

# TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2018–19

Melbourne — 31 May 2018

#### Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair	Ms Sue Pennicuik
Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair	Ms Harriet Shing
Mr Steve Dimopoulos	Mr Tim Smith
Mr Danny O'Brien	Ms Vicki Ward
Ms Fiona Patten	

#### Witnesses

Ms Jenny Mikakos, Minister for Families and Children,  
Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary,  
Ms Julia Griffith, Deputy Secretary, Youth Justice,  
Ms Jodi Henderson, Executive Director, Youth Justice Operations, and  
Mr Richard Wittmack, Director, Major Programs and Projects Office, Department of Justice and Regulation;  
and  
Ms Kym Peake, Secretary,  
Mr Greg Stenton, Chief Finance Officer,  
Ms Chris Asquini, Deputy Secretary, Children, Families, Disability and Operations,  
Ms Annette Lancy, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Family Safety Victoria,  
Mr Argiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary, Children and Families Reform,  
Mr Mick Naughton, Director, Children and Family Policy, and  
Mr Stuart Lindner, Director, Service Implementation and Support, Department of Health and Human Services.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2018–19 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; Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation; Ms Julia Griffith, Deputy Secretary, Youth Justice; Ms Jodi Henderson, Executive Director, Youth Justice Operations; and from the Department of Health and Human Services, Ms Kym Peake, Secretary. In the gallery: from DJR there is Mr Richard Wittmack, Director, Major Programs and Projects Office; and from DHHS Mr Greg Stenton, Chief Finance Officer; Ms Chris Asquini, Deputy Secretary, Children, Families, Disability and Operations; Ms Annette Lancy, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Family Safety Victoria; Mr Argiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary, Children and Families Reform; Mr Mick Naughton, Director, Children and Family Policy; and Mr Stuart Lindner, Director, Service Implementation and Support.

Any witness who is called from the gallery during this hearing must clearly state their name, position and relevant department for the record.

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

The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, 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. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, any PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Witness advisers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

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. This will be followed by questions from the committee. Minister.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to committee members for the opportunity today to talk about my 2018 budget outcomes and explain how the government is supporting families, protecting children and building better communities. This year's budget allocates \$1 billion 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 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 the youth justice system.

Since 2014–15 we have increased our annual child and family services budget investment by \$704 million, an increase of 69 per cent. In every budget the government has invested heavily to support the *Roadmap for Reform*, which I launched in 2016, with unprecedented investment to support children, families and young people. The vision for this investment and associated reforms is that all children reach their full potential by living and thriving in safe and supportive families, where they have strong attachments to parents, kin, carers and community and can embrace their cultural and spiritual identity.

Over the last four years our expansion of family services, recruitment of new child protection workers and improved risk assessment have all seen a slowing in the past 12 months of past growth trends in child protection demand. In fact over the last 12 months that growth was at 4 per cent, compared to 17 per cent during the 2015–

16 financial year. We have also seen a slowing in the numbers of children entering out-of-home care in the past 12 months.

In 2018–19 the government has once again invested significantly in the *Roadmap for Reform*, with commitments to improve interventions for vulnerable children by transforming Victoria's children and family services system, moving it from crisis response to prevention and early intervention. This includes \$112.1 million for a range of services that provide support for family preservation and reunification. This will support thousands of families and children. Parents, especially those with young children, will get the extra help that they need much earlier through investment in family services and other early intervention programs, and evidence-based programs working intensively with families will also be funded.

This budget continues the government's commitment to protecting vulnerable children through the continued support of after-hours child protection services and the continued expansion of the child protection workforce. This includes \$225.5 million to employ more than 450 new child protection practitioners across the state, the biggest ever expansion of our child protection workforce. The After Hours Child Protection Emergency Service is a statewide service that receives new reports of child abuse or neglect, along with concerns for existing child protection clients, and the government has provided continued funding since 2015 for both more staff and significant IT upgrades. As a result, average wait times have fallen by more than 95 per cent, with the average wait time now down to 25 seconds, compared to an average wait of 7 minutes in 2014.

In this budget there is a continued focus on placing children who need to go into out-of-home care with a loving family, with \$390.7 million for more home-based care placements and better support for carers, including a new kinship care model. Continued targeted care packages will help transition children out of residential care. These have already seen more than 550 children and young people move out of or prevented from entering residential care since the commencement in 2015.

We are testing new programs to provide intensive supports for children and their families to keep siblings together and to help young people leaving care transition to independent adulthood. This includes an Australian first, an evidence-based model of professionalised foster care which supports complex children and young people with intensive support from highly trained carers to stabilise them and resettle them with a family. The new model of kinship care will identify carers earlier, strengthen community connections for Aboriginal children in care and deliver better and more flexible support.

Central to the *Roadmap for Reform*, the 2018–19 budget investment is a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and self-management, with \$47.3 million going towards supporting the implementation of the *Wungurilwil Gagapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*, a groundbreaking tripartite partnership between the Aboriginal communities, the government and community service organisations. This includes Australian-first programs to enable Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to take on legal guardianship of Aboriginal children, to enable them to take on the management of Aboriginal children in care, for cultural plans to be developed and to drive innovation.

This budget builds on the record family violence investment of the 2017–18 budget, with more therapeutic counselling for victim survivors of family violence and more flexible support packages to help with relocation costs, furniture, clothing and security measures. Victims of sexual assault will also get more access to counselling support, and there is more funding for adolescent family violence programs.

Neighbourhood houses play an important role in building social capital in local communities and improving health, wellbeing and resilience, so \$21.8 million will see the biggest funding boost to neighbourhood house coordination hours ever and represents almost eight times more than what was delivered under the previous Liberal government, and \$21.7 million will see the first increase in a decade to the annual cap on the utility relief grant scheme. It will help low-income families experiencing unexpected hardship and will also provide even more support to our volunteers.

