

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2002–03 budget estimates

Melbourne – 24 May 2002

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Witnesses

Ms C. Campbell, Minister for Senior Victorians;
Ms P. Faulkner, Secretary;
Mr L. Wallace, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services; and
Ms J. Herington, Director, Office of Senior Victorians; Department of Human Services.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN (Mrs Maddigan) — I welcome Ms Patricia Faulkner, secretary of the Department of Human Services; Mr Lance Wallace, executive director, financial and corporate affairs; and Ms Jane Herington, director, Office of Senior Victorians. I ask the minister to give a brief 10-minute presentation on the senior Victorians portfolio.

Ms CAMPBELL — Thank you.

Overheads shown.

Ms CAMPBELL — First I will cover Victoria's population profile comparisons. You will see quite clearly that the yellow line signifies our 2021 population, when 25 per cent of the population is expected to be aged over 60 years; that is an increase from 17 per cent currently. The bottom line shows that at the beginning of the last century there was a very large under-10 years population, tapering off to an absolutely minimal over-85 years population.

Mr HOLDING — What is the left-hand axis?

Ms CAMPBELL — That is percentage. They are 25 per cent, 17 per cent, and the green line is the minuscule percentage for 85 years and over.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — The yellow line at the end for 85 years and over is at 25 per cent?

Ms CAMPBELL — Some 25 per cent of Victoria's population is expected to be over the age of 60 years in 2021.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Can you tell us what the numbers are on the axis? Can you read them off your chart?

Ms CAMPBELL — They are in divisions of 5 per cent.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — That does not make sense, does it?

Ms CAMPBELL — I do not have a coloured version.

Ms FAULKNER — I cannot read it either, I am sorry.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — Perhaps you could send that to us later on.

Ms FAULKNER — They are percentages, but you are looking for the intervals, aren't you?

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — Yes.

Ms CAMPBELL — It is clear from the next slide that apart from the Australian Capital Territory with its higher than average percentage of people from the diplomatic corps, Victoria's percentage of people aged 65-plus born in non-English-speaking countries is the highest around the nation, at 21 per cent of our population.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — What is the 'other' category? You have 'English-speaking', 'non-English-speaking' and 'other'.

Ms CAMPBELL — Perhaps in the census they were almost illiterate on that particular question.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Perhaps the majority is from Tasmania!

Ms CAMPBELL — I do not even know if that matches, and I am not going to check. I will not be baited on that!

The slide on indigenous age profile paints the really tragic picture that for the Koori population, people aged 50 years and over are their senior population. Their life expectancy is about 20 years below that of the rest of the population. Victoria's population in age and sex is outlined in the next slide and, as expected, women live longer than men. Just over a quarter of Victoria's population resides in rural and regional Victoria and 20 per cent of those are aged 65 years and over; by 2021 it is expected that that figure will be 30 per cent.

The impact of the demographic trend is that a growing proportion of the population is older people. I want to emphasise the diversity of the seniors portfolio. There is an impression or public perception, particularly among those not approaching senior years, that anyone classified as a senior is dependent. In fact, 93 per cent of older people live at home and only 7 per cent are in residential care or need publicly provided assistance for daily living. For all people over 80, only one-third require help with self-care, which is not the image that Mr and Ms Citizen out there have. I have been emphasising over and over again that we are in a period of transition, not a crisis. From the Victorian agenda, we are looking at this being an opportunity and challenge, not a crisis.

As members know, senior Victorians is a new portfolio. It outlines why we have taken this proactive step in Victoria: because older people are a growing part of the population. They should not be defined by their care needs. In Victoria we want to really focus on the contribution that people make. The seniors portfolio aims are outlined in the next slide. I will not read them out, but I want to emphasise that it is about supporting older people to lead active lives. It is a goal I think we all aspire to. Ageing does not commence at 65. For those who have read the report of the parliamentary inquiry into positive ageing, it was rather an earth-shattering experience to learn that our positive ageing begins at around 45 years of age. If you have not really made a conscious effort by then to age positively, you are in trouble. We in government are conscious that we have to promote positive ageing, certainly in middle age, and we want to raise the community's awareness of attitudes, actions and behaviours. Again, the image out in the community is often a picture that does not match reality. Seniors are significant contributors.

