciate you for coming here today and thank you for your initiatives in the ministry. It provides stability for vulnerable Albertans through the delivery of high-quality social supports, programs, and continuing care to eligible individuals.

My questions are on a similar line of homelessness, but this time is discussing more about Indigenous homelessness. I think it is important to highlight Indigenous homelessness. I look at how Budget 2025 is working to address this. Page 143 and 144 of the business plan talk about "ensuring better access to services for Indigenous people." I also see mentioned an expert panel that will guide this work in the long term. Could the minister please provide more information on how many Indigenous-led shelter spaces are available in the province and where they are located?

**10:30**

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks, Madam Chair, through you to the hon. member for the excellent question and for his participation today in our budget. He is correct. The Indigenous-led shelter spaces are a very critical part of our plan to address homelessness in the province. It's something that I think we're very proud of, our relationship that we've built with Indigenous leaders in this space. I have to say that the chiefs have been very clear that they want to be at the table with us during this process and that they want to help lead some of the solutions that we need to see take place in this space.

To answer his specific question, Madam Chair, there are 280 overnight spaces in Indigenous-led shelters currently. We also have Indigenous supports, which I think I'll talk a little bit more about in anticipation of a follow-up question, in places like the navigation centre and in other areas. Again, we think that we need a variety of different types of shelter, and we need to partner with a variety of different types of organizations, including different First Nation communities, to be able to make sure that we can get targeted supports to individuals that need it. People that face homelessness come from all walks of life and will have different needs and different challenges that have to be overcome to be able to get to long-term success. One of the critical components of that is obviously the Indigenous community, which is disproportionately represented by population in the homeless situations and why we think that we need to continue to invest in this important space.

**Mr. Singh:** Thanks for the answer, Minister.

What organizations has the ministry partnered with to provide Indigenous-led and culturally appropriate support and services?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. We've got a couple of real key partners already, and we're expanding. First off, in Edmonton we've got Niginan Housing Ventures and Enoch, so two separate nations, who are providing services right here in Edmonton. In Lethbridge, as I mentioned earlier, we're working with the Blood tribe department of health. As well, we have work taking place with the Elders Caring Shelter up in Grande Prairie. Our navigation centres both in Calgary and Edmonton have Indigenous and cultural supports that are helping, with a team that's doing the important navigation work. We're also partnering with Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society in Edmonton, Calgary Aboriginal Friendship Centre as well to deliver services in those navigation centres.

In '25-26 we'll begin also working directly with housing support service providers, including Indigenous-led program providers. Those agreements, that support people experiencing homelessness

to maintain stable housing, are in the process of being finalized. They will be in place on April 1 in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and on October 1 in Calgary and Edmonton.

**Mr. Singh:** Thanks for the answer, Minister. Through you, Chair, my next questions are on seniors and belonging. Outcome 2 on page 146 of the business plan states, “Albertans can participate in community life through employment, volunteerism and other opportunities that foster their well-being and resiliency.” Performance metric 2(b) on page 147 tracks seniors’ sense of belonging to local community. I see that in 2023 70 per cent reported a positive sense of belonging to their local community. Can the minister please explain how the ministry is helping foster seniors’ sense of belonging in their local communities through Budget 2025?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks again, Madam Chair, for that question. A couple of quick examples in the time that we’ve got left. We’re investing \$6 million in nonmedical home supports and social prescribed initiatives, which will hopefully help seniors remain active, engaged, and connected within their communities. We’re also providing \$200,000 in funding for accessible transportation, which also enables seniors to attend events and community celebrations, places of worship, and senior centres, allowing them to stay involved and connected within their communities, which is important.

We’re also actively fostering seniors’ sense of belonging through programs that promote social engagement, recognition, and community support. Seniors’ Week takes place annually during the first week of June to recognize and celebrate seniors’ contributions to their communities. We have the age-friendly Alberta recognition awards, which recognize community enhancement of senior infrastructure services and accessibility, and then the minister’s seniors service awards also recognize individuals, organizations, and businesses that are dedicated to supporting seniors. I will take a moment to let everybody know that nominations are currently open, and I do encourage all of you to submit some nominations on behalf of important organizations and seniors in your communities for this initiative.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Minister, for your answers here. I really appreciate the ministry’s efforts or initiatives that focus to resolve issues on Indigenous . . .

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

Now, just to advise everyone, the other team is having their break right now, so perhaps what we could do is that after this next segment of time we can have our break, and then there won’t be a crowd in the area.

Member, do you prefer blocked or shared time?

**Member Irwin:** Let’s do block.

**The Chair:** Okay. Please proceed.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you to the chair. Thank you to the minister. I obviously want to acknowledge the importance of these estimates because we’re of course talking about money that flows to some of our most vulnerable neighbours in our province. Thank you to the ministry staff for being here. But I most definitely want to shout out folks on the front lines who are working in a very tough environment. I’m thinking about housing workers, harm reduction workers, street outreach teams, those folks that are doing the hard work out there.

I want to start by speaking about homelessness, which is, of course, an incredibly pressing issue in our province and in the communities that I represent. The UCP have been underfunding housing in Alberta since they became government. Homelessness has tripled in Edmonton under the UCP, yet Budget 2025 cuts homelessness supports. In his recent March 11 press conference the minister stated that last year his ministry made the biggest investment in homelessness supports in Alberta’s history at \$220 million and are planning to spend more this year. In fact, he noted earlier that his spending is unprecedented.

A little fact-checking on the minister. We can see quite clearly in the budget documents on page 80 of the fiscal plan that this is not true, and the government is forecast to spend less, so the money is actually decreasing. My first question to the minister will be: why is he saying that SCSS will be spending more on homelessness supports when we actually see spending going from \$224 million to \$220 million and then further cut to \$216 million the following two years? We can see those numbers broken down in estimates on page 193.

Through the chair to the minister: at a time when we’re seeing record numbers of unhoused Albertans, specifically a tripling of Edmonton’s unhoused population, why – why – on earth would you reduce funding to homeless shelters from \$118 million to \$114 million and homelessness support outreach services? What service reductions are going to occur as a result of these cuts? Where will there be shelter space reductions? Given that we’ve regularly seen shelter capacity, especially in the winter, over 90 per cent throughout the province, why would this minister budget less for shelters in Alberta in the coming year? I’d ask the minister to explain that.

The latest data we have from the By Name List shows over 5,000 folks experiencing homelessness in Edmonton. That’s a number higher than ever before. Of course, these aren’t just numbers; these are humans who matter. It’s absurd that this government wouldn’t be doing all that they can to address and to tackle homelessness. Why would there be a cut?

Can the minister outline as well – we see a \$4 million increase in program planning. That’s on page 193 of the estimates document. We see the number of FTEs as well is increasing, so I would ask for a breakdown of those FTEs. How many of those FTEs are going to be dedicated to housing and to homelessness?

I want to note a couple of local items pressing not just to me as the housing shadow minister but also as an MLA who represents central and northeast Edmonton and the east part of downtown. Bridge healing is a transitional housing program that supports unhoused individuals discharged from Edmonton emergency departments. It offers wraparound supports, the type referenced by this ministry on page 143 of the business plan. The government’s own evaluation shows that bridge healing works, yet the program was set to be cut last week. This is a program that saves money and saves lives. I did call the minister out on this on social media, and he reversed course. I’m happy to see that. I’m happy to see that he did the right thing, but why was that decision made in the first place?

