

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2017–18

Melbourne — 30 May 2017

Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Ms Fiona Patten

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Tim Smith

Ms Louise Staley

Ms Vicki Ward

Witnesses

Ms Jenny Mikakos, Minister for Families and Children,

Ms Gill Callister, Secretary,

Ms Katy Haire, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Schools Education Group,

Ms Jenny Atta, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group, and

Mr Chris Keating, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian School Building Authority, Department of Education and Training.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2017–18 budget estimates.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Families and Children, the Honourable Jenny Mikakos, MLC; Ms Gill Callister, Secretary, Department of Education and Training; Ms Katy Haire, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Schools Education Group; Ms Jenny Atta, Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group; and Mr Chris Keating, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian School Building Authority. In the gallery is Ms Katherine Whetton, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Performance Group.

All evidence is taken by the committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege.

Witnesses will not be sworn but are requested to answer all questions succinctly, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

All written communication to witnesses must be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way and cannot photograph, audio record or videorecord any part of these proceedings.

Members of the media must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee.

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, committee members, for the opportunity today to talk about my 2017–18 budget outcomes and explain how the Andrews Labor government is supporting families, protecting children and ensuring all Victorians have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Visual presentation.

Ms MIKAKOS — This year's budget allocates \$975 million to the families and children portfolio as part of the Victorian government's ongoing commitment to improve the outcomes of children and families. This will fund our education state early childhood plan and our continued efforts through the *Roadmap for Reform* to transform child and family services from crisis intervention to prevention and early intervention, to support our ongoing response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and to strengthen our youth justice system. This \$975 million investment means over our three budgets to date we have increased our investment in my portfolio by \$628 million, an increase of more than 40 per cent.

Investment in early childhood education creates the best outcomes for the development and wellbeing of children, and that is why over our three budgets we have more than doubled the average investment in early childhood education and parenting compared to the previous government's four budgets. To give every Victorian child the opportunity to succeed in life, I recently launched the early childhood reform plan. This plan is backed by a \$202.1 million investment in the 2017–18 budget, the largest single investment in early childhood education. This nation-leading early childhood reform plan sets out our long-term vision for the early childhood system in Victoria.

The early childhood reform plan includes a \$108.4 million package of kindergarten reforms to support higher quality services and services that are more accessible and inclusive. It includes an additional \$55.3 million to our kindergarten services as part of an Australian first needs-based funding model. We will provide \$22.8 million to improve quality through targeted quality improvement grants and a significant increase in the

specialist support staff provided by the Department of Education and Training. Ten million dollars will be provided to build new early childhood facilities co-located with government schools, \$1.1 million has also been invested to reform funding for non-government schools to encourage more to offer a kindergarten program, and \$5.5 million will be invested to expand and enhance local governments' central kinder enrolment systems.

Of course for every child to benefit from a quality early childhood education, we need to help every child to attend. That is why we will provide an additional \$6.3 million for the Early Start Kindergarten program to ensure that Koori children and children known to child protection can continue to have access to two years of free kindergarten; \$2.3 million will be provided to make pre-purchased kinder places a permanent part of the system and to keep preserving spots for vulnerable children; and \$5 million will be directed to the kindergarten inclusion support program so more children with a disability can enjoy a quality kindergarten experience. We are also allocating an additional \$7.2 million to help children and families access early childhood intervention services whilst those services transition to the NDIS.

As part of our early childhood reform plan, we are investing \$81.1 million to expand and strengthen the maternal and child health service and provide better support for parents. This includes \$37.7 MILLION TO EXPAND THE Enhanced Maternal and Child Health service to provide additional support for 15 per cent of families until their child's third birthday. When fully rolled out this will benefit 37 000 families.

In an Australian first we are also providing \$11 million so that maternal and child nurses are able to undertake an additional outreach visit in instances where they are concerned about the risk of family violence. We are also committing \$22.3 million to expand supported playgroups to ensure that they are available across the state so that 6000 more families can attend. A further \$5.4 million is being provided to ensure Koori families access culturally relevant playgroups and parenting initiatives.

Our commitment to reform child and family services has seen average investment increase by almost \$120 million during our three budgets compared to the previous government's four budgets. In 2017–18 the Andrews Labor government has once again invested significantly in the *Roadmap for Reform*, with a \$161 million commitment to improve interventions for vulnerable children. This includes \$72.2 million to fund 450 new child protection practitioners across the state — the biggest ever expansion of our child protection workforce. Family services will receive a further \$29.2 million in funding to ensure early intervention responses to support an additional 1229 families. We are investing an additional \$59.6 million for 1982 more home-based out-of-home care placements and 100 more targeted care packages so that we can continue to reduce the number of children placed in residential care.

