

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2007–08

Melbourne — 14 May 2007

Members

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Witnesses

Ms L. Neville, Minister for Aged Care;
Mr Y. Blacher, secretary, Department for Victorian Communities;
Mr J. MacIsaac, executive director, youth, seniors, veterans and disability; and
Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

The CHAIR — I welcome today Mr Yehudi Blacher, secretary, Department for Victorian Communities, James MacIsaac, executive director, youth, seniors, veterans and disability, and Stephen Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities. I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes, or less, of the more complex financial performance information relating to the portfolio of aged care, and we will then have hopefully about 40 minutes of questions.

Ms NEVILLE — I will talk briefly about some of the achievements in this area over the 2006–07 period. Promoting seniors participation has been the big focus in the Office of Senior Victorians. We have continued our growth of the Seniors Card and the benefits it offers to Victoria's seniors. It is growing at the rate of about 60 000 new cardholders a year. We also have the maintenance of the seniors festival, which is one of our flagship events. Last year we had 313 events with an estimated attendance at our festival activities and events, including the use of the free public transport offer of approximately 375 000 seniors. This year will be the 25th year of the festival.

We also continue to acknowledge the contribution of significant Victorian seniors, men and women over 60, who have inspired us to make a contribution to our community, and we do this through the Premier's award for Victorian Senior of the Year and the Council on the Ageing Senior Achiever award.

We also place a big emphasis on better protecting senior Victorians. In 2005 we undertook some significant research in relation to elder abuse responses in Victoria and we committed last year to \$5.9 million over four years to initiatives, including establishing a statewide community education service and an older persons legal service. These initiatives will help develop our capacity to respond to this issue.

Mobility is also a critical quality of life issue for senior Victorians, particularly as people age and stop having access to driving. In 2006 we provided money over two years to a project to assist older drivers to maintain their mobility once they had lost their licence. We have also focused on mature age employment. Older workers are increasingly important for maintaining productivity as the population ages, and under our Positive Ageing program in 2005 we funded VECCI \$400 000 over two years to educate and inform the industry about the role older workers play.

Another important area for government has been investing in lifelong learning for older Victorians. Last year's budget contained a significant additional investment of \$1.2 million over four years to expand the University of the Third Age network and also to increase the membership base of the U3A program. As you can see from the graphs there, we have seen a natural growth up until 2006. We estimate a huge increase in the new U3A groups up to 2010, as well as in the second graph a huge increase in the membership of U3As, and we are expecting a growth rate of around 2000 new members per year.

Another significant achievement has been seniors Go for Your Life program activities which support local communities and relevant peak organisations to assist seniors in keeping active. A mid-term evaluation of the projects that we have run has found that we have had about 149 activity programs that have been conducted — walking, strength training, tai chi — and 11 000 people have participated in these projects. We have trained 200 fitness instructors to work specifically with senior Victorians. We have promoted the value of physical activity, and we have got over 300 organisations involved. This just points to some other areas that are the responsibility of other ministers but form part of an overall strategy to better support older Victorians.

Obviously we have some challenges in the aged-care portfolio in relation to the population ageing. For example, by 2051 Victoria can expect 125 per cent increase on today's figure — that is 2 million people aged over 60 years. The ageing of the population will be the most significant in the next 20 years. This, of course, provides some key challenges in terms of reaching out to socially isolated members, working with frail aged and how we continue to encourage senior Victorians to participate and be active in their community.

We will continue to provide a range of programs. A positive ageing program will run throughout the 07–08 financial year; an allocation of \$1.25 million will continue to promote seniors' participation through the Seniors Card and the seniors festival and also our support for U3A networking membership continuing throughout 07–08. We have also got a commitment of \$1.2 million to encourage and support seniors to continue to participate in physical activity through a range of Go for Your Life initiatives. And in the 07-08 period we will also have the statewide information education service under the elder abuse prevention project that will commence.