**10:40**

One thing that I’m positive about is investments in Indigenous-led housing, which we’ve heard the members opposite talk about as well. We can agree on that. I too would like to give shout-outs to some of the organizations doing incredible work in my riding and beyond like Niginan Housing, that operates Pimatisiwin in my riding, as well as Ambrose Place, again, programs that we know work, and Enoch, which is operating out of the old Coliseum Inn in

my riding. We know that these spaces are doing incredible work for community members, so I would ask the minister: when he knows that these programs are saving money and saving lives and uplifting our entire community, is he planning to expand those Indigenous-led housing projects? If so, to what amount, and will he be looking across the province?

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

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you. We'll start with another member who never missed an opportunity to be wrong. There are no cuts to the overall homelessness number. She's probably having a little bit of challenge reading the budget, so we'll help her out with that.

**Member Irwin:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** A point of order has been called.

**Member Irwin:** There's no need for this, Minister – this is under 23(h), (i), and (j) – to question my intellect or to be condescending towards me. I was very polite to the minister and so were my colleagues, so I would ask that the minister withdraw and apologize for those remarks.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now the government side, please.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Obviously, emotions are high on these important issues. I think we had this last meeting; I'm not sure that there can be a point of order called on the minister, but I will allow that there has been some back and forth. I think we should allow the minister to continue, but I will leave it in your hands, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Well, thank you. I enjoy hearing from both sides. Thank you.

You know, I have heard quips back and forth between the two sides, and, no, we will not have a point of order called against the minister.

Minister, would you please continue?

**Mr. Nixon:** Thank you. Overall, the change to the budget in the homeless area increased about \$7.4 million. I think what the member is referring to is adjustments, the fact that we're moving some money out of one line item to another line item around service hubs. We've made a decision to use navigation centres as service hubs rather than directly to the shelter service, which the shelters are participating in, so we move that money out of that line item into the process that we do with navigation centres.

Then there are some changes on the homeless support outreach service line, the fact that we're moving administrative staff associated with CBOs, community-based organizations, directly into the department. They will be going into another line item, which is what the member is referring to as far as the FTE increase. It is from those administrative FTEs returning into the department directly from CBOs.

In the end, the homeless budget actually remains very stable, not cut. It's \$213 million that will be invested in this upcoming year, if I got the math right, which is a significant amount of money. It's certainly not a cut to shelters. I think we should stress that. Though, the hon. member is on the record saying she doesn't want shelters, so I don't know. I'm confused now which one she wants to fund.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that we will definitely be continuing to fund shelters. In Edmonton, in fact, we've increased our shelter spaces to the most in history. This was a request of the city of

Edmonton. Two years ago I committed to them that we would. We have funding in place for over 2,000 shelter spaces, including 150 Indigenous-led spaces and over 250 women-only shelter spaces. In Calgary we have funding in place for over 2,000 shelter spaces and nearly 200 women-only shelter spaces to help with the homelessness situation.

As I said to some other questions, we're also seeing shelters being built in a variety of rural communities to be able to support some of the unique homeless situations that are taking place in those rural communities. That remains a large investment by the department, an investment that we're going to continue to make.

The other large component of that is to be able to make sure that our shelter space is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, something that was also asked for by the community and is in place. We have, again, Indigenous and women-only shelters, the navigation centre work that we've done, and on and on, which we will continue to do.

The member did ask also, I believe, about Indigenous housing, if I recall correctly. Budget 2025 capital plan will invest \$92 million in the Indigenous housing capital program over the next three years. That's a \$25 million increase in funding to that area of new funding. We also continue to invest in things like elders' lodges, seniors' care in our Indigenous communities using other capital line items, including in the continuing care capital line items; seniors housing line items as well. That investment will continue in the upcoming year.

Last on bridge healing: the member may not know, but my department did not fund bridge healing. Her conversation would be with the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction. Having said that, we have expanded the work that we're doing to be able to help with alternate level of care patients inside hospitals, and we think bridge healing is a great program to partner with our ministry on that important work, which is why I chose to include it as part of our partnership. But if she has concerns on Mental Health and Addiction's changes, she's – feel free to take it up with the minister. I know he would be happy to have that discussion with her.

**The Chair:** All right. Everyone, it's break time. Five minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 10:46 a.m. to 10:51 a.m.]

**The Chair:** All right, everyone. Let's resume the meeting here. I'm calling the meeting back to order.

We're going back to the government side now. Member Johnson, I understand your next up, so please proceed.

**Mrs. Johnson:** All right. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, through you, to the minister and to his staff for . . .

**The Chair:** Sorry. Just to clarify, Member, blocked or shared time?

**Mrs. Johnson:** Shared time, please, if the minister is willing.

Yeah. Thank you to the ministry for showing up and for all the work you do in such an important file. We're here for six hours. I think that's indicative of how important this is, Madam Chair, and I'm excited to hear about the answers that we're going to hear today in the consideration of this.

In my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka we have one of the oldest lodges in the province, as the minister knows. He's been there. I'm so grateful for the work he has done with the municipalities there. It covers quite a large area going down to Blackfalds and with Ponoka and certainly in Lacombe as well, meeting a lot of needs there. This is, of course, a really high priority in that area, so we'll look at the seniors' lodge modernization program. Specifically looking at page 97 of the fiscal plan, I see there's \$150 million over three years, including \$50 million in new

funding for the seniors' lodge modernization program. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: could the minister please explain to the committee and those watching what the seniors' lodge modernization program is about and how it will serve Albertans? If I could add to that: does this include new capital projects? Maybe he can expand upon that, please.

**Mr. Nixon:** The program, ultimately, will be for building new and also for modernizing new lodges. It will focus on ensuring seniors' lodges are vibrant community hubs, which is the goal, and places where current and new residents want to live. We're going to have more to announce on that in the next couple of months. Details of that program will come out, but the number one focus on it, again, is to build new and to modernize seniors' lodges.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Wonderful. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. I'll continue on this note. I have a couple more questions about that. What will this funding be focused on, if the minister is free to say? I hear we're going to be having details come soon, but how will that funding be focused in '25-26?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. Its goal would be to support the modernization of approximately 750 units.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Seven hundred and fifty?

**Mr. Nixon:** Units.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Again, thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. What measures are in place to ensure that this funding is going to be used to its greatest effect?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, we're working with operators as well as the municipal government to address evolving needs of seniors in our province and, ultimately, to make sure our facilities are attractive places for current and future residents. The Seniors Lodge Review Panel was chaired by the gentleman beside you and was completed in 2024. From the results of that, work will soon begin on implementing those recommendations made by that panel. Then, ultimately, using the outcomes of that lodge review, it will inform our new program. The program will work ultimately to enhance opportunities for seniors to age in place while optimizing building assets, which is the primary goal.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Fantastic. Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister.

I'll move on to maximizing independence for vulnerable Albertans. We've already heard a lot about that this morning. Under outcome 1 on page 145 of the business plan I'm interested to read about the ministry's commitment to providing vulnerable Albertans with the supports and services needed to help maximize their independence. For many, feeling independent is key to improving their quality of life. However, this could mean different things for the various groups of vulnerable Albertans. We've heard that already about homeless shelters, how one size does not fit all and that we have to be very careful of how we're approaching all of these in different communities.