We all know that family violence has a lasting and devastating impact on victims. That is why our government is devoting \$1.9 billion for a whole-of-government family violence package. This continues to deliver on our commitment to implement all 227 recommendations of the family violence royal commission. As part of this, \$156.6 million over four years will be directed to support family violence victim survivors and to work with perpetrators to change their behaviour. This includes a \$100.1 million dollar investment to help ensure approximately 11 000 survivors of family violence, including 3500 children, have better access to a range of flexible services, including counselling and therapeutic help. There will be \$49.5 million directed to enhance perpetrator intervention programs to change the attitudes and behaviours of people committing family violence, and \$7 million will be for the risk assessment report portal to help ensure victim survivors are connected to services faster.

Whilst we consider the recently announced national redress scheme, we are also investing \$13.2 million to support Victorians who are either currently or who were previously in our care, with \$4 million for the settlement of civil claims for victims of historical institutional child abuse. We are also providing \$2 million for improved access to health, welfare and advocacy services for Victorians who grew up in institutional care and \$7.1 million for the Commission for Children and Young People's work in monitoring the child safe standards and the reportable conduct scheme to keep children safe.

The 2017–18 budget invests \$81 million to ensure that eligible Victorians can continue to access concessions for utility costs, including electricity, gas and water rates.

Our government's commitment to addressing youth crime and reducing reoffending is evident, with average investment in youth justice increasing by almost \$100 million over three budgets compared to the previous government's term. The government has announced sweeping changes to crack down on youth crime. As part

of these reforms we are investing \$360.7 million to create a stronger, more secure youth justice system. This includes a \$288.7 million fit-for-purpose high-security youth justice centre near Cherry Creek and a further \$72 million to keep young offenders secure and our hardworking and dedicated staff safe. As part of this, units at Parkville Youth Justice Precinct are being fortified and strengthened, and security features will be upgraded at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre. There will also be improved intelligence gathering across our youth justice centres to help prevent and respond to violent antisocial incidents. I look forward to the committee's questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister, for that presentation. I might kick off, if I may. I refer to your presentation, the early childhood reform plan, supporting access and inclusion, and particularly the \$108.4 million in relation to initiatives to make services more inclusive. I am particularly interested in this area, as you know, Minister, because if a child starts primary school and they are well behind their peers, that is called the 'achievement gap'. There is a real risk that those children will never catch up to their peers and are at a greater risk of being lost to the school system in the later years. It comes back to that broader principle of the first 1000 days of a child's life being critically important to the way in which that child adjusts to education and school and lives a fulfilled and productive life. I am just wondering, Minister, whether you might be able to outline and flesh out in a little bit more detail how that \$108.4 million investment will help ensure children have the best chance to start and get ready for school.

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you very much, Chair, and I thank you for your personal interest in these issues as the former chairperson of the peak body for the early childhood sector in Victoria, ELAA. I know that you are very passionate about these issues. I am very proud of the fact that we released earlier this year something that I regard as really groundbreaking in early childhood education, and that is our early childhood reform plan. This is backed up by a very significant boost to funding for our kindergarten system of \$108.4 million. This includes \$55.3 million over the next four years to introduce school readiness funding for kindergartens. What we have seen in our school system, very proudly supported by our government, is needs-based funding for our schools, but this is the first time an Australian jurisdiction is introducing needs-based funding in our kindergarten system. This needs-based funding will be allocated to services on the basis of need so that children who need extra support get that extra support. So services — —

The CHAIR — What might the funding be put towards, Minister?

Ms MIKAKOS — I can give you a range of examples. Services could benefit from between \$500 and over \$100 000, depending on the number of eligible children who need that additional support. This will enable services to provide help to children who are facing particular challenges, such as access to speech therapy and literacy and numeracy support, bringing in external allied health professionals to work with young children around these issues. They might be able to engage a social worker or a child psychologist to come into the centre and support those children or be able to employ additional early childhood teachers themselves. This is really about enhancing those critical first skills of a child around literacy, numeracy and language development.

Once this funding is rolled out, this will increase our total funding to kindergartens by about 10 per cent. As I said, this is an Australian first. We are also investing \$22.8 million to provide targeted quality improvement grants and increase the support we give to our kindergartens. We have also invested further money into our early childhood infrastructure fund. We have already committed in the previous two budgets \$60 million towards kindergarten infrastructure, and the budget this year invests a further \$10 million in new early childhood facilities to be co-located with government primary schools. This is really popular with parents. We know that if they are dropping off an older child at primary school and they have got a co-located early childhood centre next door, that is extremely convenient for them.