Some new initiatives in this year's budget include the men's shed; the government made an election commitment to fund \$2 million for an additional 25 men's sheds. DVC will be rolling out this program over the next four years

commencing in the 07-08 budget period. There will also be strength training, which is one of the best ways in which we can encourage older people to be active and also prevent falls and maintain their independence, with \$1.3 million from the Commonwealth Games surplus being available to fund the strength training in local areas. The money will be expended in the 07-08 budget. Also, there is just an indication of the other range of ways in which the government is responding to the challenge of an ageing population and ensuring that senior Victorians continue to participate and engage in our community.

Mr SCOTT — My question is in relation to Men's Sheds, which you just touched on in your presentation and it is also referred to in budget paper 3, page 247. What is the purpose of Men's Sheds and how do they support older men, Minister?

Ms NEVILLE — Many older men, particularly single men over 50, often lack places that provide opportunities for lifelong learning, for health and wellbeing opportunities, for volunteering and for social connection. A Men's Shed is a purpose-built, male-friendly environment; a shed where men within a local community can meet, participate in practical activities and support each other. Research indicates that there are currently about 73 Men's Sheds in Victoria that have been either established or are in the planning stages. Men's Sheds have a diverse range of origins but are generally linked to neighbourhood houses, to health services, to churches or local government organisations. Men's Sheds established in Victoria to date had been very successful in attracting older men who miss out on conventional health, employment, education and training initiatives.

Researchers in men's health have established that older men benefit from socialising and learning in settings that mainly comprise men and that have regular hands-on activities. Men's Sheds are ideal environments for programs for older men who may be experiencing health issues, social isolation, retrenchment or other life-changing experience. Research has also indicated that Men's Sheds play a very important role in drought-affected rural Victoria in assisting men who may be experiencing depression and isolation, to help them engage in health, employment and education initiatives.

The budget provides \$2 million over four years for an additional 25 Men's Shed programs. It will comprise infrastructure grants to construct the facilities which will improve older men's health. It will also fund capacity building and planning grants to establish a sustainable community-based Men's Shed that will be supported by community partnerships at the local level. Further detail on the application process will be available later this year.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Minister, we had Minister Jennings appear before us the other week. We have received an email from Mr Ben Hart, chief of staff to the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, in terms of the ministerial responsibilities of Minister Jennings and Minister Neville, as requested by the PAEC chair, Mr Bob Stensholt. Minister Jennings was asked a question about how much within his portfolio of community services does he have of aged care. It was mentioned in the email, but he mentioned \$1.21 billion of direct budget responsibility.

I note in the email that there is a range of portfolios and you are the Minister for Aged Care. As a preamble, before I get to my substantive question, what is the total budget responsibility that you have as the Minister for Aged Care. If you do not know that, put that on notice, but I think you probably should have it on hand, as the other minister did? I also now refer you to budget paper 3, whilst you are looking at that calculation.

This is more a question on notice — you might be able to provide it in detail later on. Budget paper 3, pages 79 to 81, under 'aged and home care', and budget paper 3, pages 243 and 244, under 'seniors and veterans': Minister, can you explain in detail to the committee which areas of the aged and home care outputs and seniors and veterans outputs fall within your responsibility as the Minister for Aged Care, and what total amount of funding, as I indicated, is attributable to your responsibility?

Ms NEVILLE — As I understand it, the committee was provided with these details when the Minister for Community Services attended — —

The CHAIR — That is correct, and on an overhead as well.

Ms NEVILLE — However, I am very happy to again go through the list of the areas of my responsibility. It is very important that the committee distinguishes between responsibilities for delivering residential and community services for older people requiring care and support and representation with government on other major issues that affect senior Victorians.

For older Victorians who require assistance in the task of daily living, the policy directions are to improve the quality of government residential and community care services and to foster more integrated and flexible local responses to the support and accommodation needs of clients. This is the responsibility of the Minister for Community Services.