The next slide is a photograph of a couple of seniors I met yesterday. Those two are in a nursing home. Kathleen, on the left, is wheelchair bound but she is out there, active and exercising; and Eddie gets on the exercise bike. He provides all the bird feeders with feed every morning, and it takes him an hour to do that. So no matter what stage of care you are in, you can be an active contributor. The way forward for the Victorian government is really a very enlightened approach. We have focused on whole of living, whole of life. Through an interdepartmental committee, we have been drawing on the expertise and resources of all aspects of government and community. Partnerships are being developed not only across government but also with community organisations that are really welcoming this positive approach to seniors. We have an excellent ministerial advisory council that is very energetic and very willing to contribute.

We are establishing the Office of Senior Victorians to do what is outlined on the next slide. I will not read that. Within the seniors portfolio, the current programs that I want to briefly mention are, firstly, the Seniors Card program: 9 out of 10 people over 60 have a Seniors Card and we have 6500 businesses participating and supporting the Seniors Card. Seniors are certainly some of our biggest consumers. We want to promote business seeing seniors as active economic contributors in this state. We are working with those businesses and looking forward to increasing the numbers. During the Victorian Seniors Festival we have an estimated 400 000 older people enjoying a really diverse range of events. One gentleman said to me this year, 'If I'd known it was this good, I would have become a senior earlier'. Another comment relayed to me was that at the end of the seniors festival a man was asked, 'How are you feeling?' and he said, 'Exhausted, but after a week I'll probably recover'. He had been engaged in all sorts of activities provided by the seniors festival, which this year was for a fortnight, because it was the 20th anniversary. There is a positive ageing program, also covered under my portfolio, where work is undertaken to change community attitudes to ageing, promote intergenerational relationships, encourage mature age employment, support activity, information and education activities.

The budget output is the next slide. You have that in front of you, in the budget papers; there is no need for me to repeat that. The achievements for the current financial year are outlined on the slide. Again, you can read those. The next slide looks at the booklet entitled *A Guide to Services for Senior Victorians*. I am really pleased to say that we have now put that guide for seniors on audio tape and into big print for vision-impaired people. We are also being proactive in ensuring it is being translated. We have begun by translating it into 12 community languages. I have brought a copy of the latest version of that for members' consideration. The Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians was launched last June. It has held regular meetings and I meet with the council and the council chair at least quarterly. They have been really proactive in offering advice on the positive agenda for senior Victorians.

I want to spend a little bit of time on the Office of Senior Victorians and our development of a forward agenda. A priority action in the coming year will be to develop and implement a strategy for senior Victorians, based on a forward agenda of an age-inclusive society, enabling environments, working for all ages, healthy living, and consumer wise. I would like to expand a little on that during questions. I know we are running short of time now. With each of those forward agenda areas, it is about recognising the diversity of seniors, that they are active contributors, and that often environments when enhanced enable them to live more active lives and continue to be active

citizens. Where there are barriers, community and government have to work to remove those barriers.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — Thank you very much for that.

Mr HOLDING — One of the things that came through from your presentation is the large percentage of persons aged 65-plus who were born in non-English-speaking countries. It is obvious from the positive ageing programs that the department is running that it is important if the program is to be as effective as possible that as many resources and as much information as possible are provided to people who do come from backgrounds where English is not their first language. Can you provide the committee with some information about what the department is doing to ensure that information is provided in community languages?

Ms CAMPBELL — As I briefly mentioned, this guide has been updated. It is being translated into 12 community languages, and that will be completed by June. The languages we are covering are Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, and Macedonian — to name just some. We are making sure that not only this guide but the translation versions will be available through migrant resource centres, as they are a great contact point. There are other great umbrella organisations, such as the Greek senior citizens associations. That will be done. We are also making sure that Information Victoria has those available. There is also Seniors Information Victoria, which is a funded service. It will have interpreters available, which is a new initiative.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is such a large portfolio, I do not know where to start. Can I take you the issue of the establishment costs of the Office of Senior Victorians. Can you outline what those costs are?