Over the past four years we have provided over \$1 billion to deliver a much-needed transformation of our youth justice system and to address the recommendations of the landmark Armytage-Ogloff youth justice review, the first independent review of our youth justice system in more than 17 years. This is more than double the previous government's expenditure during their time in government. This includes an additional \$145 million in the 2018–19 budget to build on the record investment our government has already made to strengthen and improve the system. Our continued investment in youth justice has created more than 280 new jobs across the

youth justice system. We have invested over \$429 million to strengthen and build new youth justice infrastructure, including \$288 million for the new fit-for-purpose, high-security youth justice facility at Cherry Creek. This is a 580 per cent increase in infrastructure investment compared to the previous government. Consistent with previous years, a decline is continuing in the number and proportion of young people being supervised in the youth justice system under community-based orders.

By contrast the proportion of young offenders in custody continues to increase, and the budget papers make it clear that this trend is expected to continue as a result of our government's tough reforms to bail and sentencing laws. That is why in the 2017–18 budget update the government announced \$79.6 million to build 68 additional secure beds at Parkville and Malmsbury, including a new and more secure perimeter fence at Malmsbury. In this year's budget we have invested a further \$73 million to ensure we have the right people in place to bring our new secure custodial beds on line. An additional \$2.5 million is provided to expand structured day programs in custody outside of school hours to ensure an effective balance between delivery of rehabilitation, education and training, health services and pro-social activity. We are also investing nearly \$18.7 million to ensure young people in custody have access to appropriate health and mental health services available in the community. This includes increased nursing staff numbers, increased general practitioner services and additional psychologists to deliver mental health counselling.

We are partnering with the Koori Caucus to establish an Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy as part of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. This government has provided nearly \$11 million to support this strategy, including over \$5 million to ensure the continued success of the Koori youth justice program. A further \$13 million over four years and ongoing funding is provided to ensure the Children's Court youth diversion service continues across Victoria. We also know that more needs to be done at the prevention end of the system, particularly for CALD groups of young people, who are overrepresented in youth justice. That is why the budget commits an additional \$15 million to support a whole-of-government approach to preventing youth offending.

The government has undertaken extensive work to stabilise and strengthen the youth justice system over the past four years. This has included significant investment in infrastructure improvements, a dedicated recruitment campaign to build our workforce and additional training to support our existing staff and keep young people safe. Our 2018–19 budget continues this work, including to fund Corrections Victoria security and emergency services group — SESG — staff and an improved intelligence-gathering function across both youth justice precincts. We have also implemented a new behaviour management model in custody and have trained all staff in the model to ensure they have strategies to manage unacceptable behaviour. Some have also received tactical options training. We are delivering a comprehensive suite of legislative reforms to ensure that those responsible for serious offending are dealt with appropriately, including through the Children and Justice Legislation Amendment (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017 which has legislated for longer sentences for serious offending. We have also released the Armytage-Ogloff review — as I mentioned earlier, the first independent review of the youth justice system in 17 years — and accepted all 126 recommendations either in full or in principle. This government has already invested \$50 million to address the review's priority recommendations in the budget update in December. This included funding for a new classification and placement service to ensure young people are assessed and are appropriately and safely placed in our centres.

In summary, our government has taken the action needed to provide early intervention and reduce the demand on the child protection system and the number of kids going into care. We have increased supports for victims of family violence and sexual assault. We have improved Victoria's safety by creating a more secure youth justice system.

Chair, thank you. I look forward to your questions and those of the committee members.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, the budget paper reference is budget paper 3, page 93, and I will also refer to comments you made in your presentation about additional beds in youth justice facilities. Can you outline to the committee why there is a need for these additional beds in the youth justice facilities?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you very much, Chair. The Andrews Labor government is getting on with the job of overhauling the youth justice system, one that targets violent offending and keeps staff and the community safe. To date we have provided over \$1 billion into the youth justice system. Late last year the government committed \$79.6 million to build 68 new secure beds and security infrastructure across the Parkville and Malmsbury precincts. This includes an additional 36 secure beds at Parkville and 32 secure beds at Malmsbury.

This year's budget invests an additional \$73 million to operate these new secure units, including a new and more secure perimeter fence and gatehouse at the Malmsbury Youth Justice Precinct. These new secure beds will meet rising demand as a result of our record investment and sweeping reforms to the criminal justice system, including an additional 3135 new police officers as well as our sweeping reforms to bail and sentencing.

This also includes the Children and Justice Legislation Amendment (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017, which passed the Parliament late last year. It was part of Victoria's largest ever suite of legislative measures to keep the community safe, particularly in respect of youth offending. Legislative changes included longer detention periods, more intensive control programs, a new offence for adults who use children to commit crime and stronger consequences for young people who commit crimes whilst in detention, and these are now in effect. Members of the committee might recall that in fact this was a bill that the opposition tried to scuttle in the Legislative Council. The budget papers show very clearly that there is an increase in the number of young offenders being placed in custody, and I certainly alluded to that in my presentation just before. This is projected to continue as a result of our legislative changes and our other reforms.

Expansion works are already progressing at our various sites, particularly with the Macedon Ranges Shire Council approving our planning application, meaning that works can begin, and Kane Constructions Pty Ltd was recently awarded the contract across both locations. A community advisory group has also been established to ensure that locals have their say in relation to issues at the Malmsbury Youth Justice Precinct including the upcoming expansion works. The community advisory group includes many local residents who have strong connections to the community. These works will allow us to meet demand until the new facility at Cherry Creek comes online in 2021.

**The CHAIR** — I refer you to budget paper 3, page 98, where the second dot point refers to a new and more secure perimeter fence at Malmsbury. Can you outline to the committee why that is required or why that investment is taking place?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — This year's budget includes funding for a new and more secure perimeter fence around the secure accommodation areas at Malmsbury, as well as a new gatehouse to increase community safety. It has been very concerning to me as the responsible minister to find that things that should have been put in place when the secure site was commissioned at Malmsbury during the time of the previous government were not done so properly. It is very clear that what was built at Malmsbury was a secure facility that I have characterised on other occasions as a gingerbread house. We have had young offenders being able to leave that facility because it was poorly designed and it was understaffed, and we have had to fix this mess. We have had to invest \$46 million to improve security and the infrastructure at Malmsbury, which is the same amount of funding that the previous government committed to building the secure site at Malmsbury in the first place. So if it was done properly in the first place, we would not have had to put in this significant additional investment, but we are addressing these problems at Malmsbury and we are making sure that that community feels confident about the additional fencing that is being put in as well as the fortification works that have occurred at Malmsbury and the standard at which the new beds are going to be built at Malmsbury.