The CHAIR — I think that investment, too, is partly due to the fact that with 15 hours of kinder there are some natural capacity constraints within kindergartens that have offered previous programs. That level of investment, I am assuming, is in part due to the fact that 15 hours of kinder for four-year-olds is now a common standard, so there is a need to make sure there is appropriate infrastructure in place. Is that your understanding?

Ms MIKAKOS — I am very pleased that we have all our early childhood services in Victoria offering a quality 15-hour program now. Of course we continue to impress upon the federal government the need to continue that ongoing funding. We are responding to population growth. We are obviously wanting to make sure that every child has the opportunity to access a quality kindergarten program in their local community. This is why we are continuing to invest in our infrastructure. This compares to \$37 million appropriated over four budgets by the previous government. We have already put in \$70 million over our first three budgets.

The CHAIR — Coming back briefly to the school readiness fund, how many schoolchildren do you think will benefit from that additional funding? Have you done any modelling around what that might look like?

Ms MIKAKOS — Yes, we have, Chair. In fact the point that I would like to make is that all children in our kindergartens will benefit from this funding, because when you have additional allied health professionals coming in to the service or you have additional teaching staff in that service, all the children who participate in that kindergarten program will of course benefit. This is targeted at the one in five Victorian children who start school developmentally vulnerable. We have had national data that shows us that one in five children starts prep not ready developmentally for school, and this is why the plan is talking about ensuring that children are ready for kindergarten, ready for school and ready for life. This is about making sure they have that initial developmental support. And this is backed up by evidence. The University of Melbourne was funded by our government — it goes back actually to the previous Labor government — to do a longitudinal study called E4Kids, a very significant study, and that study found that children who need the best support currently have the least resources and that the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children grows during early childhood.

We know that unless children get that additional leg-up, that additional support very early on, it is very hard for them to catch up later on in school and they will continue to fall behind. So this is a very smart investment that we are making very early on to ensure that those children can get that additional support so they can start school better prepared. This is backed up by NAPLAN testing results that show that children who do participate in a quality early childhood education do better in NAPLAN testing in primary school and later on.

The CHAIR — You made an interesting comment at the end there about quality. I think there has been a greater focus now in terms of improving the quality of the profession of early years educators. I think there is probably a greater emphasis now on that area than was previously the case maybe, say, 20 or 30 years ago, and there is always, I suppose, that desire for constant improvement and making greater gains — making greater efficiency gains, I suppose — in relation to early years educators. In terms of the investment announced in the budget, what programs are you looking at developing or implementing in relation to improving the quality of early years educators?

Ms MIKAKOS — Can I say at the outset that as the minister I have the opportunity to meet so many of our early childhood teachers and educators right around the state, and I pay tribute to their professionalism and their commitment. It was great just to go and speak to a very large number of them at the ELAA conference just last Friday morning. We are wanting to continue to invest in lifting the quality, and this is backed up by that E4Kids longitudinal study that I referred to earlier — that we need to continue to do more in this area. We are investing \$22.8 million in this budget to improve the quality of early childhood education in Victoria. This will include \$4.6 million in quality grants to help services that need the most support to access intensive coaching, training and advice to improve their professional practice and outcomes for children. The focus of the grants will be determined based on the needs of services; for example, taking into account each service's assessment against the national quality standard.

In addition to this, we are also providing \$18.2 million in additional support that will fund about 50 new departmental staff with early childhood expertise. They will perform a similar role to what we do in our schools at the moment — go out in each region to our early childhood services and work with those early childhood services to continue to lift quality. So there is a very big commitment there to drive up quality performance in our Victorian early years services.

The CHAIR — Coming back to my earlier comments, there is an interest, I suppose, that I have in terms of what we can do to assist children with a disability to make a transition from an early years environment into school smoothly, because we know that if there is that early intervention, they are more likely to have a happier primary school experience, and similarly children from a disadvantaged background, be it from a CALD background or from a low socio-economic background. So can you just inform the committee in terms of what some of the issues are that are going to be deployed to address some of those key issues?

Ms MIKAKOS — Sure. Thank you, Chair. I am absolutely determined to ensure that all Victorian children can participate in our early years services, and we know the particular groups that tend to miss out tend to be either very disadvantaged children, Aboriginal children or children with disabilities. So if I can start with your first question, which related to children with disabilities, we have a program called the kindergarten inclusion support program in Victoria that helps to build the capacity of our kindergartens to provide a learning and

development environment that responds to individual needs of children with a disability or complex medical needs. This funding provides additional staff training or additional staff and access to specialist expertise. So in the budget this year we are providing \$5 million over two years to meet growing demand for the KIS program.