Ms CAMPBELL — The Office of Senior Victorians has been created from within the Department of Human Services. It is supported by 14 staff members at a cost of \$1.14 million, for salary and operational costs. It is within the existing branch so there are no additional costs to the Victorian budget as a result of this. The Office of Senior Victorians is supported. That is also out of the aged and home care output group of \$3.96 million in the budget paper, under the positive ageing output.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — And there were no additional staff required for the formation of the office?

Ms CAMPBELL — It is from within the existing resources. The manager of this portfolio area is Jane Herington; she is currently working within the department and was prior to the portfolio.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Has the office actually been established? There is reference in our briefing paper that it is targeted for June this year.

Ms CAMPBELL — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is operational?

Ms CAMPBELL — It is operating. It will be launched officially in the first week in June, but it is operating now.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — What roles or functions are those 14 people performing now that they were not performing when they were not called the Office of Senior Victorians? What has been picked up that was not being done in those functional areas?

Ms CAMPBELL — What we have done is change the focus of our work to a whole-of-living, whole-of-life approach. Those people will be working on the forward agenda. They will be developing those five key themes in conjunction with the non-government sector, local government and other government departments through the interdepartmental committee. That forward agenda, together with the ministerial advisory council's contribution to round tables, will be the focus of their work.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — Can I turn to the Seniors Card, which is very popular in my electorate. However, when my bowlers who all go north for the winter come back they tell me that they would really like to see extensive reciprocal rights between states in the use of seniors cards between states. Is any work being done on that? I think at one stage there were some meetings between the commonwealth and states about trying to get some sort of Seniors Card that can be accessed in all states?

Ms CAMPBELL — Currently Seniors Card travel applies in the person's own state. Each state has its own variation of that in terms of interstate visitors. The department has done a

cost-benefit analysis into the feasibility of the provision of reciprocal public transport arrangements between the states. In the recent May federal budget the Prime Minister announced that the commonwealth would provide \$25.5 million over four years to provide reciprocal transport concessions. Officers of the Office of Senior Victorians and the Department of Infrastructure have met with the commonwealth to try to ascertain the full cost implications. The commonwealth is very good at offering \$25 million for a program that is going to cost considerably more than that, and we have found that its offer is not matching up with costs. Reciprocal transport arrangements between the states and the territories probably are as keenly sought a request in our electorate offices as are many other concessions. It would provide great opportunities for Australia as a great tourist market for seniors who have the disposable income and the time to travel. But at this point in time DOI, DHS and commonwealth bureaucrats are trying to find a way through that is cost effective and gives interstate transport — —

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — You have no idea how long that might take?

Ms CAMPBELL — No.

Mr CLARK — I have some questions about performance measures. I refer to page 69 of the budget papers under the positive ageing output group. At the moment there are just three performance measures listed there — attendance at Victorian Seniors Festival, eligible seniors with a Seniors Card, and funded projects for which satisfactory reports have been received. Firstly, are you intending to put in additional performance measures based on measuring the performance of the Office of Senior Victorians, because none of those currently there specifically relate to the performance of the office; and secondly, in relation to the attendance at the Victorian Seniors Festival, the numbers in the budget papers show 430 000-odd attending in 2000—01, a 400 000 target expected outcome this year, and again the target for next year. Given that your portfolio and the Office of Senior Victorians has presumably been created to put a greater emphasis on whole of life as a senior, et cetera, with greater focus on senior Victorians, why has only 400 000 been set as a target for this year and again for next year in terms of those attending the seniors festival?

Ms CAMPBELL — The measure has remained steady over several years. It is not expected that attendance will increase significantly.

Mr CLARK — So you are not expecting more attendance?