**The CHAIR** — Can you indicate to the committee in a little bit more detail — obviously in a confidential way, without breaching any confidentiality — about the type or the nature of the fortifications? Also, I think you mentioned increased staffing levels too at youth justice facilities. Can you just inform the committee a little bit more about what that might entail?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. In the budget last year our government allocated \$72 million to repair, strengthen and fortify both the Parkville and Malmsbury youth justice centres. This included the hardening of ceilings, installation of custodial doors, security of windows and frames, improvement of the overall fit-out and the condition of accommodation units and the program centre. In addition to this, SESG staff and Corrections Victoria are now located at both of our youth justice facilities. They also have the ability to deploy OC spray and to take other measures in the event of a serious incident occurring. Improved intelligence gathering has been put in place at both of our youth justice precincts. This was a capability that we did not have previously and is similar to what exists in our adult prison system. Effectively it allows our youth justice staff to better track and disrupt dangerous criminal associations and loose network affiliations and to prevent antisocial incidents from occurring whilst in custody.

What I can add further is that we know the previous government did not act on the 2010 Ombudsman report; in fact they shelved the master plan and they did nothing to plan for the future. So we funded \$288 million to build

a new fit-for-purpose, high-security youth justice precinct at Cherry Creek. That facility will have 224 beds for remand and sentenced young offenders. A 12-bed mental health unit and an eight-bed intensive supervision unit will come online from 2021. We have also been responding to the Armytage-Ogloff review that I have mentioned already with our initial \$50 million response late last year. We have set up a targeted recruitment campaign. We have funded 21 additional safety and emergency response team staff as part of that. Tactical response training has been delivered to all safety and emergency response teams — SERT staff — and is being rolled out to all youth justice workers to help them prevent and respond to violent and antisocial incidents in custody. This training —

**The CHAIR** — Order! We might come back to that, Minister.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Good afternoon, Minister. Good afternoon, secretaries and staff. My first question is to the secretary, Ms Peake. In February we asked you questions about the number with respect to unmet demand for child protection workers — that is, the unallocated cases. You gave us information in percentage terms — 19 per cent I think was the figure that was unallocated — and you agreed to take on notice the actual number that we are chasing. When the department provided a response on notice it still gave us the percentage terms. Can you give us the numbers in actual numbers of unallocated cases?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Can I just get some clarity from the Chair first, if I may. As I understood it, we were going to do the DJR questions first and then switch over to DHHS. I just wanted to get some clarity from the committee on whether that is still in fact the case. As I understood it, that was the advice that we had had from the Chair.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — The secretary is at the table, Chair, and the reason I am asking this is that we have been asking it for a number of years and have not got an answer. If we do not have an answer now, we have got 2 hours in which the department can perhaps go and find the information for that.

**The CHAIR** — I will let the question stand. The only qualification I would mention is that this is the estimates inquiry. The inquiry you are referring to obviously was the outcomes hearings. So if the secretary is able to provide any advice for the current financial year, which I think Mr O'Brien is seeking the numbers about, that would be in order.

**Ms PEAKE** — Thanks, Mr O'Brien, for the question. I think it is important just to explain why we focus on the percentages, and that is because it does give us a clearer picture of efficiency in the program. I think, as you will have heard in the minister's presentation, that it is really clear that we have had substantial growth in the reports coming through to child protection — the numbers of children who are in both the child protection service and out-of-home care service — and those numbers change during the day and every single day. So we have been focused on the BP3 measure around the allocation rate, because it actually shows us over time what is happening in efficiency in the program. What I can inform the committee is that as a result of the recruitment that the minister referred to and the additional workers that have come online earlier this year we are seeing some really positive improvements in that allocation rate.

So at the end of last year — and you will remember from my answer earlier in the year — we were sitting at around 79 per cent of cases being allocated. We are now, as of the end of April, at 85 per cent of cases being allocated, and that is up from around 81 per cent that we saw in 2014, and that has really been a product of three things. It has been a product of the improvements in bringing through a pipeline of workforce staff who have been able to carry cases, and we have done a significant body of work to make sure that we are both having more student placements and better relationships with universities, so we are seeing more students come through and join the child protection program. But we also have done a lot of work in making sure that we are recruiting from interstate and overseas more experienced practitioners, so that as we grow our workforce we have more experienced workers who can take on more complex cases as well.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, that is good, and that is very similar to the answer you gave me in February, and it is the same answer the minister gave in Parliament last week. I go back to the question: can you provide us now with the actual number of cases that are unallocated?

**Ms PEAKE** — That is not a figure I have with me, and, as I have explained, because it changes —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, can I go back to the —

**Ms PEAKE** — Mr O'Brien, I just do want to be really clear. It changes every single day.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Can I read to you some of the quotes from the transcript in February. I asked, '... could you perhaps explain what 19 per cent equates to in actual numbers as well?'. Your response, 'Certainly, yes'. You then gave a similar answer to what you have just given me now. I said, 'I am not sure if I got an answer to the question on the number that it equates to'. 'Yes. I am happy to take that on notice', was your response. I tried again three times. 'I am happy to take it on notice', again you said, and then finally, 'Again, I will have to take that on notice. It is certainly data that we release'. Now, Secretary —

**Ms PEAKE** — The allocation rate is data we release.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, Secretary, if you have got a —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — And in fact it is released quarterly, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry, Minister, I am talking to the secretary. If this is a question that you have a percentage figure for, I understand that it will change, but to have a percentage you have to have the original number. If you can say there is 15 per cent unallocated, that is fine. Does that mean 10 kids? Does it mean 10 000 kids? These are actual children that need support. It is not that hard to provide us with a figure. If you can give us a percentage, you can give us an actual number.

**Ms PEAKE** — And, as I have indicated, Mr O'Brien, again I am happy to take that away, but it will —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, no, Secretary, we have had it taken away for the last four years.