I want to know more about how Budget 2025 is improving outcomes for these groups. Specifically, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: how does the ministry help seniors and those within the continuing care system maximize their independence while ensuring they're kept safe and have their basic needs met?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, there's a lot that goes on in this space. You know, we're continuing, though, ultimately to focus on funding the

ongoing work that's in place to enhance the provision of nonmedical supports for Albertans in home and community care. Nonmedical supports, Madam Chair, are services and supports related to instrumental activities of daily life that are not health related in nature but are critical to enable individuals to live safely and independently at home or in the community.

Some examples in this budget include: housekeeping, meal assistance, transportation. We're investing, as another example, \$6 million in nonmedical home supports and social prescribing initiatives, which work to ensure that seniors living in community access supports such as housekeeping, meal preparation, transportation, and social opportunities to meet their basic needs and to keep them safe and independent in their homes.

Four million dollars is also being directed to prevent and address elder abuse through supporting initiatives such as the co-ordinated community response or elder abuse shelters. That funding helps ensure that seniors at risk have access to safe environments and necessary services in the event that they are affected by elder abuse.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. If we could just expand upon that a little bit. That was specifically towards safety and basic needs being met. I'll expand upon that. How is the ministry helping Albertans with disabilities maximize their independence on top of their safety and basic needs? How is it affecting and maximizing their independence?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, we received some feedback in 2021 from the persons with disabilities steering committee. The ministry ultimately implemented a new made-in-Alberta assessment of needs that is person-centred, strengths-based, and changes when people's needs change. The new assessment has standardized casework practices across the province, ensuring consistent assessments to explore each individual's unique support needs. PDD staff proactively assist families in developing and maintaining their capacity to provide care through facilities, access to PDD services and supports such as respite supports and specialized community supports. Ongoing case management activities ensure that available supports and services align with individual supports.

PDD services support the individuals to achieve their outcomes such as independence and community inclusion through the following services: community access supports, which help individuals take part in activities so they can learn and develop and be with others; employment supports to learn new skills and find and keep a paid job; and home living supports, which help individuals to live as independently as possible and do daily activities like banking, caring for your home, making meals, or even laundry.

Between April 2024 and December 2024 PDD provided community access to 6,957 individuals; employment supports to 2,307 individuals; and home living supports to 11,431 individuals. The PDD program provides employment supports to train individuals for employment and provides workplace supports for the purpose of maintaining paid employment. This includes postsecondary education funding to support the participation of adults with developmental disabilities who are eligible for PDD programming in postsecondary institutes, as a couple of examples, Madam Chair.

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

That's a great segue into my next question, which is about PDD. I'm excited to ask the question because an increase of \$83 million is really exciting. I'm glad to hear about that this morning.

11:00

Objective 2.3 on page 146 of the business plan references supports for adults and children with disabilities. I understand this includes the persons with developmental disabilities program and the FSCD, the family supports for children with disabilities program. We've heard a lot about this already. I'm not going to rehash this, but if you could just – I think we've got time for one more question here. Objective 2.3 references modernization, so why do PDD and the FSCD need to be modernized?

**Mr. Nixon:** We're seeing real challenging numbers, particularly in FSCD, that need to have a broader conversation. We've committed to the sector to have that conversation with the department and the sector this year. One of the most often quoted numbers would be, when the FSCD program was created, 1 in 10,000 children were being diagnosed with autism. There are some studies that show it's 1 in 34 or in that range now of children being diagnosed with autism. That alone requires us to sit down and evaluate what adjustments may need to be made to the program to make sure that we're serving the community that the program was designed for.

The vast majority of pressures in FSCD are around autism, so that also requires us to sit down and have a long-term conversation about how we make sure that we improve that program to be able to care for the children and the families who have children with disabilities who are entering that program. Over the next year we will continue to have those conversations, making sure that FSCD – we don't want any rumours; we know, Madam Chair, how the rumours start with certain members of the Legislature – remains in place caring for families but is focused on the actual statistics of the disabilities that we're seeing come in that need support from those family communities. It will continue, though, to be heavily invested in, over a quarter billion dollars in this budget, and amongst the highest priorities of the department that we get it right.

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

**The Chair:** All right. I see that we have some additional members who have joined us, so let's go to the government side for introductions, please. Sorry. I said the government side, but I meant opposition. I'm so sorry. If you could please proceed.

**Ms Ganley:** Kathleen Ganley, Calgary-Mountain View.

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

**Ms de Jonge:** Hello, Chair. Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

**The Chair:** Welcome. Thank you for joining us.  
We're going to go back over to the opposition. Please proceed, Member. Shared or block time?

**Member Irwin:** We'll continue with block. Thanks so much.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Member Irwin:** Okay. I would like to continue by talking about homelessness. Page 143 of the business plan states that, informed by the advice and recommendations from the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force, the government of Alberta began implementation of the Action Plan on Homelessness in 2022, and in '25-26 the government will begin allocating provincial funding for housing and support programs directly to service providers and so on and so forth. Anyways, in the Action Plan on

Homelessness there are no recommendations that I can see that outline defunding community-based organizations, CBOs, although action 5 of the plan suggests hiring a third-party vendor to "review and modernize the funding model for shelters and CBOs."

Can the minister advise which recommendation the business plan is referring to regarding the defunding of CBOs? Where can we review these recommendations? Can the minister, through the chair, of course, outline who was consulted in making these significant changes to the ministry in their funding model? We've got a whole lot of folks in the sector who are asking what is going on, and I think it's fair that they get some answers.

We've learned that five of the CBOs – Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and Wood Buffalo – will be losing funding as of April 1, and that Edmonton, which is Homeward Trust, and the Calgary Homeless Foundation will lose theirs as of October 1. Could the minister, through the chair, confirm that all these funding cuts are indeed happening and within the time frames that I outlined?

Was a third-party vendor, as noted earlier, ever hired to review the funding model for CBOs? If yes, is there a report, and is that report publicly available? Also, who was the vendor? At a time when we're looking into procurement practices and seeing some shady dealings from this government, I think it would be fair to be transparent about that as well, Minister.

I would love to know: what is the rationale for centralizing all of the funding within the ministry in Edmonton? How will this centralized and top-down, prescriptive approach work for local communities that have, as we know, the needed regional expertise to effectively address local issues as pressing as homelessness? We know, for instance, that Medicine Hat was able to make incredible gains at the local level through their community-based, housing-first approach. Why would the minister ignore those successes and change that model? You know, it seems a bit like a government-knows-best kind of approach, which seems surprising from this minister and cabinet, that love to criticize Ottawa for the same thing. I'd love some clarity from the minister, through the chair, of course, on that one.

Currently as well, the CBOs in Calgary and Edmonton both manage their co-ordinated access programs, which are key features of an evidence-based, housing-first approach to addressing homelessness. If, as we've learned, CBOs are in fact losing their funding, is it the government that's going to be taking over co-ordinated access? If so, where will that essential data be stored? Will it be available still to other homeless-serving agencies? Will it be publicly available? I think it's reasonable for me to be to be concerned and to be asking these questions about management of data when we do have a minister who's on record throwing out various numbers depending on the day.

I've talked a little bit about the approach that, you know, these CBOs have taken. I'd love to know if the government of Alberta still supports a housing-first approach. As I noted, we know that many of the CBOs employed such an approach. Will this be the strategy when this minister centralizes everything under his ministry? If not, why? You know, we don't see references to housing first now in these budget documents. We see terms more like "housing-focused and recovery-oriented delivery." We note that on page 145 of the business plan. Is the minister using those terms interchangeably with housing first? If not, what is the difference, and what is the research that supports his approach?