There are further significant related whole-of-government policy challenges regarding senior Victorians. The structural ageing of our population presents major challenges. There are going to be not just more senior Victorians proportionally to the rest of the population but more people reaching very advanced ages. An increasing proportion of these seniors will be members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, who as they age will have particular needs.

We are already tackling some significant issues affecting senior Victorians. These include protecting senior Victorians from the risk of elder abuse, improving age-friendly qualities of our local communities, encouraging healthy and active living for seniors and promoting the inclusion of seniors in Victoria's economy and social life.

In my capacity as the Minister for Aged Care I am focused on the whole-of-government policy agenda for population ageing and seniors programs delivered by the Department for Victorian Communities and the Office of Senior Victorians. This delivers a range of seniors access and participation programs. We have the Victorian Seniors Festival, which is a major undertaking; we have a ministerial advisory council on senior Victorians; and I am in process of appointing a new council. I am delighted that we have had such a wide-ranging set of applications from right across Victoria.

We have got the Victorian Seniors Card, as I have said. This is growing at about 60 000 per year, and now there are currently 900 000 seniors who have a card. We have the elder abuse prevention policy, which is another key initiative that is coordinated through the Office of Senior Victorians. We also operate the positive ageing program, which is making considerable progress in meeting some of the challenges of an ageing population.

The labour market is a critical issue to the economy and all of us, particularly to seniors. So structural ageing means that the proportion of people of working age will decrease as a proportion of the population. We have already undertaken one project with VECCI, and the Office of Senior Victorians is now working with employment programs within DVC to help redress skills shortages by promoting improved participation by older Victorians in the labour market.

Also this program is focused on the liveability of our local communities, and we are supporting local government to develop plans and actions to improve the aged-friendly nature of their communities. We have also the healthy and active living for seniors programs. We support a range of initiatives, like the strength training and gentle exercise programs, and, as I indicated, around 11 000 people through the evaluation had already participated.

With have life-long learning programs through the U3A development. I have just spoken about the men's sheds, so I will not go through the details of the men's sheds again. Our ageing policy agenda will increasingly focus on the measures government can take to foster social inclusion of senior Victorians and better respond to the risks of social isolation. One of my major responsibilities as minister is to help to build a more age-inclusive society, where seniors are valued and have ample opportunities to participate in community life.

In short, again reiterating what the Minister for Community Services would have indicated to the committee, the Minister for Aged Care is responsible for statewide seniors-related policy and seniors access and participation programs delivered through the Department for Victorian Communities. The Minister for Community Services is responsible for all matters relating to the policy, planning, funding and delivery of aged-care services in the state.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So the bottom line is, on my understanding, around \$9.1 million?

Ms NEVILLE — Yes, \$9.2 million.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So 9.2 for this year.

Ms GRALEY — Minister, I want to talk about this broad and somewhat curious term for us baby boomers, 'positive ageing'. I refer the minister to budget paper 3, page 243, where it mentions 'seniors grants'. Can you just explain to the committee what kind of initiatives and projects the positive ageing program and the senior grants program cover?

Ms NEVILLE — This project was initiated in fact in the 2004 state budget with a four-year allocation of \$5 million. The purpose is to promote improved quality of life for seniors, and it has done so by promoting change in a whole range of important areas. It supports strategies and initiatives that maximise the quality of life and recognition of senior Victorians. The strategies promote a more age-inclusive society, opportunities for participation, access to information and better understanding of the challenges of positive ageing.

The first three years of the program have supported a range of initiatives to a total of \$3.5 million. The age-friendly communities project, which is our largest investment, provided \$1.3 million to the Municipal Association of Victoria, with a further \$100 000 for an evaluation project. The MAV works in conjunction with the Council on the Ageing and the Office of Senior Victorians to provide grants to local councils for demonstration of projects that promote positive ageing and age-friendly communities. It is also developing tools for local government to help them successfully respond to the ageing of the population in their particular municipalities.