**Ms PEAKE** — It will be different day to day.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry?

**Ms PEAKE** — It will be different day to day, which is why we look over time at that percentage.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — But if you can give us a percentage — to work out a percentage, you have to have actual numbers.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Things are worked out over time. The secretary just told you.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Then give us the figures over time. Give us the figures for last financial year; give us what it is at the moment. This should not be that hard and this committee has now been told, Chair, three times in the last hearings, 'We'll take that on notice', and it has not been provided. I am asking again for the department to provide us with the actual figure. Now, you can give it to us on the 17–18 numbers to date, you can give us an update on 16–17. You have said that this data is data that we release, but you are not actually providing us with a number.

**Ms PEAKE** — I am very happy to take that again. I am very happy to take it away, but, as I have indicated, I do think that in terms of the substance of your question about the performance of the program —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — If I could just add further —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, if the percentage is provided over a period of time, then you must have numbers over a period of time. If you can tell me that there is 15 per cent of cases unallocated — these are kids that are not being looked after by a caseworker —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Well, that is actually not correct, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — No, Minister, hang on. I am asking the questions here of the secretary.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — But the premise of your question is actually incorrect.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — If you can give me a percentage, then you can give us a number, and we have asked this for years now and we are still getting blocked by the department refusing to answer this question. We have

got an hour and a half or so to go. Surely in that time if you can tell me that 15 per cent is unallocated, you can tell me what that figure is based on actual numbers of children.

**Ms PEAKE** — Mr O'Brien, I am happy to go away and look at that. What I just do really want to clarify though is that a suggestion that children who are not allocated to a primary worker are not allocated is not correct.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — They are allocated to a team; I understand that. You said that to us last time, but this is a critical question and I am sure the minister and the department understands how important this is. We understand how difficult this sector is, but it is not that hard to provide us with a number.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — We have put a 36 per cent increase in the child protection workforce, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — As I said, the number could be 10 kids, in which case, 'Hey, we are doing all right'. If it is 10 000, then that is a serious concern for the Victorian community, and it is incumbent on the department to answer this committee's questions.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Well, if I could add — rather than, Mr O'Brien, you haranguing the secretary — that we have put in a greater level of transparency around these matters. We publish the allocation rate on a quarterly basis, which was never the case under the previous government.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Minister, the discussion for the last 5 minutes indicates that you are not providing transparency.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — In fact the latest quarterly data is actually up on the department's website. The quarterly data, the latest quarterly data, is actually on the department's website. We have provided a level of transparency around these matters that has never existed before. Quarterly data on a range of performance measures is published quarterly.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Until the department's annual report in 2016–17 this data was reported. That was the first time that it was not reported as a number.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — No, it is also published on the department's website on a quarterly basis. The percentage —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So you are telling me the actual number is published on —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — No, the allocation rate, and the secretary explained why, because that is how you look at the historical trends and comparisons over time, and that was in fact reported as a percentage as well during your time of government, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Minister, do you understand how percentages work? You take two numbers —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you for that, Mr O'Brien. Perhaps if you invested \$10 and bought a calculator, you could work out what the number of cases was.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — But I would only be able to do that, Minister, if I had the actual numbers to start with. To get a percentage of 15 per cent allocation rate you have to have the numbers. I am still trying to work out why these numbers, despite the committee asking several times and being assured that they would be provided on notice, you cannot provide them to us.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Your government published them as a percentage —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — No, you are the government, Minister. You are the minister.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — We are now putting them up, and we are now publishing them quarterly as well as annually.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — You are not publishing them. Can you, please —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — In fact the secretary has just advised you that the most recent data is that we have had a significant improvement to the allocation rate of 85 per cent —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — In the next hour and a half can you please provide us with this number?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — which compares to just under 81 per cent during the time of the change of government.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So what is that 85 per cent calculated on, Minister?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — So that is a direct result of our reforms and increasing our child protection workforce by 36 per cent. We are making the investments and the reforms necessary to address these issues, Mr O'Brien, and as the secretary has attempted to explain to you —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — You are not addressing the question that this committee —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Ms Pennicuik until 1.06 p.m.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — All children do receive support.