A lot of questions there. I'm going to move quickly on to the federal funding as well and working with other orders of government, which is something I've encouraged this minister to do since I took on the role of housing critic or housing shadow minister. The minister outlined an injection of funding of \$35

million at his press conference on March 11. You know, it was apparently a matching announcement, but the concern that we've had from stakeholders is that there are actually no new funds from the province. It's just the ministry incorporating the federal funds into their budget and matching it with money that was already planned. I just would love to know: where do we see that \$35 million in the budget? Can the minister, through the chair as well, outline how that funding, specifically that federal funding, is going to be used?

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

To the minister for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, first, to reiterate again, there are no cuts in the area of homelessness. We continue to invest heavily in the area and will continue to invest. The member brought up changes in regard to CBOs, so let's make that very clear. There are not cuts to the funding that is provided to the services provided by CBOs. There were multiple different reviews done over time, including a report that was coauthored by the CEO of the Homeless Foundation, which provided a recommendation to centralize some of that grant funding process and to make sure that now that the provincial government was stepping heavily into the shelter space, there was some level of co-ordination around that process. We are taking the grant distributing process back in-house. We are not taking in the operational function of the nonprofit organizations, including the CBOs, that we work with on a daily basis.

One of the CBOs that the member said was upset: actually, the CEO stood on the stage supporting this change, that being the Lethbridge Housing Authority, and very much supports the direction that we're going. To be very clear, there is not one reduction in services or dollars to that space. It fully remains funded within the budget.

There was a question about whether or not internally funding models have been reviewed. The best of what I can figure out at the moment up here is that MNP did a review of the recommendations of the funding model in 2023, and that would have fed into this conversation. But the biggest impact, for me, would have been the report coauthored by the CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation recommending that we step into this role.

Our government is very much focused on recovery and on making sure that people have safe places to stay. This is a big discrepancy between Conservative governments, between the Alberta government, between the Official Opposition, things like the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa, in other governments in this province, who... [interjections] They're laughing at their own coalition in Ottawa. That's surprising, though they are fairly comical. Really, really focused on a different approach to be able to continue to see people face homelessness. We've seen members of the Official Opposition protesting, trying to keep people to live inside encampments and not have them go to shelters, and that member, Madam Chair, in particular, attacking homeless shelter providers and the front-line workers.

11:10

**Member Irwin:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Another point of order has been called.

Please proceed, Member.

**Member Irwin:** Yeah. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) the minister is imputing false and unavowed motives to me. If the minister would like to table where I've ever attacked shelter providers, I'd be happy for him to do so. Otherwise, that is completely an inaccurate statement and is meant to cause disorder within this room.

**Mr. Nixon:** I'll take that one, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Happy to table all of that and will in the Legislature, but for now I will withdraw it. The member has been pretty clear on the record, though, so we'll be happy to table her words, also attending protests to, again, keep people in encampments.

The reality is, though, that we have a different focus, and that is what our partners want, and we continue to fund to be able to create thousands of units of housing, thousands of units of emergency shelter. That member's party, when they were in power, oversaw wait-list increases on things like affordable housing by 76 per cent, Madam Chair. The investments that have been made by the Conservative government since then have seen stock increase by 40 per cent and people inside safe shelters receiving services, not freezing to death, being victimized by gangs, and in spots where they can't be cared for.

I also do want to reference Red Deer's mayor – Red Deer is the head of the CBO, the community-based organization in Red Deer – again, emphasizing support for these changes and wanting us to proceed with those changes. We're going to because it's the best way to be able to make sure that we get appropriate services to people.

As for the question of housing first or this word or this terminology, what I care about and what this department cares about is keeping people safe, getting people into the homes and the recovery that they need, which is why we've invested billions of dollars in housing and why we continue to move forward.

I will say this. The federal government looked at the approach that Alberta is taking and said very clearly to us that they want to partner with that approach, which is why the latest round of CBO funding that we announced, that the member referred to, in that press conference builds upon the made-in-Alberta approach that is keeping people safe, that is investing significant amounts of dollars.

I anticipate we'll get some more questions on housing stats, so we'll save it for then. Happy to, again, continue to talk about the unprecedented investment the government has made and, more importantly, how Albertans, our municipalities, our industry have all stood up to the table to be the only shining light anywhere in the country of Canada when it comes to creating affordable and attainable housing and leading the way in the country when it comes to caring for people facing homelessness.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister. Are you wrapping up with your time now? Shall we proceed to the government side?

**Mr. Nixon:** Sure.

**The Chair:** We have five seconds left.

All right. Member de Jonge, please proceed. Blocked or shared time?

**Ms de Jonge:** Minister, do you prefer block or shared?

**Mr. Nixon:** I love shared.

**Ms de Jonge:** Excellent. Well, thank you, Chair and Minister and your officials for being here today and for the important and good work you're doing on behalf of all Albertans. I want to talk a bit about women-only shelters today. As we know, women experiencing homelessness are often at heightened risk of experiencing exploitation and abuse, and it's so important and it's good to see the ministry is making efforts to prevent exploitation

and abuse by introducing women-only homeless shelters in the province.

In Strathmore there's a centre called the True North women's crisis centre. I've had the opportunity to visit that shelter several times, and they provide very critical support to women that are facing and trying to escape abusive situations and at the same time facing housing insecurity. I can't speak highly enough about the critical support that they provide.

Minister, I see on page 145 of the business plan, key objective 1.1, that there's over \$220 million that's allocated to homelessness and outreach support services. I have a couple of questions about women experiencing homelessness and the supports that you tend to provide. First, can you just explain the difference between women-only homeless shelter spaces that your ministry funds and the women's shelters that the Ministry of Children and Family Services funds? If you can explain that difference, please. Then in addition to that, how is Budget 2025 going to impact the number of women-only homeless shelter spaces that your ministry is funding?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. There is a big difference and both are important. Often when we say women's shelters in the homeless context, people automatically think about both sexual violence shelters and domestic violence shelters, which are critical. Those are not run by this ministry. That's work that's done by the ministry of children services. Again, that sometimes confuses people because at some point along the line it was in this ministry, but that's who has the lead on that work.

When we're talking women-only shelters, we're talking about emergency homeless shelter spaces that are for women only and is a safe space for the women who find themselves facing homelessness to be able to access services. That's been a key part of the work that we've done to increase shelter spaces in Edmonton and Calgary.

When we set out to do this process about two years ago, we didn't just want to increase beds across the board. We wanted to make sure that we were doing shelters differently and that we were expanding our shelter providers to be able to include other key demographics, including women. Indigenous is another area as well that we have been focused on. Another area would be family shelters as well, individuals who are in family units, to be able to receive some level of support as they move along with that process.

There are many reasons why it would make sense for women to have a shelter space directly for them. I know I've heard stories from our providers about the opportunity that has arisen to be able to help people by being able to separate them, frankly, from males in their lives that are not being helpful and sometimes even endangering those individuals. By getting them into that women-only space, it allows those who work on front lines to be able to work to get that individual to the care they need and maybe get them separated from something that could sometimes be very violent that may be taking place in their life.

We'll continue to invest in that area. I believe we have 240 women shelter spaces at the moment. I'll see if one of my officials could check on that for me. It is a model that we intend to continue, certainly in our largest cities, and we'll be looking at how it may or may not fit into some of that rural context as we try to expand our homeless services into more rural communities.