Ms CAMPBELL — No, my priority will be to promote the whole-of-living, whole-of-life framework outlined with those five priorities. The one week seniors festival is absolutely important — there is no doubt about that — but our expectation is that the numbers will remain around about the same. The 2001—02 expected outcome has not been obviously finalised as yet. That will be reported in next year's budget.

Mr CLARK — And performance measures generally?

Ms CAMPBELL — Performance measures generally will be considered in light of the new strategy and in terms of the framework, which at the time of the budget papers was not as clear as it is and will be at the launch of the Office of Senior Victorians.

Mr CLARK — So you may consider some additional performance measures for future years?

Ms CAMPBELL — I will consider it in light of our work on whole-of-living, whole-of-life, and it may be if we are looking at people's opportunities in the built environment, in employment, in health, that within government we think beyond the seniors portfolio itself, because there is no point in limiting output measures unnecessarily. That will be considered in the light of the strategy generally.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Could I seek some clarification on the figures for the attendance at the seniors festival? The committee was advised by the department that March 2002 was the first time the seniors festival had been held. I see there is an actual figure — —

Ms CAMPBELL — No, the festival — it is the first time the 'festival' has been held. It had been a 'week' before that.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — It changed its name, and the length of time changed too

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — How many years had the week been in place?

Ms CAMPBELL — 20 years.

Mr HOLDING — When we had the Honourable Marsha Thomson appear before the committee, she described a lot of the government's initiatives in the information and communications technology area to promote access to information technology by a greater range of Victorians than might ordinarily be accessing that sort of technology at the moment. I understand that the Office of Senior Victorians has also been active in promoting access to information technology by senior Victorians in residential accommodation. I am wondering if you can provide the committee with some information about what the Office of Senior Victorians has done in that area?

Ms CAMPBELL — Within our aged care residential information technology project we have allocated \$240 000 to enable Internet access and computers to be put into nursing homes. Now most people would not think of nursing home residents as being surfers of cyberspace, but I have had the joy of actually seeing some of the residents of the nursing home in Bacchus Marsh surf the Net and communicate. In 2001 the government has had 10 sites and it has allocated further funding for an additional 10 sites to enable older residents to use the Internet. The vast majority of those sites are in country Victoria; hence the ability of residents to communicate with family scattered, generally speaking, further out than their actual home.

I will give you two examples. One is the Bacchus Marsh nursing home where the lady who was showing me what she could do was accompanied by a primary school student who was helping her. Her movement was not all that successful so the primary student was helping her and explaining what to do. She asked the little girl to bring up the photos of her great-grandchild when she was a matter of hours old and she was able to show me those and then photos of the great-granddaughter three weeks later. Eddie, the fellow on the bike you saw just before, is in a nursing home that is not connected to the Internet through this particular project but, conscious of the project, I suggested to that nursing home that they email Germany with photos of Eddie. He thought that was pretty terrific! He said that would give him the opportunity to communicate, particularly visually, in a way he had never done before. So this project has \$240 000 spent in the 20 nursing homes provided with the funding, but we are expecting a ripple effect such as the one I just described.

We have also funded \$30 000 for a Skillsnet roadshow for seniors to provide training in community settings. Again it is something that opens our minds, carers' minds and families' minds to the opportunities for seniors provided by the Net.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, can I take you to page 69 of budget paper no 3, 2002–03 *Budget Estimates*, and to your output group titled 'positive ageing'. I would like to ask you about the output costs listed there for 2000–01. The actual reported is \$4 million, the target for 2001–02 is \$1.6 million, the expected outcome is \$3.9 million and then the target for 2002–03 is \$4 million. I understand the difference between target and outcome for 2001–02 reflects the change in your portfolio, the extra funds — there is a footnote there — for seniors cards, festival and office — but what I would like to ask you is in the previous year's budget for the same output group the expected outcome for 2000–01 was \$1.5 million, basically the same as last year's target.

Ms CAMPBELL — Where is that \$1.5 million? I've got \$1.6 million.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — No, the \$1.5 million comes from last year's budget papers.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — That is in last year's budget papers.