In addition to that, we have also provided further funding in the budget for early childhood education services. It is not quite directly related to your question about kindergarten, but we also do want to ensure that children have access to early childhood intervention services. This is \$7.2 million over two years to enable more children to benefit from access to services like speech therapy whilst we are transitioning to the national disability insurance scheme.

And in addition to that, in relation to Aboriginal children and children known to child protection there is a program in Victoria called Early Start Kindergarten which effectively provides free kinder for two years for those most disadvantaged children. We are providing \$6.3 million in additional funding over the next two years to meet increased demand for that program, and this will enable about 600 additional children to benefit from that particular program. We have continued to close the gap in relation to Aboriginal children's participation since we have been in government, and that is something that I am very proud of.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. I absolutely love this portfolio. I commend your good work on this; it is fascinating. I look forward to you coming back next year. On that note, I will pass over to the Deputy Chair until 10.02 a.m.

Mr MORRIS — Can I ask you about the gender equality budget statement that was included in the associated papers with the budget? There is a brief mention in the statement of:

\$98.4 million for kindergarten initiatives that will help improve educational outcomes for girls —

quoting from that page with those words. Can you indicate to the committee what the breakdown of the funding is over the forward estimates? Where is it in the budget papers, where is it detailed?

Ms MIKAKOS — The sound quality in here is not the best, but you were referring, if I could hear correctly, to the gender equality statement that was in fact released by Minister Richardson and falls under Minister Richardson's portfolio. If you could direct me specifically to the question that relates to my portfolio —

Mr MORRIS — I am referring to the \$98.4 million for kindergarten initiatives that will help to improve educational outcomes for girls.

Ms MIKAKOS — Have you got a specific reference in the budget papers to the figures?

Mr MORRIS — It is in the gender equality budget statement. It is the second page I have; I do not have the statement with me I am afraid.

Ms MIKAKOS — I am happy to provide you with a written response in relation to that particular matter. I am happy to take questions obviously that relate to my portfolio, but what I can say to you more broadly is that obviously we are making a very significant investment in early childhood education that will benefit both boys and girls in our kindergarten system. I have already outlined to the Chair the range of initiatives. School readiness funding of course is something that will apply to all eligible children, and in fact I would anticipate that all children will benefit from that investment, similarly with initiatives that relate to disadvantaged children participating in kindergarten and children with a disability participating in kindergarten. All of these specific initiatives will broadly benefit all Victorian children.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, \$98.4 million for kindergarten initiatives, which is or certainly would appear to be fairly and squarely part of the early childhood component of DET: in your response are you saying that this is not part of DET?

Ms MIKAKOS — No, Mr Morris. To be clear, you have asked me a question about the gender equality statement, and my response has been that gender equality statement relates to Minister Richardson's portfolio.

Mr MORRIS — I have asked a question about almost \$100 million for kindergarten initiatives, which is fairly and squarely in this portfolio.

Ms MIKAKOS — Yes, we have \$108.4 million, to be precise, for a range of initiatives that relate to kindergarten. In addition to that we have \$81.1 million for maternal and child health, so we have a very broad-ranging set of initiatives.

Mr MORRIS — This is \$98.4 million for improved educational outcomes for girls. It is a distinct mention in the gender equality budget statement, and it is clearly in your portfolio.

Ms MIKAKOS — I think, Mr Morris, what you are referring to there is effectively the kindergarten investment that I have already outlined to the Chair — \$108.4 million in outputs. If you subtract the \$10 million in TEL, effectively the \$10 million that is for infrastructure — that is, for new kindergartens to be built, to be co-located with primary schools — you will then arrive at that figure that you have been quoting. The point that I have been making, Mr Morris, is that the kindergarten investment that we are making — —

Mr MORRIS — So it is yours and you do know about it.

Ms MIKAKOS — The point that I am making to you, Mr Morris, is that the kindergarten investment that I have outlined to the Chair already will benefit both girls and boys.

Mr MORRIS — The \$98.4 million of the \$108 million appears to be for girls. Is that correct?

Ms MIKAKOS — The point that I am making to you, Mr Morris, is that, whilst gender equality sits with Minister Richardson, the early childhood investment that I have outlined will benefit both boys and girls in Victorian kindergartens.