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Minister. I wasn't sure if you were just looking for that number . . .

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, they found it – they're quick – 445.

**Ms de Jonge:** Through the chair, thank you and to your team as well for the initiative and leadership on this important work. This is really changing and saving lives. Thank you.

You mentioned in your answer specific housing supports for Indigenous communities, and so I want to just look at another housing program in Budget 2025, the Indigenous housing capital program. I see on page 97 of the fiscal plan that this initiative is going to be receiving \$92 million over three years, including \$25 million in new funding. This initiative will provide for Indigenous communities to construct, purchase, and redevelop housing. Through the chair, Minister, my first question is: can you just expand on this program a bit and how the funding through Budget 2025 will be used? I'm interested to learn: what's the eligibility criteria for communities to qualify for this program? And perhaps, Minister, can you please provide an update on the progress of this program, including how many projects have been completed to date?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah, happy to. Great question, Madam Chair.

I'll start with the last question first. Through the Indigenous housing capital program, the department's been able to approve \$74.5 million in funding for 22 different projects. Those have resulted in 521 new units of affordable housing in 15 Indigenous communities across the province. We continue to accept new applications for funding year-round in this program.

The eligibility criteria. To be eligible for this program, applicants must be an Indigenous government, or an organization, or a housing management body, municipality, or nonprofit organization with formal partnerships with Indigenous governments or organizations. Eligible projects include construction, including additional extensions, the purchase of existing buildings or the repurposing of existing buildings, and units may be used for rental or for lease-for-purchase underneath the program.

**11:20**

We continue to heavily invest in this area. As I said, in Budget 2025, I think you mentioned, hon. Member, it is \$92 million for the program over the next three years, which is \$25 million in new funding in this fiscal year, which we hope will create an additional 300 new units in this space.

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Minister. It seems like the approach that you're taking to tackle homelessness takes many different approaches. It's well developed. It's well rounded. You're making sure that supports are provided for many different demographics and communities across the province.

I am going to continue on with housing on page 145 of the business plan. Key objective 1.3 talks about implementing "the crossministry plan to support attainable and affordable housing for middle- and low-income renters and buyers." Can you please outline how Budget 2025 will impact this crossgovernment plan and address maybe some of the challenges with keeping up with housing demand? I'm also interested to learn more about the stop housing delays portal and how it contributes to this plan. Finally, how does this plan complement your stronger foundations strategy? You have two minutes.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, in two minutes that's a lot to cover. Let me first just start off with that Budget 2025 is ultimately going to support another 9,000 additional households over the next three years, 2,700 households through rent supplement increases, 6,300 units through the Alberta affordable housing partnership program, 300 new units to the Indigenous housing capital program, 750 new units

through the lodge modernization program, and on and on throughout that area.

We continue to be focused across the sector. Both attainable housing, which is market housing, which Alberta has had a lot of success on over the last year, but also traditional affordable housing, Indigenous housing, seniors housing, and of course continuing care housing.

The stop housing delays dashboard which we brought in place, which is very heavily focused on where there are government permit delays that are holding up construction, was launched. I call it a reporter permit blocker, but it's officially called the stop housing delays dashboard. It continues to feed information into the department, which then allows us to trigger conversations with different levels of government, particularly municipalities, but also more importantly with other ministries where we can show how things like a transportation project, if it was funded, could create this many thousands of units inside a community.

When the Flames' new stadium was announced in Calgary and the transportation component of that was announced by Minister Dreeshen, as an example, that came with thousands of new units of housing as part of us being able to participate in that project and us being able to show that, you know, maybe it's a lagoon, maybe it's a sewage issue, maybe it's a road issue, but where that block may be taking place from allowing that development to take place, which is why it's resulted in us having more success when it comes to market-based housing than anywhere in the country, a 34 per cent increase this last year in housing starts, that we anticipate is going to continue and ultimately the only place where we see rent actually decreasing anywhere in the country.

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

We'll head to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, Member. Block or shared time?

**Ms Sigurdson:** I would like block time, please.

**The Chair:** Okay. Please proceed.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and I just want to thank all of the senior-serving organizations throughout the province. I know that they do important work in a very difficult time and certainly the need outstrips the resources all across Alberta.

I just want to begin by focusing specifically mostly on seniors at first. We know that page 21 of the fiscal plan indicates a 5.1 per cent increase in the consumer price index and population growth. CPI is 2.6 per cent, population growth is 2.5 per cent. Therefore to maintain services at current levels investment increase of 5.1 per cent is needed. Since we know the seniors population is growing at a faster rate than other demographics, an even larger investment is needed.

This budget falls short of that. Overall spending growth is just 3.6 per cent and the most recent stats indicate that we have 810,000 seniors, people 65 and older, living in our province. Does the minister have a more up-to-date number, or is he using 810,000 to forecast for the year ahead in terms of the senior population? I'll just ask the minister also, through the chair, how come the seniors budget does not increase throughout at least 5.1 per cent to keep up with CPI and population growth?

Next, I'd like to look at 7.3 in the estimates, the seniors home adaptation and repair program, otherwise known as SHARP. This is an amazing program that supports seniors to age in the community, where the vast majority of seniors wish to be, close to their neighbours, community centres, family docs, familiar retail outlets, and religious centres. This program was created under the NDP government when I was minister, and it really increased the

opportunity for people to stay in their homes, you know, up to 10, 15 years longer. We know that people's quality of life is so much better when they can do that, yet there's no CPI or population growth increase, so this is just status quo. Why isn't this program being championed more, supported more, invested in more?

Budget estimates line item 7.4, seniors community grants: this is kind of shocking to me, really. It was underspent by \$1,600,000. We know, because I certainly have met with senior-serving organizations all across the province, that the need currently far, far outstrips the resources that they have, and yet here we have a budget item of last year where the grants have not been distributed to seniors' organizations, and seniors are suffering, Madam Chair. There's no doubt that the affordability crisis impacts seniors more than many other populations because, you know, they're on fixed incomes, they're often no longer in the workforce, although some are, and so them being able to manage the increased costs of groceries, utilities, insurance, all these things is very difficult for them.

Many nonprofit agencies do support seniors. What I'm being told is that no longer is it sort of preventative services anymore; it's, like, basic needs. People need food. People need shelter. Before it was always that people were supported with recreational activities, opportunities to connect, because we know, of course, social isolation is a key issue and it has very negative health outcomes for seniors. I mean, I don't understand. Why is this line item underspent?

I'm going to move on to number 8 now, the Alberta seniors benefit. According to the minister's mandate letter, he is charged with indexing the Alberta seniors benefit to inflation. However, Bill 32, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, passed in the fall, puts a 2 per cent ceiling on inflation for income support programs. Last year the consumer price index was estimated at 2.9 per cent. In the fiscal plan it is forecast to be 2.6 per cent in 2025. This seems particularly ill advised, as the annual report for the last fiscal year says,

[The] (Alberta Seniors Benefit, Supplemental Accommodation Benefit, and Special Needs Assistance for Seniors) were increased . . . to match the rate of inflation for 2023. This increase provides people who rely on these programs with additional financial support to meet their basic needs. By continuing to index these programs, vulnerable Albertans will have more resources to keep up with increased cost of living.

This is found on page 16 of the annual report. Seniors who qualify for this report are particularly vulnerable, and even small amounts . . .