Ms CAMPBELL (Nods)

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The expected outcome was \$1.5 million, but this year you have reported an actual outcome of \$4 million. So in the six weeks between the preparation of last year's budget and the end of the financial year the figure has gone from an expected \$1.5 million to an actual of \$4 million. I am wondering if you can explain how that came about?

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — That actual is for 2000–01, not 2001–02, you realise that, don't you?

Ms CAMPBELL — I know what you are getting at and I am happy to explain that all. First of all, if you look at that footnote, it reads, 'Funding for the seniors festival, seniors cards and Office of Senior Victorians is included in the 2001–02 expected outcome and 2002–03 target'. That is in the budget papers. It effectively advises that for the financial year 2001–02 funding for the seniors

festival, seniors cards and Office of Senior Victorians was misallocated. The reason for this is as follows: firstly, the aged and home care output group was created for the 2001–02 budget and this involved extensive disaggregation and reassignment of activity budgets totalling approximately \$855 million from the previous aged care and primary health output groups; and secondly, during this process funding totalling approximately \$2.5 million for the seniors festival, seniors cards and the Office of Senior Victorians was incorrectly allocated to the aged support services output rather than the positive ageing output. That misallocation was being corrected in the 2001–02 expected outcome in the 2002–03 target budget.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Is that reflected in a change in the other — was it the aged support?

Ms CAMPBELL — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — I wanted to look at discrimination against workers over 45. I have an ageing population in my electorate and I know a lot of people think that by the time they get to 45 they will find it impossible to get another job, that people really discriminate against them. Is your area doing anything in relation to trying to put forward a positive image of older workers?

Ms CAMPBELL — Yes. The department, Vichealth and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission are working in partnership on the Working for Ages project. That aims to help overcome cultural barriers and systemic barriers that contribute to the discrimination of workers aged over 45. It will also explore ways to enhance employment opportunities through equal opportunity practices. The project focuses on pre-retrenched and recently retrenched workers from companies such as Orica, Bradmill and Pacific Dunlop. The project targets workers and also works to inform service providers of their needs to ensure that workers will receive advocacy, counselling, retraining and, hopefully, alternative employment opportunities. I want to talk particularly about one of our project workers who has been engaged on a 12-month project. She is coordinating a pilot project in the eastern metropolitan region and the western metropolitan region. For example, last November we had a very successful regional lunchtime forum at the Toyota factory in Altona. That forum brought together employer groups, older workers, unemployed people, local government economic development officers and federal government people, adult migrant services and unions. That project has proven to be quite successful.

Also I had the pleasure of going to a very proactive group in the city called the Over 50s Association, which is an organisation run by older people whose primary intention is finding employment opportunities for older citizens and enlightening employers. Again, to go back to the previous point raised by Tim, the fellow who was the real dynamo in that particular organisation when it commenced a couple of decades ago is now 92 and runs part of the computer system there. He is really proactive, using the Internet to link employers and potential employees who are over 45.

Mr CLARK — In relation to Mr Rich-Phillips's question about the mis-classification of funding within the aged care area, would it be possible for the department to provide the committee with a reconciliation of the budget numbers, not just for the minister's area but generally, then it will know exactly how it has all ended up?

Ms CAMPBELL — We can do that, but a lot of that information has already been provided. I am sure your colleague would have provided you with a copy of that. As a result of a freedom of information request of Mrs Shardey a lot of that documentation has already been provided. I would have thought you would have a copy of that.

Mr CLARK — It would be helpful for the committee members to have it officially so we can take it into account collectively in our report. In relation to the Office of Senior Victorians, does that have a physical presence, a shopfront where people walk in off the street? Within that office do you have your own office physically that you work out of, and roughly what proportion of your ministerial time do you expect you will be devoting to the Office of Senior Victorians in contrast to your other ministerial portfolio?

Ms CAMPBELL — In terms of a shopfront, at the ground floor — —

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — Is ministerial time a budget item? I do not think it is.

Mr CLARK — I would have thought it is a resource of government that is applied to achieving outputs.

Ms CAMPBELL — I won't be answering it anyway.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — I do not think we need to ask ministers to account for their time.