Mr MORRIS — So does that make the statement in the budget papers misleading?

Ms MIKAKOS — Not at all. It is going to benefit both girls and boys.

Mr MORRIS — Can you perhaps explain to the committee — —

Ms MIKAKOS — The issues around gender equality are questions that perhaps you should address to Minister Richardson, who I understand is appearing later today.

Mr MORRIS — Kindergarten initiatives, Minister, are clearly part of your portfolio. Can you indicate what we are going to get in the way of improved educational outcomes for girls for almost \$100 million?

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, if I could give you a breakdown of that figure, which I have already been indicating to the committee, as per my earlier explanation, there is \$87.1 million that includes a range of Education State reforms and high-quality learning and development for three and four-year-olds. That includes the school readiness funding and the quality improvement grants that I just explained to the committee earlier. The \$6.3 million for the Early Start Kindergarten for vulnerable children — something that I just explained to the Chair earlier — providing the free three and four-year-old kindergarten for children under child protection and Aboriginal children, and there is — —

Mr MORRIS — The supporting information clearly says \$98.4 million for girls. It is the outcomes for girls.

Ms MIKAKOS — I am just trying to finish answering your question if I can, Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — It is the improved educational outcomes for girls that I am trying to get to hear. That is the claim that is made in the budget papers. I am asking what they are.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, I am just trying to give you the breakdown of those figures.

Mr MORRIS — No. You are giving me a range of figures that relate to early childhood education generally. I am asking about girls.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, I think I have responded to that question now on a number of occasions, explaining to you that the investments that we are making are multifaceted across the kindergarten sector and will benefit both girls and boys.

Mr MORRIS — And specifically what improved educational outcomes for girls will result from this almost \$100 million?

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, of course it includes girls.

Mr MORRIS — No, it says specifically it is all girls.

Ms MIKAKOS — Girls will benefit from participating in more opportunities to attend a quality kindergarten program in Victoria.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, your budget singles out girls to the tune of \$98.4 million. It says there will be improved outcomes. I am asking you what we get.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, I have already explained to you that the gender equality statement is another minister's responsibility.

Mr MORRIS — No. You are giving me a general answer about money that is going into the system generally.

Ms MIKAKOS — I was happy, Mr Morris, to continue to give you the breakdown. I assumed that you wanted me to explain how that figure was arrived at.

Mr MORRIS — I am asking what we get — 'we' being the Parliament — for funding of almost \$100 million.

Ms MIKAKOS — And I am just explaining that to you, Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — No, you have not. Your own government's budget papers claim that this \$98.4 million will help improve educational outcomes for girls. That is what it is for. That is what your budget papers say.

Ms MIKAKOS — And it absolutely will, Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — So what will it do? This is \$100 million. What will it do?

Ms MIKAKOS — I have just spent the last few minutes indicating to the committee exactly the great initiatives that we have funded in the budget.

Mr T. SMITH — No. You have not at all. You have been reading line items from a budget paper reference.

Ms WARD — Raising your voice does not make it easier for us to hear what is going on, Mr Smith.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Ward! Mr Morris with a question.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, if I could conclude my answer.

Mr MORRIS — You have not begun, Minister.

Ms MIKAKOS — There is a further \$5 million. I have talked about the breakdown so far. I talked about 87.1, I talked about 6.3.

Mr MORRIS — You have not told me one single thing it will do to help improve outcomes for girls, which is what you are claiming.

Ms MIKAKOS — There is a further \$5 million to ensure children with significant disabilities can participate in kindergarten, and then I explained that if you look at these figures and if you take out the capital investment in terms of the output that is being delivered, that will benefit both girls and boys in our kindergartens, and absolutely girls will be beneficiaries of this additional investment. I have talked about how this is all geared up to making sure that children start school better prepared, and that will mean that girls start prep and primary school better prepared.

Mr MORRIS — Surely the point should be about improved educational outcomes for preschool children, not about girls, which is what your budget papers are claiming. It says specifically girls —

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, girls do make up about half of the population.

Mr MORRIS — and you have not given me one concrete example of what this \$100 million does for girls — not one concrete example. Can you not give me a concrete example?

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris, I am happy to give you lots of examples. I have just been speaking at some length about the kindergarten initiatives that we have funded.

Mr MORRIS — No, you have been speaking at some length about general programs which may well improve both. But what will we do specifically for girls, which is what your budget claims?

Members interjecting.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Morris — —

The CHAIR — Order! Government questions until 10.12 a.m.

Ms WARD — Morning, everyone. Let us have a respectful 10-minute conversation. That would be delightful.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Order! It is government question time.