**The CHAIR** — Order! Minister!

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you, Minister. Thank you, secretaries, deputy secretaries and staff for attending today. Minister, it is sort of on the same issue, where I am talking about child protection. Acknowledging that throughout the budget papers — so we look at page 72, which outlines the amounts spent in this area, and it describes it on pages 76 and 77 — and in your own presentation there is certainly significant funding allocated to child protection, but there are still concerns in the sector that the number of children is increasing. It is difficult to ascertain whether the increase in spending is actually just keeping up with population growth and the number of children entering the child protection system, so I just wonder if you are able to provide the amount that has been spent per child in the system this year and for the forward estimates, particularly in terms of breaking that down into supporting children in the home and supporting children in out-of-home care.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, Ms Pennicuik, for your question. Firstly, you alluded to sector concerns. Can I say to you that we are working extremely closely with community sector organisations around the *Roadmap for Reform*, and they have been very supportive of the reforms that we have been putting in place and the investment that we have made, and it has been a very significant, real investment, as I alluded to in the presentation right at the outset. I just would want to get a little bit more clarity on whether you are referring to costs per child for child protection or for children in out-of-home care, because obviously they are different sets of numbers.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Well, let us have a look at children in out-of-home care to start with; it makes it simpler. Has that amount increased, or is the significant increase just keeping up with the significant population growth and the significant numbers of children in out-of-home care?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Look, we will take your specific question on notice in terms of you wanting funding per child to see what data we can provide you in relation to that particular issue, but the point that I would like to make in relation to out-of-home care is that we have actually put in place new reforms, new measures, that had not existed before. For example, we have had new supports for carers; the introduction of Carer KaFÉ, which is actually a formalised training system for our foster carers and our kinship carers on issues like trauma that they have never had before; our professionalised foster care model, which is an Australian first that has never existed before; a new sibling model to keep siblings together; targeted care packages to move 550 kids out of residential care. So that is new funding, new measures that we have implemented as a government, but certainly we will see what we can provide you in terms of data.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you, Minister. I am just intervening now because I think we have got 30 seconds left. So it is the —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Well, I can give you some further detail. Over the past 10 years the average out-of-home care growth in Victoria was 8 per cent, with the highest of 20 per cent in 2013–14. There has been sustained growth year on year in out-of-home care. However, that growth in 16–17 slowed to 6 per cent, so we are seeing a slowing, as I referred to earlier, both in child protection demand and out-of-home care —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Okay, so any information you can provide on the breakdown would be great.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — but we have been providing new investment and putting in place new reforms.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Acknowledging that, I am just trying to dig down into the detail a bit.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Good afternoon, Minister and officers. Minister, just before I go onto my substantive question, could either yourself or secretary Peake clarify, because I am a bit muddled after the line of questions by Mr O'Brien that did not seem to make much sense. Has the way the data is reported changed in this term of government in terms of the allocated or unallocated cases we were talking about?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — No. My understanding is that the figure has been presented as a percentage for a number of years, and that enables the department and the community to track the efficiencies as a result of various measures and investments that have been put in place.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — So effectively this hullabaloo is nothing new, what Mr O'Brien is going on about?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — And, Mr Dimopoulos, I would add that we as a government have put in a far greater level of transparency in that we are now publishing the allocation rate on a quarterly basis on the department's website. The most recent quarterly data for the first quarter for this year is available for people to view —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Previously was it annually?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — There was an annualised figure published only under the previous government. Not only are we publishing the allocation rate, but we are also publishing a range of other performance measures on a quarterly basis.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — So in effect while the line of questioning, in my view, tried to insinuate something untoward, in fact, if anything, there is more transparency in how the data is reported to the Victorian community. In fact, like you said, a 36 per cent increase in the workforce — a historic proportion. So I just want to clarify that —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Well, Mr Dimopoulos, when you have seen unprecedented investment under our time in government and you are actually seeing that translate into better outcomes for children and families, then I guess you need to clutch at straws in order to try and beat this up into something. But I would make the point, further to the secretary's point that she was attempting to explain to Mr O'Brien, that where a case is unallocated, attention is still being paid to the child. Each child is the responsibility of a team and ultimately a team manager. Where something needs to happen for the child, the team manager does the work themselves or assigns the task to a child protection practitioner. So team managers are actively monitoring the allocation of cases and case work and prioritising a response to changing circumstances in the best interests of the children for whom they are responsible. Obviously we are working to address the historic underinvestment that has occurred in our child protection system. That is why we have put in record funding. This is why we are growing our workforce in particular by 36 per cent.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — I might take you to just one last thing before I get to what I wanted to ask you, rather than cleaning up the mess left by others. Effectively the nature of the reporting requirement, in terms of reporting percentages, is because of the nature of the dynamic business we are in, which is that it changes hour by hour, not just day by day. I understand that; thank you. Nothing has changed other than more transparency, so I appreciate your clarification.

I want to get on to the mental health supports for young people in custody — it is budget paper 3, page 93, and page 98 makes reference to the additional funding. I just want to get a sense from you about what exactly is that additional funding, so for both health and mental health services, that young people are getting in custody.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you for your further question. We know that young people in youth justice have complex health needs, and that is why health and mental health services are essential across our youth justice custodial precincts. The 2018–19 budget provides \$18.7 million for additional health and mental health services to young offenders in custody to support their health and rehabilitation. This ensures young people in custody have access to appropriate physical and mental health services similar to those that exist in the community. Additional primary health services funded through this budget include increases in nurses and doctors at the

Parkville and Malmsbury youth justice precincts, new clinical staff to safely administer medication to young people in custody, increased dental and radiology services, and the establishment of electronic medical records to support quality health service provision to young offenders in custody. Additional mental health services provided through this budget include trained psychologists at each custodial centre who provide mental health-related counselling.

So we are expecting to see improved outcomes from this increased service. That will include enhanced nursing response for timely assessments, enhanced access for young people to see a doctor, improved mental health through onsite counselling, safe administration of medication and greater collaboration with rehabilitative services through access to health information. This builds, I should add, Mr Dimopoulos, on investment that our government made last year, in the 17–18 financial year, to enhance clinical mental health assessment treatment and support services for young people in custody. So this \$18.7 million in this year's budget represents a significant investment in the health and mental health of young people in custody, ensuring appropriate service provision to meet their health and rehabilitation needs, and is a further investment to ensure services are monitored and measured against the required standards as well.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Minister, how does that investment, particularly the mental health element of it, align with the Armytage-Ogloff review?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you very much. Look, we are, as I explained earlier, working assiduously in relation to the implementation of this very significant report. So we are addressing recommendations made in that particular report in terms of the investment that we have made in our health and mental health services. We had the benefit of Professor Jim Ogloff obviously being part of that review, someone who has considerable expertise in the mental health services area. They did provide us with specific recommendations around both health and mental health programs, but also in terms of addressing rehabilitation needs. For example, there is \$8.8 million of funding as part of the \$50 million over four years in the 17–18 budget update that related to new programs for young offenders that directly address their offending behaviour, including programs targeting violence as well as programs for young people struggling with drugs and alcohol; and there is a further \$11.5 million provided for the delivery of assessments for young offenders to ensure that programs and services directly target their offending and needs to address their risk of reoffending.