A unique feature of the program is its emphasis on sharing information between funded municipalities and other municipalities. The MAV has day-to-day responsibility for managing this program. We have also funded, as I spoke about briefly before, a workplace employer education partnership project with VECCI, which is a \$400 000 project. There was an education project aimed at small-to-medium businesses, trying to encourage them to attract, develop and retain their older workers.

We have also had a joint initiative with VICNET, which is run through the state library, to improve the internet take-up rate of senior members of our community. We have also had an Images of Age program, which has attempted to redress some of the stereotypical images of older people in the media and some popular misconceptions about ageing. It has supported over 20 theatrical and film projects and provided sponsorship at a cost of around \$220 000. The program also supports a number of smaller initiatives, like the Premier's financial literacy project for older Victorian women, which provided seminars for women in locations around the state as well as support for conferences and workshops on issues affecting older Victorians.

In 06-07 the allocation for positive ageing was \$1.25 million. We have completed the project with VECCI, and we are continuing to fund the MAV/COTA age-friendly communities project as well as some mobility projects with the Department of Infrastructure. We have also got a number of other projects that are in development. This is an important program within the Office of Senior Victorians, and it really is about changing the way that we see older Victorians in our communities.

Ms MUNT — Minister, I recently had the great pleasure of being part of the panel to choose the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians. I can see a couple of other members of the interview panel here today.

It was a great pleasure for me to see how many senior Victorians actually applied to be on this panel and give something back to their community. We spent quite a deal of time, those of us on the panel, ensuring there was representation from various age groups, regions and ethnic backgrounds as best we could, and I came to a much clearer understanding of the work of the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians.

I think it is very important, as an advisory council, for the minister to put forward the needs and views of senior Victorians, so I was wondering if you could please explain to the other members of the PAEC, who might not have the understanding that I have been privileged to gain, what is the role of the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians and what we are expecting from that body over the next few years.

Ms NEVILLE — The Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians provides very valuable advice to the Victorian government in relation to issues of interest to senior Victorians and has done so for a number of years. The previous council's term expired on 24 November, and it was one thing I was very keen to re-establish when I was appointed as minister, so we went through a process of advertising this right across Victoria.

It has certainly been overwhelming in terms of the interest we have received from senior Victorians really right across the board. We received a total of 124 nominations, and they really were from a range of ethnic backgrounds, a range of skills and also a range of geographical locations, from small rural to large regional to metropolitan nominations.

They were advertised right across both mainstream and ethnic media, in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* as well as through all the regional papers and radio. Information kits were also provided to Victorian members of Parliament,

encouraging them to look for leading seniors in their local communities. Media releases were issued, and again that elicited quite a lot of interest in this process.

Just to give you a sense of the value of the ministerial advisory committee it might be worth touching on some of the things that it did in its previous life back in 2006. For example, it worked on some important projects around volunteering and provided some advice to the minister responsible at the time, based on findings from four community round tables that it undertook to better understand what it is that encourages or promotes volunteering in local communities, particularly among senior Victorians.

We certainly all know that senior Victorians play a very fundamental role in supporting our local communities through their volunteer efforts. The report and recommendations for actions were published on the council website and provided to all who participated in the consultation.

The council also played an important role in the development of our elder abuse response. It continued to co-host community forums with the Office of the Public Advocate to encourage senior Victorians to protect their rights through enduring power of attorney, relating to both financial affairs and medical treatment. It held forums in Cheltenham, Geelong, Melton and Morwell during 2006. Special focus forums were also held in Morwell for indigenous elders as part of NAIDOC Week and in Broadmeadows for Arabic-speaking older women in collaboration with the Victorian Arabic Social Services.