Mr Smith interjected.

The CHAIR — Order! Mr Smith, you will not berate their witnesses.

Ms WARD — Minister, I do apologise for the behaviour of some of my colleagues. Their rudeness knows no bounds. I would like to get on with my question, if I may, otherwise we will end up with a similar silly scenario to what we had last year where the minister was not able to finish her answers because people kept on talking.

Ms MIKAKOS — I got one question last year from the opposition.

Ms WARD — Minister, I would like you to go back to early childhood reform, please. You spoke about this in your presentation, as well as in budget paper 3, page 54, 'Parenting and maternal and child health'. There is the \$81.1 million that you talked about to expand and strengthen the maternal and child health service and to improve parenting support. Our Chair did talk about children being ready for school, and he did talk at length around kindergartens, and I know it is something that he is very passionate about, as are you.

Can I please also, Minister, thank you for your advocacy on behalf of Victorians to ensure that we do get 5 hours of federal funding for our kinders, because those 15 hours are incredibly important, and I know that in my community it is something that they are very nervous about. They do want to ensure that there are a full 15 hours of funding for four-year-old kinder, and I do not think my community is alone in really wanting that outcome. Minister, with this \$81.1 million, what is within this to help parents or kinders have kids ready for kinder?

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you, Ms Ward, for your question. Can I at the outset, in terms of your preamble, agree with you that it is incredibly important that we continue to press the federal government to give us ongoing funding for the national partnership for universal access to ensure that the 15 hours of kinder can continue to be delivered. Specifically to your question, we are investing \$81.1 million in a range of initiatives to expand and strengthen our maternal and child health service and also parenting programs for families across Victoria. This builds on a record \$133 million investment in the maternal and child health service in last year's budget. These reforms are really designed to improve the quality of our universal services and the types of targeted support that we offer to families.

We are expanding our enhanced maternal and child health service, but this is a targeted service for families with children at risk of poor outcomes due to factors such as premature or low birth weight babies or parental mental health issues. Maternal health nurses use their clinical judgement as well as intake criteria that identify specific risk factors to determine which families need this additional support. Currently the enhanced maternal and child

health service is only funded for 10 per cent of families and runs out when the child turns one, but we know that those needs of a child and the family do not end when a baby has its first birthday, so we are expanding the enhanced maternal and child health service to support 15 per cent of families until their child turns three. This will obviously mean more families get additional support for longer, and when fully implemented this will provide about 37 000 families who are struggling with 20 hours of support across their child's first three years. This is on top of the 10 universal key ages and stages visits. The important thing about the enhanced maternal and child health service is that it also involves home visits, so if a family cannot get into the service, then their qualified nurse will go to the family.

In addition to this, we are also investing in an Australian first — an additional maternal and child health outreach visit for families at risk of or experiencing family violence. This will allow nurses to provide an additional visit to around 12 000 families during the early postnatal period, which is, as the royal commission showed us, the time of heightened family violence risk. These nurses will receive tailored training to help them engage in those difficult conversations about family violence. We are also providing further workforce development support for our nurses. We are very lucky in Victoria in that we have got a very highly skilled workforce. They have got a triple qualification, in fact, to be a maternal and child health nurse, and we are going to continue to support the workforce. We are going to be providing funding for training.

Ms WARD — Now this is incredibly important to lay these foundations for young people and their families. Another important support would be playgroups. How are supported playgroups helping in this space?

Ms MIKAKOS — We are providing \$22.3 million to increase the availability of supported playgroups right across Victoria for the first time. At the moment less than half of our local government areas have a supported playgroup. These are playgroups that have a trained facilitator that works with the families. They are typically targeted at families experiencing disadvantage whose children, research tells us, are at greater risk of poor educational outcomes. So this is an opportunity for parents to learn new parenting skills and develop greater confidence in their children's development, but in addition to that obviously parents being able to have that peer support of engaging with other parents and learning from each other is critically important as well. The funding will obviously make it statewide, which will provide another 750-odd new supported playgroups. This will benefit an additional 6000 families with the supported playgroups.

In terms of other supports for families, just to conclude on the discussion we had about maternal and child health, we also have a phone service, the Maternal and Child Health Line, that exists. It is available every day of the year for families 24/7, and the funding in the budget also provides for more staff so that they can take an additional 20 000 calls each year. This is a really important service, enabling parents to call a qualified maternal and child health nurse and ask questions around babies' feeding or sleeping and other important questions that go to the health and wellbeing of parents as well. So we are going to expand this service so that more families can take advantage of it —

Ms WARD — It is a very important line, Minister. I have used it.