So in response to the Armytage-Ogloff review, my department has developed a new service model for the delivery of youth offending programs, and these new programs will be evidence-based, using validated screening and assessment tools that ensure program interventions address the young person's risk of reoffending. There is also a new suite of programs that have been developed that include offence-specific programs, offence-related programs, brief psychosocial programs and individual interventions. Offence-specific programs address the factors that cause criminal behaviour, and include programs addressing violence, family violence, sexual offending, drug and alcohol-related offending and driving offences. Also, offence-related programs include treatment readiness to prepare a young person for an intensive intervention and drug and alcohol programs for young people who have substance use needs that may not be directly related to offending behaviour.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — In the last couple of minutes we have remaining, in the investment that you have outlined in response to the last couple of questions that I have asked, how is it historically in terms of the supports that young people have in custody?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you for your further question. So the Youth, Health and Rehabilitation Service — YHaRS — is contracted to deliver health and rehabilitation services to young people in our youth justice precincts. They also provide rehabilitation services to young people residing in the community who are sentenced and under the supervision of youth justice on community-based orders. So those YHaRS service contracts covering health, mental health and youth offender programs will expire in January 2019. A tender process is underway for the provision of these services beyond this date, and therefore I am restricted in what I can say in terms of that level of detail, given the procurement process that is underway —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — But it appears, Minister, from what you said that the investment is much bigger.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — but we are making a significant investment both through the budget update last year and this budget to overhaul the delivery of health and mental health services in our custodial precincts and to deliver an enhanced range of rehabilitative programs because ultimately the youth justice system has a clear objective

of rehabilitating young offenders. We want to make sure that that can occur before they are reintegrated back into the community.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Thank you very much, Minister. Can I just say, as gratuitous as it may sound, that you inherited a system that was fairly broken and you have commissioned expert advice and you have acted on that advice very quickly and I think we are already seeing the results. Thank you for your industrious efforts and your commitment to the cause.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, last year the department released under freedom of information a table and a total of the figures of unallocated cases by region. The figures as at 31 March 2017 were that there were 2954 cases unallocated. I will read from the document. It says — this is from the department:

Case allocation data is extracted on a monthly basis from the client relation information system —  
the CRIS —

and reflects data at the date of extraction, the last Friday of each calendar month.

Secretary, can we have the data up to date to the most recent month for the current year period?

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — The data you have never provided.

**Ms PEAKE** — Again, Mr O'Brien, I am really happy to take that away. Can I just clarify one thing, though, which is you have mentioned what reporting has been done over time, and I just do want to make sure that we are clear, that my understanding is that from 2011–12 the measurement of unallocated cases has always been a rate so that we can see over time the efficiency of the program.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — A percentage.

**Ms PEAKE** — But I am really happy to take that question away.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — And that is completely fine that we can see it over time, but we can only come up with a rate if we have got the data. We have got the data for last year. Can we today get an update on the data for the most recent period to 30 April?

**Ms PEAKE** — I am not sure if I can get it today, but I can certainly come back to you with it.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — There is a whole phalanx of public servants behind you, Secretary. We have got an hour and a half —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — They are looking after kids, mate. They are not here to serve you.

**Ms PEAKE** — I am happy to see what we can do, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, they are obviously not right now, Mr Dimopoulos. They are sitting here in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Presumably they are here to assist the committee to answer the questions that it has — surely.

**Mr Dimopoulos interjected.**

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Well, the department has provided these figures before. Can I ask then another question, Secretary? As I said, the figure at 31 March 2017 was 2954. Can you tell me whether the figure has increased since then?

**Ms PEAKE** — I have not got the figures with me to answer the question, but I am very happy to take it on notice and come back to you, and I will see what we can do during the hearing and if we cannot during the hearing, come back to you afterwards.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — There is a document that I can refer you to, Mr O'Brien, 'Performance for selected measures — 2017–18 financial year: Child Protection Family Services'. It has got data as at 18 April 2018, and that is up on the department's website now.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Does it have the actual figures, actual numbers?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — It has the latest quarterly data for the quarter ending March 2018, and it is —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Does it have actual numbers or percentages?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — No, it is percentages, which has been the historic figure —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I am not sure how many times I can say this, Minister: it is not the percentage I am after.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — and it is broken down by regions as well as the statewide total.

**Mr T. SMITH** — What part of raw figures do you not understand?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Can I just clarify that, Secretary —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — We have provided a lot more data than you ever did.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — you are going to take this on notice. Can I also again ask for it to be provided by region? Can I also ask, if you cannot provide that, which are the regions with the highest numbers of allocated cases?

Minister, can I go on to the PC's ROGS report. For the year 2016–17 alone, for example, DHHS received 110 961 child protection notifications. Of those, the ROGS report highlighted that 30 000 were finalised. Could you tell the committee with respect to going forward what happens to the other 79 000 cases from this data, but presumably in any year there will be cases that are not finalised, so what actually happens to them?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Mr O'Brien, could you just provide a little bit more detail about what ROGS data exactly you are referring to?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I am referring to child protection notifications. The question I am actually specifically asking — those figures relate to 16–17, but presumably there are cases ongoing that are unfinalised, and I am trying to find out what happens to them.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Mr O'Brien, what we need to be really clear in explaining is that I think you are referring to child protection notifications, so these are effectively reports to the department. Not every one of those matters may result in an investigation. In fact probably I think historically only about a third do lead to an investigation, so I think you are making an assumption that they are all matters that have a file open and an investigation occur. A lot of these matters might be closed at the intake point because they do not meet the statutory threshold for the department to investigate.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So they are bone fide, but there is nothing to them, for example?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Well, it could be that there is nothing to it or the family might be referred to Child FIRST and family services. They might get a different level of support because the matter does not warrant an investigation because the statutory threshold has not been met around potential or actual significant harm to the child.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Just following on from that, the ROGS report also says that 31 000 cases were investigated and 79 000 were dealt with by other means. Can you tell us what the other means actually are?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — As I alluded to, there might well be a referral.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I appreciate that there are some that are not investigated.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Yes. I can obviously ask Ms Peake to add further, but some are referred to family services for support, so they might well be receiving counselling services and other types of support to meet the family's needs. As part of *Roadmap for Reform* we are shifting the whole system to put the greater focus on prevention and early intervention. This is why we are seeing a slowing down now in the growth rate of child protection reports, and that is a positive thing. It shows that those reforms are working, that investment is paying

off, and we are seeing fewer children coming into the system. That is where we want the whole system to go in the long term. Our vision is to have more support much earlier on before matters escalate and we have a child protection investigation needing to happen.

I should also add that, in terms of BP3, again increased transparency, we are now publishing in here for the first time the number of child protection investigations. That will be a measure going forward that will enable us to better understand these figures that we have got, this very large number of reports, but then there is a much smaller number that actually translate to an investigation.

**Ms PEAKE** — Mr O'Brien, the only thing that I would add to that is quite a significant driver of the growth over the last decade has been police reports of family violence. So if there is a call-out to a house where there is a family violence incident and there is a child, under the family violence legislation there is a requirement to report through to child protection.