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

To the minister for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you for that, Madam Chair. First off, I think it's important to note that on senior benefits alone the ministry is investing \$572 million in Budget 2025; again, a significant number showing the commitment of Alberta's government to those who built our province. We continue to invest in strategic programs. The federal government obviously remains the primary funder when it comes to pensions, but we want to supplement in areas that can care for seniors, some of which the hon. member just raised.

I do want to address indexation first and foremost because she brought it up a few times. When indexation rates were set, and they're set by Treasury Board and Finance, not by this minister. So they're welcome to have those conversations, obviously, with the minister. But when indexation rates were set for this year, the inflationary rates were at about 1.9 per cent. Indexation therefore was set at 2 per cent. You don't change every month. It's done over a period of time. My budget reflects that increase. It's a significant increase across the sector, particularly when it comes to seniors'



benefits, which the overall budget has increased by \$47.5 million this year; \$11 million of that, on that line item, is from increases due to inflation in indexation. So the budget does take that into account.

11:30

The hon. member also quoted – I believe she may have been quoting about the overall budget, but the budget that's before us today increases by 10.6 per cent, which is significantly higher than both inflation and population growth. It's actually an increase of a billion dollars across my entire budget and programs, showing where the government's focus has been.

On to SHARP real quick. I do agree with the hon. member: extremely important program. In fact, I think we want to continue to look at programs like this, particularly as my ministry takes on continuing care, because we know that one of the important aspects that can have some of the biggest impact on continuing care is making sure that individuals who can still be at home and want to still be at home have that opportunity to be there. We know that sometimes it's just a small investment that will help them to be able to return home. So we want to make sure that we continue to see results of it.

We have not cut SHARP funding. The member is incorrect. In fact, as we move forward with assisted living Alberta and stepping up that organization, we will continue to have other conversations on where we can make other strategic investments like SHARP to be able to help deal with our overall objectives when it comes to the seniors home and adaptation repair program. Budget 2025 maintains that funding at \$9.9 million. It also maintains the tax deferral program at \$9.8 million, making sure that, again, really a focus on helping seniors remain at home, doing what they want to do in the homes that they built, when they can.

We also have to point out when we're talking about seniors the large investment that the department continues to make in FCSS every year across the province; \$105 million this year again in FCSS, making sure that we're empowering our partner agencies inside rural communities in particular but all across the province to be able to make sure that they're helping us with things like transportation, making sure that there are events and different things that are taking place inside all of our communities to be able to make sure that we can care for seniors.

What else can I talk about? There's so much going on with seniors, Madam Chair, that it's hard to just pick a few, but I will bring up another couple. We've got an investment of \$3.5 million going on across 19 communities for accessible and affordable transportation programs for older adults and seniors. For some of the urban members here, they probably will not know how big a challenge is for transportation inside rural areas, particularly for seniors who don't have their licences anymore. This program will continue to help older adults and seniors and Albertans with mobility issues be able to get to essential services, social connections, health care in the communities that they call home.

We're also making investments in supports like grocery shopping, meal preparation, yard maintenance, social wellness activities to support independence and health; \$15 million in funding has been committed to healthy aging Alberta to be able to help with this work. The number one thing that we've been able to accomplish since the hon. member was the minister, who oversaw a wait-list increase of 76 per cent when she was the minister of housing, is that we've been able to increase our housing stock by 40 per cent and put significant investments in making sure seniors can be where they want to be, and more importantly, where they can be in rural Alberta, Madam Chair, when they want to be.

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

Member McDougall, please proceed.

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for coming here today to talk about these very important issues.

I'd like to talk a little bit today about affordable housing as well and the rental subsidies available to Albertans with low income. Looking at the performance measure 1(a) on page number 145 of the business plan, it measures the number of new affordable housing units and new rental subsidies that the ministry has funded, committed to, or supported for Albertans in need. I read that in '23-24 the ministry delivered 2,302 new affordable housing units and new rental subsidies to Albertans with low income. The figure for '25-26 is \$2,700. That's a pretty remarkable 17 per cent increase in new affordable housing that you expect to do for this upcoming year. I'd be interested to know how the ministry will reach this target for '25-26. It's a pretty dramatic increase.

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah, it is a dramatic increase and, again, shows the enormous effort that's taking place on the housing side of the ministry under the leadership of ADM Williams, who's at the table here, to really make sure that we meet the capacity. At the same time as they've had to as a department, for the first time over the last year, actually step into the market side of the file, which has not traditionally been a space that has needed much work in our province. So they've had a lot on the go to meet that target that you're referring to, hon. member, of that 9,000 additional households over the next three years.

The breakdown is as follows: 2,700 households with rent supplements, 6,300 units through the affordable housing partnership program over the next three years, 300 new units through the Indigenous housing capital program, 750 new units through the lodge modernization program, and more than 800 units that are currently under construction. In addition, the '25-26 housing benefit to survivors of gender-based violence will support, also, another 1,100 households, and capital maintenance and renewal funding will keep 4,100 units online that would have come offline if we had not made that investment to being able to maintain our stock.

So we continue to see the department exceed expectations when it comes to the work that they're doing on housing. We haven't even gotten to the market level, where they're knocking it out of the park in ways that are just not seen anywhere else in the country.

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you. How many of these new households will be served by rent assistance versus new builds?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. Budget 2025 ultimately supports more than 9,000 households over three years, including 2,600 in '25-26 through rent assistance. Of these units, 7,100 will be supported through new capital builds. So 6,300 new and 800 that are already in progress. Then 2,700 units ultimately, though, will be supported in total through rental supplements.

**Mr. McDougall:** Okay. Thank you. And how many of these units would be accessible for persons with disabilities?

**Mr. Nixon:** Alberta Social Housing Corporation's portfolio: approximately 14 per cent are barrier free, or approximately 5,000 units, across the portfolio. Moving forward, as part of our bilateral agreement with the feds, new construction projects will be subject to accessibility standards set out in the Safety Codes Act and other appropriate legislation and ultimately to comply with the national building code, the 2019 Alberta edition. All projects funded in

whole or in part by the government of Alberta are to include at least 10 per cent of new units being barrier-free.

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you. One of the key components of Seniors, Community and Social Services is protecting vulnerable Albertans. These could be people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities or facing job insecurity. In addition to these groups, obviously, the protection of our province's seniors is a very important priority. I am pleased to see that Budget 2025 addresses the issue of elder abuse in key objective 2.5 on page 146 of the business plan. I also see mentioned the development of the safe spaces program in rural Indigenous communities on page 144, which I think you've discussed a little bit. Can the minister please tell us what steps his ministry is taking to prevent and address elder abuse in our province's communities?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. Madam Chair, we're investing \$1.525 million in this budget year to support the network of elder abuse, according to community response through our Elder Abuse Awareness Council. The funding is part of the four-year \$5 million commitment we have made to enhancing community-based responses to elder abuse across the province. The program works as follows. Communities can hire elder abuse case managers to lead their local co-ordinated community response and then provide supports and referrals for older adults experiencing abuse.

As of September 2024 the program has been expanded to 20 communities, including both rural and urban centres. This increased from 15 communities in the first year. Most rural programs serve a broader area across the region. Ongoing funding committed in Budget 2025 will allow the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council to strengthen the network of support for older adults who are at risk of abuse and experiencing abuse. Between September 2023 and August 2024, which is the most recent data that we have, elder abuse case managers in 15 communities provided support to 549 older adults.

11:40

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you.