Ms MIKAKOS — and not have to get in the car and drive to their local hospital if they have got a particular concern. They can get that additional support over the phone.

Ms WARD — That line helped me work out that it was the block of chocolate I had eaten that day that was probably preventing my child from sleeping while I was breastfeeding.

Ms MIKAKOS — Very good, Ms Ward. I am pleased it was of some assistance to you.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Thanks, Minister. I do not have a baby story to tell, other than to ask you a bit more about the Koori programs. You mentioned in your presentation 5.4 million for specialised Koori support playgroups as an example but also in an answer to a question from the Chair around disadvantaged groups. I just want to get a sense of the implementation of investments in this budget that assist Koori families to access and engage with early childhood services. Either yourself or one of the officers, what is the implementation body? Is there a governance arrangement? Is there a Koori-related NGO that is helping us to deliver this?

Ms SHING — What role does self-determination play?

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Yes, what role does self-determination play in this kind of investment for Koori families to engage in early childhood services?

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you, Mr Dimopoulos, for that question. We as a government pride ourselves on working very closely with Aboriginal organisations in the spirit of self-determination, and that has certainly guided development of our Koori-specific initiatives. The Deputy Premier and I, together with the Minister for Training and Skills, launched a document called *Marrung*, which is our Aboriginal education plan for Victoria. That document was developed in close partnership with VAEAI, the peak body for Victorian Aboriginal educators, and this has driven a range of initiatives that we are funding in the budget this year.

We have got funding for Koori supported playgroups — \$1.5 million over four years for that — and then there is separate funding, \$3.9 million over four years, for Koori families as first educators. This particular investment will fund Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in five locations with high out-of-home care admission rates and limited access to programs to employ educators at each of these locations to work with Koori families. So we are working very closely with our Aboriginal organisations to deliver these programs.

In addition to this Aboriginal parents and families will be able to take advantage of our prepurchased places, which is also in the budget this year — \$2.3 million for that. We piloted this last year. It is designed to enable families where they do move into — —

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Staley until 10.22 a.m.

Ms STALEY — Thank you, Chair. My question is for the secretary — BP3, page 53, and early childhood intervention services. Secretary, is the transfer of early childhood intervention services, the ECIS, to the NDIS and its rollout, which commenced on 1 July 2016, proceeding on schedule?

Ms CALLISTER — Thank you, Ms Staley. So the 2017–18 budget provided additional funding of 7.2 million over two years to enable more children to benefit from early therapeutic intervention through the state government while they wait to transition to the NDIS. The government currently funds early childhood intervention services and flexible support packages for approximately 13 000 children aged nought to six with developmental delay or disability and their families. Both of these programs are in scope for the NDIS.

The new funding will provide additional ECIS places for more than 800 children commencing in 2017 until the full transition of ECIS services to the NDIS is complete in 2019. This will have the dual benefit of enabling children to access the early childhood intervention services across the state but also enabling ongoing provision for children while their NDIS plans are being prepared. So it will also enable the early childhood intervention sector to increase its capacity to deliver services to those children with developmental delay or disability in preparation for what we anticipate, and have seen already in the Barwon area, as the increased demand for services being brought about by the NDIS. And I have the transition schedule that I could outline for you.

Ms STALEY — I think we have that, don't we? Go ahead.

Ms CALLISTER — So as of 1 January this year Central Highlands local government areas — —

Ms STALEY — No, we have that. That is public record already.

Ms CALLISTER — You understand? Okay.

Ms STALEY — Perhaps you could move to what difficulties have been experienced in the transfer of the ones that we have seen so far to the NDIS.

Ms CALLISTER — Certainly. As part of the bilateral agreement the commonwealth agreed that 1800 children on the waitlist would transition to the NDIS in the first two years of the rollout, but this has been brought forward at the request of the NDIA, and the details of all of these children were provided to the NDIA by January of this year. We have recently become aware of a number of children from the waitlist — that 1800 — whose planning has not yet been undertaken by the NDIA, so we have escalated that issue. We have talked to the agency. We have asked for some more detailed information to determine exactly how many are yet to be contacted, and once that is available we will work with them on a strategy to move that more quickly. If a child is — —

Ms STALEY — Sorry, did you just say you do not yet know, of that 1800, how many have not had the planning done; you are still trying to find that out?

Ms CALLISTER — We have asked for that information from the National Disability Insurance Agency.