One of the things we have done a lot of work on in the last 12 months is how police and specialist family violence and child protection work together to make sure that if the child is not at risk of significant harm but the mother may need strong support to protect her and her child, the appropriate response is a specialist family violence response rather than a child protection response. That is a really significant part.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That is one of the other means that might address those needs.

**Ms PEAKE** — And a very significant one.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Going back to the issue of caseworkers, Minister, can you confirm that the number of children in child protection who end up in juvenile justice, currently the figure is around 40 per cent?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Just to be clear, are we talking about children who are in out-of-home care at the time that the offence is committed or children —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — No, the number of children who are in child protection who ultimately end up in the juvenile justice system, and are you concerned that this figure will increase if the number of children being looked after by a caseworker is not addressed?

**The CHAIR** — Order! I think, Mr O'Brien, you are asking the witness for an opinion, which is out of order.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Can I confirm if the figure is 40 per cent, for a start?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, Mr O'Brien, for that question. I just need to be really clear about what we are talking about here. Every year the Youth Parole Board in its annual report publishes a range of data that indicates I guess the relatively disadvantaged backgrounds of young offenders who come into the youth justice system. Many of those young people have had histories of child protection, and that might be historic contact with the child protection system.

What also occurs is there is an annual survey and data collected by youth justice in relation to these matters. I know that at the time of the previous government I think 13 per cent of children in out-of-home care who committed an offence. I think that figure sits at about 15 per cent now. There has not been a significant increase. I am concerned that the opposition does continuously seek to suggest that somehow children in out-of-home care or in our child protection system are responsible for youth crime in our state, because that is very far from the truth.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — We're not suggesting anything. We're wanting to know what the figures show, Minister.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Just asking a question, Minister.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — In fact some of our very serious young offenders at the moment have no child protection histories.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you, Minister. Just in quickly following up on the statistical data I was looking for before, can you also add to that how much is provided to carer households per child, per year — just leave it at that. If you could provide that on notice. I only do that because —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — I can provide you with some advice.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I have a very, very short amount of time with you just at the moment.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. Of course.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — You have been talking a little bit about more money towards early intervention as opposed to dealing with issues when children have already come under child protection. I think you and I have discussed before that this is a very important area. I wonder if you could just talk me through which areas of early intervention and protection are receiving increased funding in this budget and whether that is an increased percentage of the overall budget compared to in the past.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. Thank you, Ms Pennicuik. Firstly, just in relation to your first query, we will certainly see what data we can provide you in relation to carer payments, but just to make the point that obviously the level of support that carers receive is also a product of the complexity of the child's needs. There is a very complex table of variable payments, depending on the complexity of the child's needs, but we certainly have provided more investment for our carers. Through our first budget they got the first increase in carer payments in more than a decade, and we have provided additional supports through the flexible funding that they can receive to pay for things like medical costs, dental costs, glasses for children, tutoring and those types of expenses. We have provided permanent carers with access to those types of flexible funding for the first time ever, and the training package that I alluded to earlier. So we are happy to give you some additional information in relation to that if we can break it down by per carer.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — In terms of early intervention more broadly — and that is, as I said, a key thrust of *Roadmap for Reform* — we have a range of services in early intervention, from Child FIRST and family services to the Cradle to Kinder program, which we expanded statewide last year, and there is continued funding for that in this budget. All of these types of programs are really about providing that additional support.

The budget this year has \$92 million over two years for the Child FIRST and family services and other early years supports to continue providing support for an additional 3600 families, including 2000 families supported through Child FIRST and integrated family services; over 400 families supported through Cradle to Kinder; over 500 families supported through the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program; and over 700 families supported through the enhanced maternal and child health models that we have established.

This is one part of the \$218 million in additional funding for family services, including intensive early years services, provided over the term of this government. If we can provide you with any more information, I would be very happy to.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Yes, Minister, just because of the 30 seconds left, just to focus on the percentage increase that is going towards intervention programs.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — As a percentage of the entire investment?

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Yes, and whether that has increased over the past and is that going to be maintained in the forward estimates, because I think it is an important issue.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. We will see what we can provide you in relation to that, but certainly there has been an increase in that prevention and early intervention support.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you.

**Ms WARD** — Hello everyone; welcome. Nice to see you all. Minister, can I get you to turn to your presentation — I think it is the second last slide — on youth justice where you have 2.5 million to expand structured day programs in custody. Could you please talk us through what the structured day programs are?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you very much, Ms Ward, for your question. The government has provided \$2.5 million to expand and reinstate structured day programs in youth justice centres to ensure a more secure custodial environment, promote positive behaviour and meet the rehabilitation needs of young people. As recommended in the Armytage-Ogloff youth justice review, it is important to engage young people in activities that give them the opportunity to develop positive social and life skills.

Our structured day components include participation in education and rehabilitation programs outside of school hours such as skill-based programs to build independent living and life skills — for example, budgeting, financial management, meal preparation and time management — and to encourage personal development such as conflict resolution skills, decision-making skills and strengthening self-esteem. It also includes employment assistance programs, including interviewing skills, résumé development, administrative support and other assistance to access community-based employment support opportunities, as well as peer-led mentoring to support development of peer support networks, expansion of sport activities, and Landcare projects that will benefit local communities particularly up in Malmsbury.

It was disappointing that the number of program coordinator positions ceased under the previous government. This did have an impact on the ability to deliver these structured activities after school hours, so we are putting in place this funding to enable structured activities to occur after school hours and on Sundays for all young people in custody. Obviously this was as a direct result of the more than 600 staff that were slashed from the Department of Human Services during the time of the previous government.

**Ms WARD** — You mentioned a secure custodial environment when you were talking in your response about the structured day programs. How do they promote better safety and security in youth justice?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Providing a structured day for young offenders in custody reduces the opportunities for them to be disruptive and otherwise engage in antisocial behaviour, leading to a more stable custodial environment. This is in addition to a range of initiatives undertaken by our government to stabilise and strengthen the youth justice system. I referred earlier to the fortification and strengthening works that we have made to accommodation units, also the SESG staff of Corrections Victoria that are now located in our youth justice facilities who have particular abilities to do things like deploy OC spray and take other measures in the case of a serious incident. I also referred to our improved intelligence gathering capability that we now have in place.