Other ongoing issues and activities that they have been involved in and representations they have made to government include issues around: accessible housing; maintaining mobility, through the Department of Infrastructure; as I said, the elder abuse advisory group; advice around the provision of HACC services; participating in the VECCI mature-age workforce project; the age friendly communities project with the MAV; and also the financial literacy project. So you can see they have had a broad-ranging impact and provided a range of advice on issues that government is responsible for.

Mr WELLS — Thank you, Minister. I refer you to the government's state election commitment of \$5.8 million for elder abuse prevention. In the budget estimates of 06–07 Minister Jennings announced that the funding allocation for elder abuse totalled \$5.98 million under the Supporting our Seniors initiative, yet in March 2007 *Promoting the Safety, Dignity and Independence of Senior Victorians* consultation paper published by the Department for Victorian Communities stated that funding for elder abuse would only be 2.64 million.

Can you provide to the committee how much was actually spent on elder abuse in 06–07? Why has the funding decreased from 5.98 to 5.8 million and now, it appears, down to 2.64 — where is the other 3.34? How many cases were actually reported in 2006, and when would you expect the community education and older persons' legal service to be in operation, considering that Minister Jennings said it would be in operation by the end of 2006?

Ms NEVILLE — In the 06-07 budget the government allocated \$5.9 million, which is over four years, to support prevention of abuse of older people. The budget included \$0.3 million to the Department of Justice for the establishment of the older person's legal service, and \$1.23 million was allocated to the Office of Senior Victorians for the statewide education service, whole-of-government coordination, professional education and support, information and revision of the Department of Human Services elder abuse prevention guide. It is a key priority in improving community awareness of elder abuse, which will improve the capacity to identify and respond to instances of elder abuse, which is why we are establishing this service.

Since the allocation of the funds, which total \$5.9 million, significant work has occurred on these initiatives. The Department for Victorian Communities in collaboration with DHS, Victoria Legal Aid and also Victoria Police has prepared an implementation plan which identifies the timetable for implementation of the key initiatives over the next three years.

A consultation paper on how to effectively combine the community education centre and the older person's legal centre was recently released in collaboration with Victoria Legal Aid, and we have received more than 40 submissions in response to this, which will inform the tender documentation.

The consultation process leading up to the tender has been complex due to the decision to combine both the community education service and the older person's legal service, and the tender for the combined service is scheduled for June of this year.

In tandem with the establishment of the combined service, a three-year communication strategy is also currently being developed. The Department for Victorian Communities has been working with the Department of Human Services to review the elder abuse prevention guide, and this will be an important component of our community education process.

We are also currently investigating the most effective ways to promote the development of local area networks, including the use of existing networks such as family violence, the centres for sexual assault, and primary care partnerships, to provide more coordinated and collaborative approaches.

In relation to the expenditure in this financial year, we will take that on notice and provide details to you.

Mr WELLS — It sounds like a lot has been spent on the bureaucracy; we have not had any cases reported through this system yet?

Ms NEVILLE — As I indicated, this system has gone through a consultation because it was felt, after the initial consultation, that we needed to combine the services, that that was going to respond best to the needs of older people who are at risk of abuse, and that both through that process of submission and consultation, we are close to being able to release the tender documents which will be in June of this year.

Mr WELLS — So from June this year, will people be able to start reporting cases of elder abuse?

Ms NEVILLE — A tender is scheduled for June of this year.

Mr WELLS — The tender? So we are still not sure when older people will be able to report abuse?

Ms NEVILLE — The tender is scheduled for June, and the service will be up and operating following the awarding of the tender.

Mr WELLS — Okay.

Mr PAKULA — Budget paper 3, on page 243, makes mention of the Victorian Seniors Card program. I am wondering what achievements there have been and what benefits you see the card providing over the forward estimates period.