Ms CAMPBELL — That is usually left to the *Herald Sun* front page. The first thing to report is the Seniors Card operates from the ground floor of the Department of Human Services. That is a very well-patronised area of DHS where people can come in, they meet up with friends, there always seems to be coffee running there, TVs, papers, book exchange, computers, a friendship base that operates extremely well from the ground floor of DHS. I do not plan to have yet another shopfront at this point in time. The second question asked if I was in that office. No, I operate from the office from which I have always operated.

Mr HOLDING — My question is a follow-up to Judy's question on workplace discrimination against workers aged over 45, but relating more broadly to the question of how older people are portrayed in the community and the extent to which the way younger people view senior Victorians and the way the media often presents senior Victorians I guess invites subconscious discrimination by people who put barriers or ceilings on what older people or senior Victorians may achieve. Can you describe some of the initiatives that the Office of Senior Victorians is taking to overcome the negative media portrayal of senior Victorians and some of the discrimination that flows from that?

Ms CAMPBELL — The Victoria University of Technology has been allocated \$50 000 to research what projects will work to break down those barriers. We all would have our own opinion on what might work well. I can tell you after seeing that nursing home with the Internet and the primary school students I would probably be pushing very strongly for promotion of such projects. Others that come to mind are where juvenile justice clients mix with older men particularly through recreation — I think it is gym work they do. That works extremely well. As I said, a number of us have a range of opinions on what will work well, but we have allocated \$50 000 to the Victoria University of Technology to tell us what are the cross-generational programs that can be seen to be successful.

Again with my strong interest in a range of culturally diverse communities and making sure they are all included in whatever work we do, at a Melbourne college we have Italian language students working with older people to develop friendships and assist in their academic work. They are just a couple of examples. Another one that comes to mind is one that brought to my attention when the ministerial advisory council met in Hamilton recently. At a seniors gym class there were also in attendance people from a local disability day program. The benefits of that cross-generational program is that when people go shopping in Hamilton, be they seniors or people from the local day program, they are able to chat about exercises as well as their shopping needs. That work is under way and I hope we have some really great ideas that we will be able to report back to the committee when the programs are operating.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about the falls prevention program. Can you tell the committee what responsibility you have for delivery of that program and also what contribution you had in the falls prevention review?

Ms CAMPBELL — The falls prevention program was outlined in the government budget initiatives. That falls prevention program is primarily the responsibility of the Minister for Health. If the committee wants detailed information on the falls prevention program those inquiries should be directed to the Minister for Health. If you want to know how much is allocated, the budget papers indicate it is \$1.5 million to that program.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Do you have any responsibility at all?

Ms CAMPBELL — I do not have a direct responsibility for the falls prevention program.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Did you have a role in the review?

Ms CAMPBELL — That is with the Minister for Health.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — In relation to the Victorian Seniors Festival — I think the budget estimates an expected attendance of 400 000 to the festival this year — how do you see the festival promoting the health and wellbeing of senior Victorians?

Ms CAMPBELL — The first and obvious comment is that during the Seniors Week or Seniors Festival people are out and there is a lot of social interaction. It is particularly noticeable for

people who use public transport that it is really a very busy time. There is social interaction; there is also the opportunity for organised health and fitness programs — for example, many seniors groups came on the Castlemaine train for the country launch and organised walking trips around Castlemaine and beyond, so it promotes health. Through the Seniors Festival we had healthy and interesting eating and culinary delights. Elizabeth Chong had full-capacity crowds enjoying her culinary treats. Through the week and through the festival we tried to promote social interaction, health, exercise, the arts. There were a number of wonderful, creative and entertaining musical and artistic experiences for people, as well as encouraging people to use the natural environment. A number of the events were in the Fitzroy gardens and up at the Castlemaine gardens, so all in all it is a whole-of-life approach.

Mr CLARK — I want to come back to the question I asked that you declined to answer in relation to the amount of your ministerial time you devote to the portfolio of senior Victorians. It seems to me that that is a pretty fair indicator of the importance that you and the government attach to it?