What is the safe spaces program, and how is Budget 2025 supporting the development of this program in rural and Indigenous communities?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, first off, I think it's important, you know, that the shelters and safe places we have for women and men over 55 years old that are leaving an abusive situation – ultimately, it connects clients to supports such as safety planning, counselling referrals, and community services. We're also investing 1.756 in the coming year to support Alberta's two elder abuse shelters, the Sage Seniors Safe House in Edmonton and the Unison Elder Abuse Shelter in Calgary, just to your last question.

The safe spaces program ultimately expands access to elder abuse shelter spaces in rural and Indigenous communities across the province by using vacant spaces and seniors' lodges. We're investing \$750,000 in '25-26 into safe spaces through a grant to the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council as part of our four-year \$2.25 million initiative until '26-27. That council ultimately administers the program alongside the co-ordinated community response grant and is working with rural and Indigenous partners to expand the reach of that program.

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

Changing a little bit to the low-income transit programs, I'd like to preface my question by recognizing that, you know, obviously, not everyone can afford a car or a bus pass. That's why it's so important that the government provides support for low-income and

vulnerable Albertans who need to get across town to buy groceries, access services, or just go to work. The ability to get from point A to point B without relying on others can also be an important aspect of people's independence.

I've heard about the low-income transit program, and I'd like to get some greater insight into this. Looking at line 6.3 on page 193 of the main estimates, I see there is \$16.4 million allocated to family and community safety. According to the description on page 191 of the estimates I see that family and community safety funding provides grant funding for municipalities and community-based organizations to provide community-centred services to Albertans. Would the minister please highlight how much funding is allocated to the next three years for these transportation services, and where is the funding located in Budget 2025?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. The funding is located on line 6.3 in the estimates. The budget includes \$16 million for low-income transit programs, of which \$12 million is for Edmonton and Calgary, and the remaining \$4 million is for other municipalities. The program ultimately provides funding to municipalities with transit systems that offer reduced transit fares to low-income individuals. Of course, this is in addition to the amount of other investments that we make in the overall transit system through the department of transportation. That's where it is in the budget, and that is the breakdown.

**Mr. McDougall:** How many Albertans are accessing this funding?

**Mr. Nixon:** Nineteen municipalities are getting the funding, including Calgary and Edmonton as well as communities like Hinton and Camrose. Each municipality that receives that funding ultimately determines the eligibility for the passes that they provide. A great example of the success of this program is the city of Grande Prairie. Between April and December of 2024 the city provided more than 4,300 transit passes at reduced rates to low-income residents in the Grande Prairie area, as an example of what the program does.

**Mr. McDougall:** How does the low-income transit program meet the needs of vulnerable individuals? And if the program is helping low-income, vulnerable individuals in municipalities, what happens in municipalities that do not offer low-income transit programs or do not have a transit system?

**Mr. Nixon:** Yeah. You know, I think that the last part of your question, with the time we've got left, is important. I remember when the NDP had their carbon tax coming in, Madam Chair, and they told everybody to take the bus. The reality is that there are no communities that I represent that have a bus, so we have to recognize that investments like transit systems won't work in some of the other areas. It's why, with the time we've got left, we've invested in places and organizations like Drive Happiness with significant investments that focus on volunteer driver programs and other aspects that can help particularly seniors and other vulnerable people in communities like I represent across the province, that don't have transit systems, to be able to make sure that our constituents get access to services. We've seen lots of success with that program.

We also see investment in FCSS in that area as well.

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

We'll move back over to the Official Opposition. Blocked or shared time, Member?

**Ms Sigurdson:** Block, please.

**The Chair:** Please proceed.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm referring to the fiscal plan, page 106, capital plan details. In January 2024 the minister appointed a committee to review and make recommendations for the lodge revitalization program. They were to complete the report in spring of 2024, and the minister promised this report would be made public. I understand that the report was completed in May 2024, and the report has not been made public, and it's almost a year later.

None of the allocation of the investment for that fiscal year, \$25 million, has been spent. You can see that in the capital plan, page 106, very clearly. In the minister's mandate letter he's charged with completing this review and expanding lodge capacity to keep up with increased growth and demand. We know that there's a significant need of affordable housing for seniors in our province, yet this significant investment has been languishing, and nothing's been done regarding it. Having met with many people in the sector, I'll continue to wait for the minister to fulfill on his goals.

On page 25 of the strategic plan it says: "Ensuring adequate supports and safety for Alberta's seniors. Government is working with senior lodge providers to grow the provision of senior lodges and improve the lodge system's efficiency and sustainability into the future." When is this report going to be made public? You know, it's over a year since that press conference where he promised this, and there's a significant need in the community. Why is such an important initiative being delayed?

Page 48 of the annual report identifies objective 3 as inclusion. In previous annual reports inclusion focused on the most vulnerable seniors' groups, and these groups were named. They were named: LGBTQ2S+ seniors, recent immigrants and refugee seniors, and Indigenous peoples who are seniors. Why have these vulnerable groups been deleted from the annual report? What is the minister doing to support the seniors' pride community specifically?

Page 57 of the annual report shows that according to the most recent statistics seniors' sense of belonging to the community has decreased by almost a full per cent. This indicator is used to assess seniors' experiences of social isolation, ageism, and quality of life. What has caused this decrease, and what is the minister doing to mitigate it?

On page 52 of the annual report key objective 3.4 states: "promote the prevention . . . of elder abuse by raising awareness, supporting coordinated community responses, and system coordination." We know that 1 in 10 seniors, tragically, do experience elder abuse in Alberta. We also know that we do not have enough shelter beds to ensure that the safety of seniors is protected. In addition, due to the extreme lack of affordable housing in our province, after their emergency shelter period has ended, seniors have nowhere to go. Elder abuse shelters will sometimes keep seniors in the shelter for extended stays due to this, which means those spaces are not available for others who need the emergency accommodation. What is the minister doing to create longer stay housing for seniors who've experienced elder abuse so that they are not taking shelter beds away from those needing emergency accommodation? Too often, tragically, seniors find themselves in the regular shelter system. This is no place for them, and a specialized system to support them is needed. Additional emergency elder abuse shelter beds are needed across the province. Will the minister be increasing these beds?

When the UCP became government, they eliminated the office of the Seniors Advocate, and the minister indicated the Health Advocate's office would take over the responsibility of the Seniors Advocate. Where in the annual report or other budget documents is

the work of the advocate reflected? On an annual basis, how often does the minister meet with the Health Advocate to receive her advice? There is no annual report for the Health Advocate for the last reporting period. When will this report be available?

I just want to remind the minister: when I asked him just a simple question about "What's the number of seniors in our province?" he didn't answer that in his last block. I just want to remind him and to let us know because it's very important that he have that figure for forecasting.

I'm going to start to talk about continuing care now. I'm looking at government estimates, page 194, number 11, continuing care. Of course, this item is new to the ministry because this was always in Health before. In the fall, of course, this was transferred to Seniors, Community and Social Services. But despite this transition nothing really has changed in the sector. I talked to operators . . .

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

Over to the minister for his response.

**Mr. Nixon:** We'll start with the lodge review panel. We had the lodge review panel done. It was led by a member of this community, Madam Chair, MLA Lundy, who did an excellent job. When we launched that initiative, we did not know that the mandate of the ministry would be expanded a few short months from then to begin to transition the operation of continuing care into the fold.