Ms NEVILLE — As I indicated, the Seniors Card is extremely popular. There are currently 900 000 Seniors Card holders in Victoria. This is 95 per cent of eligible applicants, so it is a very well supported program that the government provides, and each year it grows at a rate of around 60 000. It provides a number of benefits, for example public transport benefits, access to discount seniors day tickets on the metropolitan transport system, concession rate fares for shorter trips, 50 per cent off senior trips on V-Line services, and additional discounts of up to 65 per cent on off-peak travel three days a week.

Seniors off-peak travel vouchers for two return trips anywhere in Victoria on V/Line-ticketed rail and coach services are also provided if you are a Seniors Card holder. We also provide free public transport on Sundays within metro Melbourne, and on the bus networks in Bendigo, Geelong and Ballarat. Also free public transport is provided during the Victorian Seniors Festival, on both the Met and also selected regional and local bus services and V/Line. The free travel vouchers concession travel at any time on V/Line services and free public transport on Sundays was introduced last year and is funded by the Department of Infrastructure; again, those programs have been are extremely well taken up.

Other benefits provided if you are a Seniors Card holder in Victoria include discounts at over 3000 participating businesses, and free entry to Scienceworks, the Melbourne Museum and the Immigration Museum. We also have free fishing in Victorian waters for Seniors Card holders and many senior Victorians welcome that, as a lot of them are recreational fishing people.

The Seniors Card and its benefits are promoted to seniors through a whole range of mechanisms. Directories of discount providers are mailed on a regular basis to Seniors Card holders, providing them with up-to-date information on the benefits that they can receive from having a card: the latest edition of the Metropolitan Retail and Services Directory and also the rural and regional retail and services directory were mailed out to over 580 000 Seniors Card holders last year.

Also monthly listings of new businesses that are joining the program are in the two major seniors newspapers, which are very well-read papers — *50-Plus News* and the *Victorian Senior* — and we have a monthly calendar of events in the *Victorian Senior* newspaper, and also we have a website. As I said, the Seniors Card provides a lot of benefits to seniors and that is illustrated by the take-up rate and the participation rate in the Seniors Card program that we operate.

Dr SYKES — Minister, my question tends to follow on from the presentation you have just done. It relates to maintaining the mobility of aged country Victorians. I just pick up on public transport — and I have raised this with the transport minister. First of all, in relation to seniors travelling to Melbourne for example for the Seniors Festival, I had a lot of concerns raised with me last year, as did my colleagues, about the relatively low number of seats available on the trains to get to the festival. So in principle the offer was there but in reality it was difficult to take up.

Secondly, with people further away than, say, Seymour, Ballarat or Bendigo, the travel times are such that it is often necessary for someone, to attend a festival activity in Melbourne, to either come down the day before or return the day after. So there is a need to fill a gap, ensuring that those concessions consistently apply the day before and the day after, not needing to be put in place after there are clamours from the bush. Equally there were issues raised by me with the minister for transport in relation to the train scheduling and frequency that impact on the ability of country Victorians to take advantage of off-peak travel concessions.

One other issue that is causing concern is the issue of the multipurpose taxi program, which has been through some changes and generally, after a bad period, has come back to being better. Interestingly the lack of availability of public transport in country Victoria is not a criterion for the frail elderly being able to access the multipurpose taxi program. I would suggest if that was included, that would achieve your objective of enabling people to age and live independently for a much longer time.

I guess my question to you, Minister, is: will you take on board the issues that I am raising and ensure appropriate policy adjustments to ensure that what I believe you are intending to achieve is in fact achieved for country Victorians; and, if necessary, will you allocate what I would consider relatively minor additional sums to the budget to ensure that Victorians get the same deal as their city colleagues?

The CHAIR — Minister, insofar as you can answer, given several other portfolios are involved.

Ms NEVILLE — That is right. There are a number of issues that touch on other responsibilities. Those services are the responsibility of other ministers, particularly in relation to the minister for transport.

Dr SYKES — But there is an underlying principle in your portfolio of looking after the interests of the aged.

The CHAIR — The minister accepts that.