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — No, I think in fact I ruled it out of order. The budget is about the ministerial areas of responsibility and matters in the budget; it is not about how the minister spends her time. I wanted to clear that up.

Mr CLARK — The minister's salary is paid by taxpayers, by *Herald Sun* readers and by others, and I would have thought a forum like this is one in which ministers should account for how they use their time, which is a taxpayer-funded resource.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — I disagree with you.

Mr CLARK — Madam Acting Chair, if that is your ruling I am in no position to dispute it, but I do not think it is very good accountability or a good reflection on the work of this committee.

Mr HOLDING — On that logic, when the Speaker appears here, I can ask him questions about how you spend your time?

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — Yes, I think if you follow it to the logical conclusion you will find what you are saying could be broadened to such an extent so that every minister would be responsible for every area of government. Did you have another question?

Mr CLARK — No, thank you.

Mr HOLDING — Minister, one of the things that has permeated most of the questions and answers we have had today has been the importance of older Victorians being able to find out information about programs that are being run by the Office of Senior Victorians and by other agencies in order to be able to access them. I am wondering if you could provide the committee with some information about what you are doing to promote access to information about programs being run by the office?

Ms CAMPBELL — The obvious first port of call is the *Guide to Services for Senior Victorians*. We have spent \$100 000 this financial year on the provision of this guide and the translation. That is really very significant and full of information. We have a new web site, as we are encouraging people to access information through the Internet — www.seniors.vic.gov.au — and that will be online from 7 June. We also fund Seniors Info Victoria, which is a free and confidential telephone line. That is staffed by professionals including social workers, it is managed by Council on the Ageing, and it is open weekdays business hours to older people. I must say it is not just to older people. Carers can ring that line, as can family members who may be concerned about a senior Victorian and their ability to access government and other services.

Mr HOLDING — Is that a toll-free number?

Ms CAMPBELL — Yes, it is.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the Seniors Card. I notice in the slide you gave us that the breakdown of your output groups funding for seniors cards is static from last year's budget to this year's budget at \$873 800. I also note you have introduced a performance measure of the number of eligible seniors with seniors cards this year, and you have set the target at 95 per cent. Given that there is an ageing population and funding is static, does that mean the proportion of seniors with cards is likely to decline this year?

Ms CAMPBELL — No, our target is to increase the coverage of seniors cards to 95 per cent.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Do you know what the figure is currently.

Ms CAMPBELL — It is getting closer to 95 per cent.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Do you have any figures for what it is currently?

Ms CAMPBELL — I have not got it here, but it is close, I am told, to 95 per cent. I do not have those figures with me, but I am happy to forward that to you.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — You are going to increase penetration of the card with no increase in budget?

Ms CAMPBELL — That's right.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — How will you achieve that?

Ms CAMPBELL — With our Seniors Card directory, which is partly funded through sponsorship from business and through advertising — and we intend to cover that extra through advertising income.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are you able to give the committee a breakdown of the expenditure on Seniors Card, is it administration, is it physically producing the cards — where that budget is spent?

Ms CAMPBELL — The Seniors Card — the printing of the directory is \$470 000, materials and system to support the business supporters is \$70 000, materials and system to support new members is \$134 500, translating and interpreting services, \$5500, and we are looking at the budget there of \$680 000. We have got the Seniors Card staff — salaries and operating of \$193.8 million.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Million dollars - you mean thousand dollars?

Ms CAMPBELL — Sorry, thousand dollars.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — No wonder you are going for 95 per cent coverage. Thank you very much. This concludes the consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolios of consumer affairs and senior Victorians. I thank you, Minister, and your departmental officers for being with us today. There are a couple of things I think you are going to send us — a bit of information.

Ms CAMPBELL — In fact I will pass that up — that is the subject of the FOI that I would have thought you would already have.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN — If we give that to Michelle she can include that in the documents from today, and thank you all very much. Thank you to the members of the committee, who have worked very hard this week, as they do every week.

Committee adjourned.