Ms STALEY — Are all the children who were receiving early childhood intervention services through previous programs in the areas which have moved to the NDIS — I am particularly interested, I might add, in Central Highlands and Loddon — now receiving their services under the NDIS?

Ms CALLISTER — Well, as the NDIS rolls out all eligible children are referred to — there is a transition for all eligible children to be referred to the NDIA and for them to conduct the planning. So I think, as I just said to you, there has clearly been some early identification of some delays for some children. Where there were any of these hiccups in the first area, down in Barwon, we worked quite closely with the NDIA to assist transition and to support the transition of those children.

Ms STALEY — Sorry, I am now confused. I thought the 1800 you were talking about before were ones who were on waitlists, and I am now asking about ones who were previously in programs — whether they have all transferred. I am missing something.

Ms CALLISTER — I understand they have.

Ms STALEY — Okay. Thank you. You might need to take this on notice, but as at 31 March how many children were on the ECIS waiting list in north-eastern Victoria, north-western Victoria, south-eastern Victoria and south-western Victoria?

Ms CALLISTER — Ms Staley, I will have to take that on notice.

Mr MORRIS — Can we have an indication, for each of those regions, of the number of children who have been on the waiting list for longer than three months, in addition to that?

Ms CALLISTER — I will have to take that on notice too, Mr Morris.

Mr T. SMITH — My question is also to the secretary. Budget paper 3, page 59, the asset funding of 10 million, early childhood development facilities: how much does a standalone kindergarten cost to build, for want of a better description, compared with a co-located kindergarten?

Ms SHING — How long is a ball of string — a small one or a big one?

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Shing!

Ms CALLISTER — I am sorry, Mr Smith, could you just repeat the question?

Mr T. SMITH — How much does a standalone kindergarten cost to plan and then to build compared with a co-located kindergarten — for example, at a primary school?

Ms CALLISTER — I am going to refer the question to Mr Keating.

Mr KEATING — The kindergarten component of the centre will cost between \$2 million to \$4 million.

Mr T. SMITH — Sorry, what was that?

Mr KEATING — A kindergarten, depending on the size, might cost between \$2 million to \$4 million in total, but often that is wrapped up into a much larger integrated centre which might have child and maternal services, consulting suites — a whole range of things — and those can be up to about \$10 million, depending on how the local governments are planning them.

Mr T. SMITH — Co-located?

Mr KEATING — It really depends more on what is integrated into the building. The kinder component is two to four, but if there is a whole range of other services at a co-located centre, then it could be up to 10.

Mr MORRIS — So are the costs for a standalone centre and co-located similar?

Mr KEATING — Yes, I would say essentially the same.

Ms WARD — That is not standalone because it has got other things in it.

Mr KEATING — Yes. If you are talking about just a school and a kindergarten, co-located or separated, the costs are essentially the same.

Ms WARD — No, I think they are talking about just a kinder on its own.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Ward.

Mr MORRIS — I think we can ask the questions. A standalone kinder versus one that is co-located with a school or other facilities.

Mr KEATING — Look, there might be some marginal savings if they are constructed by one builder on one roof line simultaneously, but generally they are constructed — —

Mr MORRIS — Not much?

Mr KEATING — Not much difference.

Mr T. SMITH — For 2018–19 there is an allocation of 6.3 million, 19–20 has 1.8 million and then it tapers off to just 0.3 million in 20–21. This is again for the secretary. Why has 63 per cent of the budget been allocated next year, which happens to be an election year? Could you outline what the 6.3 million will be for, and where will it be spent?

Ms CALLISTER — Mr Smith, can I have the budget paper reference?

Mr T. SMITH — Budget paper 3, page 59, Secretary.

Ms CALLISTER — I will refer it to Mr Keating.

Mr KEATING — We have been running an annual grants program for each of the capital grants. Each financial year we are putting up both grants rounds for the major grants and the minor grants, and in terms of structuring the program we have basically allowed for this number of projects to add up to the value in those forward estimates.

Mr T. SMITH — Yes, I am sure that is the case, sir, but I want to know, that 6.3 million — where is that going?

Mr KEATING — That will be subject to an application process consistent with the children's capital guidelines.

Mr T. SMITH — At the moment you do not have a list you could provide to the committee?

Mr KEATING — If there are projects which are yet to be committed to through the application process, they would not be known — so, in the out year. But of the \$60 million, \$35 million is already committed to for specific projects.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you. Could you provide a list of that to the committee?

Mr KEATING — We would be able to provide a list of all the projects that are agreed to at the moment, yes.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — We might break now till 10.30 a.m., and we will resume with the DHHS component.

Witnesses withdrew.