**11:50**

We've taken the initial report and have made sure that it and the senior lodge side of the file are at the table for conversations about assisted living transition with continuing care to make sure we've got two things done: one is that any overlap between those programs as they come together has been thought out, which is a change from when the panel would have had their mandate, and also to make sure that the extraordinary ability of that side of the sector to be able to help support getting those who need continuing care out of acute-care beds into their services is taken into account. That transition committee has almost done its work. I do know that the lodge review panel will then go to cabinet shortly afterwards because of those adjustments, and we'll have more to say about it at that time, though the industry participated in it significantly and have provided very good recommendations, that we will be moving forward with, that I think will make circumstances a lot better for both continuing care and traditional self-contained seniors' housing.

As for elder abuse – actually, I'll talk about that next – we were just talking about it with some of the government members in their questions. The member is wrong; there is significant investment continuing in that space. One in 10 Albertans obviously could be victims of elder abuse, which is a significant number. Budget 2025 reflects the importance of addressing that issue. It's why we're investing \$4 million towards preventative and supportive services for older adults experiencing elder abuse, which is actually an increase of almost three-quarters of a million dollars in this budget; the total investment, as I said, of \$4 million.

We provide \$1.7 million per year to seniors' shelters in Edmonton and Calgary to help those escaping abuses. Through the safe spaces program, established in 2024, the government is expanding access to elder abuse shelter spaces in rural and Indigenous communities. In addition, there's a range of supports for services and laws in place to help address elder abuse and support those who are facing it. This will remain a priority of the department. We've also increased at a significant rate the number of units that are available for people fleeing elder abuse to be able to make sure that we are in a position to care for them.

The member brought up housing, that there is nothing taking place with affordable housing. I could understand her confusion as a former minister because, sadly, at her time in the ministry, no affordable housing was built, not one unit. We saw, as a result of that decision, an increase in wait times by 76 per cent across the province when it came to affordable housing.

But don't worry, Madam Chair. Along came the Conservative government, who then began to make significant investments inside this important area, and I'm just going to give you a few because it would take all six hours of estimates to be able to list it. But let's start with the affordable housing partnership program, with a \$654.7 million investment over three years; \$249.2 million in new funding over three years supports about 5,300 new units. The Indigenous housing capital program: \$92 million over three years, \$25 million in new funding supporting about 300 new units. The capital maintenance and renewal increases: \$130.2 million over three years, supporting 4,100 units coming back online as a result of that investment. The lodge modernization program: \$150 million over three years. The affordable and specialized housing program: \$4.7 million. The disaster recovery and emergency assistance program: \$16 million. On and on and on.

Not to mention the fact that we also removed all of the NDP red tape that they created in the housing sector, which has allowed Alberta to be the only shining beacon when it comes to creating market housing, which has resulted in rent going down in places like Calgary, the only place anywhere in Canada where you see rent going down, because we made sure to get rid of that NDP red tape and trust Albertans . . .

**Member Irwin:** What about Edmonton rents?

**Mr. Nixon:** . . . to be able to make sure that they build more units and make sure that people have a place to live.

And the hon. member just heckled: what about Edmonton? Well, Edmonton continues to see their capacity go up as a result of the investments the government is making. Madam Speaker, we're just going to continue to get the job done.

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

We'll head back over . . .

**Mr. Nixon:** Oh, I gave you a promotion, Madam Chair, to Speaker.

**The Chair:** Oh, thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that, Minister.

We'll move back over to the government side now. Member, you only have five minutes left. We'll start with you on the next session. Please proceed.

**Mr. Lundy:** Sure. Just to confirm, Madam Chair, we're still sharing time with the minister?

**The Chair:** If the minister is agreeable.

**Mr. Nixon:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Lundy:** Sure. Well, very impressive list. I could listen for six hours about those investments, Minister, but maybe I'll target in a little more than that. You've touched on this a bit, but I think it's relevant to bring some of these concepts that you're getting asked about and providing information for, and that's aging with dignity, particularly in the rural Alberta setting.

Through the chair, this is very much related to outcome 3, and you can find this on page 147 of the of the business plan. More generally, it looks at supporting Albertans who require assistance to live in their homes and communities – and this is along with continuing care homes – through a co-ordinated system of

wraparound social services and high-quality care. Broadly speaking, it's focused on ensuring Albertans can access quality care and services when and where they need it to support their independence and quality of life – this is very important, especially, again, for those living in rural communities – are still able to receive the care that they need. You know, if that's not possible, we do sometimes have situations where some have to move hours away from their home community in order to have access to the care they need. So I do think this is a very important issue to discuss. Through the chair to the minister, I would like to ask: through Budget 2025, would the minister please provide some specific examples of how the ministry plans to improve the continuing care system so rural Albertans can access the care they need when and where they need it?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thanks, Madam Chair, to the member for the question. I do really appreciate him bringing up rural Alberta. For our friends across the aisle, that's that place between Edmonton and Calgary. I know you spent lots of time in rural Alberta as a rural MLA. Again, we'll invite all members of the committee. Any time they would like to come enjoy rural Alberta, like Sundre rodeo or Rocky Mountain House national park, they certainly are invited. None of them have taken me up on it yet. I don't know why. Former Minister Schweitzer used to invite them and say that he would bring a bus to get them there, but to date I haven't seen any of them in rural Alberta.

We continue to be focused on things like implementing our resource hubs for co-ordinated access for rural home-care services as an example. We're also supporting client-directed home-care invoicing, which was expanded to rural communities last year, ultimately supporting increases in rural home-care service hours. It's also important to ensure that there are trained and capable health care providers, obviously. So we are directing our efforts towards building continuing care workforce capacity in rural and remote areas with investments that are focusing on recruitment, retention in difficult-to-recruit areas and continuing care sites, programs, and positions in rural Alberta.

**Mr. Lundy:** Great. Well, thank you, Minister. Happy to join you in your riding any time I get the invitation.

I would like to ask a little more about the wraparound services, as always, going through the chair. Can you maybe expand on the rationale behind this focus on wraparound services rather than simply the care provided in the continuing care homes? It's an important element to dig into a bit.

**Mr. Nixon:** We find many Albertans are preferring, obviously, to age in their home and, in particular, not just in their home but in the communities that they've called home. So we are really focused, as we stand up assisted living Alberta, to make sure that we're not only providing medical supports but that we're focused on wraparound services alongside facility-based care, which obviously needs to remain and is going to be critical, to be able to make sure that everybody is receiving the highest level of support, including if they're at home, just as if they were in a supportive living or long-term care setting.

We're investing in things like nonmedical home supports, which I know we've talked a lot about this morning, to be able to make sure that we can remove simple barriers that could maybe allow individuals to remain in their home or their community for longer periods of time, things like investing in ramps or helping with snow removal or helping with yardwork or other aspects, maybe renovations on washrooms or different areas where people may need some level of support to be able to remain in their

communities, which ultimately is better for those individuals but also saves the taxpayer money because it is a much better approach for both the individual and for the taxpayer than having people inside acute-care beds or inside the wrong setting for their current circumstances.

**Mr. Lundy:** Yeah. Great, Minister. I appreciate that. Twenty-six seconds before lunch. You already talked about the seniors' home adaptation and repair program and the property tax deferral program. I would say: two great programs that we know are helping seniors stay longer in their homes. I appreciated that you were able to provide the financial elements under the budget for those

programs. I think they're super important. I would ask you to describe them, but two seconds doesn't seem like enough time.

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

I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this portion of consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded. I'd like to remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet this afternoon at 3:30 p.m. to continue our consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]