Ms NEVILLE — As I indicated earlier in my presentation, the Seniors Festival is a well-patronised event every year. I think about 370 000 people participated in events during that period. They were people from right across Victoria. So they are participating in local communities and sometimes also participating in Melbourne. Again, like in previous years, Senior Card holders last year were able to travel free on all metropolitan services and some selected regional bus services and V/Line services during those periods of time over the five-day period.

As I said, 375 000 people is the average attendance that we received last year. There were certainly some congestion issues because of the number of people who were participating in the Seniors Festival particularly on the V/Line network which is, in a sense, a good news story. People from across Victoria want to come together here in Melbourne and participated and enjoy their activities that we have on offer as part of Seniors Week.

This year we will be doing some work to emphasise to seniors intending to travel during Seniors Week that it would be advisable to book ahead where they can. Often people are planning their journeys so to book ahead and actually get — —

Dr SYKES — Are you going to increase the number of seats though or is it going to be first in, best dressed?

Ms NEVILLE — We are trying to encourage seniors to book as early as possible to ensure they get allocated a seat. This is the work that we are — —

Dr SYKES — So there are no new seats?

The CHAIR — So it is first in, best dressed, is it?

Ms NEVILLE — The Department of Infrastructure is aware of the capacity issue so it is something we have certainly raised with it and some of the challenges along Victoria's transport during the time of Seniors Week. We are trying to encourage seniors to take advantage of this free transport during that time and participate in a festival, but also make sure that they are able to book ahead so that they actually get a seat on the service that they require.

Broadly in relation to mobility issues, it is something that the government has taken seriously. I spoke a little bit about the projects that the Office of Senior Victorians has been involved in in terms of mobility issues. We have certainly contributed money to other projects like transport connections, which is a project that is jointly funded by the Department of Human Services and the Department for Victorian Communities.

This funding supported some pilot projects in rural and regional Victoria in local government areas, with particularly higher levels of an ageing population. This was about looking at alternative mechanisms to connect local communities to ensure isolated older members of our community were able to use a method of transport to bring them to social activities and recreational activities.

The pilot found that through the pilot process, it was able to develop and trial a whole range of different transport services. We were able to improve access to information about little local transport solutions and improve coordination between local agencies to improve their access for people who have poor transport options.

In relation to the broader projects that you referred to like access to public transport, it is the responsibility of the Minister for Public Transport. I suggest that the committee directs those questions directly to the minister responsible. However, I will say that obviously the Office for Senior Victorians will continue to be interested in the broader policy issues around mobility for older Victorians. We know that the more active and engaged older Victorians are in the community, the better their health and welfare outcomes are.

Dr SYKES — Can I take that as a yes? The issues that I am raising with you are currently — we will call it — fine tuning of some of the policies that you have in place. Will you take those concerns on board and if you need more information, will you come back to me or other members representing country electorates?

Ms NEVILLE — Certainly, we will continue to have an interest in these issues. Like I indicated, the ministerial advisory committee continued to provide advice on this matter last year and so certainly like the office responsible for senior Victorians, in all of these areas there are issues in which we have an interest.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. It is good to see you have mechanisms for continuing to develop policy for aged care.

Just a few things: there is a question on notice here regarding the Seniors Sunday Pass, which I will pass to the secretariat. I would like perhaps Mr Gregory to do a bit of homework to reconcile table 2.10.1 in budget paper 4 regarding output appropriations with what is in the output summary in budget paper 3 at page 235. I do not want an answer now, but he can take it on notice.

I have also asked in the past for departmental responses in regard to what services they expect to provide, both in terms of resources and staff, in servicing this committee next year, bearing in mind our experience over the last few years.

That concludes the consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of mental health, children and aged care. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance. It was a good session. Where questions have been taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date, and we would like responses to those within 30 days. They will be used and taken into consideration for the further reporting of this committee to Parliament.

Committee adjourned.