All of these things in combination are really designed to ensure that we have a stable and secure environment for those young offenders in custody and importantly to provide a secure workplace for our dedicated staff.

**Ms WARD** — Minister, you mentioned that there was an expansion of these programs. Have these programs and these resources been in youth justice for some time? Has it been around for a while, this kind of program?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — The cuts that we saw to the program coordinator positions that ceased under the previous government did have an impact on the youth justice system's ability to deliver these types of structured activities after school hours. I did allude to the 600 staff that were lost. There were in fact 20 youth justice staff jobs that were slashed as part of that. In addition to that we saw the entire youth justice system move out of head office and into the north division of the Department of Human Services, and therefore taking away the ability of central head office, I guess, to have proper oversight of the system.

So we have seen a range of cuts that were made and restructures that were undertaken by the previous government that did have a direct impact. Obviously there was the master plan that got put in the bottom drawer in relation to Parkville. We also had an underinvestment of our youth justice staff out in the community. I was shocked when I became minister to learn that there were only two dedicated youth justice staff tasked with supervising young people on bail across the whole state of Victoria.

So during our term of government we have created more than 280 new jobs across the youth justice system. This is what public servants do. This is why we value our public service as a government. This is why we are investing in these types of jobs. It has meant that we have been able to employ, through a \$36.5 million investment, additional bail supervision staff, increasing the total number of bail supervision workers across the state to 17. We have recruited 120 youth justice custodial workers; we have provided enhanced induction and training programs to our staff, making sure that our staff are properly equipped and that they are adequately

supported. I want to take this opportunity to commend our dedicated youth justice staff. It is challenging work and I know they are absolutely committed to rehabilitating the young people that they work with and they absolutely have the support of this government.

**Ms WARD** — Absolutely. Minister, in your response to my first question you mentioned the Armytage review. How does the expansion and reinstatement of the structured day program align with this review?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, Ms Ward. The review conducted by Penny Armytage and Professor Jim Ogloff found that the youth justice custodial centres did not have a consistent operating model operating across all precincts for some time. To support the rehabilitation of young offenders the review identified the need for a tailored, structured day for young offenders. A structured day would replicate a day on the outside, so to speak, to prepare young people for engagement with school and for participation in the workforce. To support this we have established a new custodial operating model. Also a new custodial classification placement service has been created that will review and allow proper security and risk assessment to be conducted of all young people in custody to ensure that they are placed at the appropriate security level. All of these things were missing from our youth justice facilities previously.

**Ms WARD** — Thank you, Minister. That is quite useful. Do you see the use of having these kinds of reviews that actually do help inform policy and help give a real structure and, if you like, scientific data or a thorough examination of what is actually happening on the ground, which helps inform policy?

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — If you actually act on it as well — the previous government ignored about seven of them.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Absolutely, Ms Ward and Mr Dimopoulos. We are very serious about fixing up the mess that we inherited in the youth justice system. That is why we had the courage to commission an independent review, and we have the absolute will and commitment to then go and implement that independent review. We have released that publicly. I know that the parliamentary —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Mr Smith until 1.46 p.m.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Referencing page 93 of budget paper 3, ‘Strengthening the youth justice system’: Secretary, in answer to a previous question I asked of you in February you were unable to provide the committee with any data regarding the types of drug use in youth justice facilities. I am just wondering if you could provide that to this committee.

**Mr WILSON** — I am not sure I said no data. I think it was put to me that there was a reference to ice being a problem in the facilities, from memory, and I think I just wanted the opportunity to clarify whether that was the particular issue that the member was raising or whether it was an issue of whether it was more people coming in with drug addictions that was the problem. As it turns out it is the latter that we have more issues with. As you would expect, a lot of the young people that are committing offences are doing so in part because of drug addictions and so on, and that is a problem for us and there is more investment in those sorts of programs and so on. So it was not so much and this is my recollection of it, Mr Smith, and it was not so much data on drugs; it was really a clarification of what was being put to me that I sought the opportunity to do before I came back with the answer. If there is a particular data request on contraband and things we are seizing and all those things, I am happy provide that to the committee.

**The CHAIR** — Insofar as it relates to the current financial year.

**Mr WILSON** — Yes.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Secretary, the minister and former director Ian Lanyon blamed ice for a lot of unrest within the youth justice facilities.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — You are actually verballing both of us in relation to that.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Why is there no reporting on young people?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — That is actually not what we said, Mr Smith.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Please, Minister.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — But you are verballing me and Mr Lanyon.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Please, Minister. I am asking the questions.

**The CHAIR** — But they must be in order.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Why is there no reporting on young people using such destructive and dangerous drugs within Victoria's youth justice facilities?

**Mr WILSON** — The evidence I have is that there is no evidence that they are using those drugs in custody. I would stand to be corrected that —

**Mr T. SMITH** — You are saying there is no drug use?

**Mr WILSON** — There is no evidence that I am aware of that that is an issue in our facilities. The issue I was pointing to was more the problems we have with people coming into those facilities with addictions, but I am happy to take that on notice and clarify it.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — If I could add, because I need to clarify this, Mr Smith —

**Mr T. SMITH** — No, hang on. I want to continue to ask —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — both Ian Lanyon and I referred to young people coming into custody who were drug affected. We know that many of them are substance affected, including on ice, when they commit their crimes. If they are remanded into custody —

**Mr T. SMITH** — The secretary has just said —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — soon after, then of course they will continue to be drug affected.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Minister, the secretary has just said —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — And your parliamentary inquiry did not make any contrary findings, I should add.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I want to clarify what you just said. You said there is no drug use in —

**Mr WILSON** — Keeping in mind that I took responsibility for youth justice on 3 April 2017. I do not have any evidence in my time as secretary that there are drugs being used whilst people are in our facilities. The evidence I have in relation to the question that was put to me is more about people coming into those facilities with drug addictions causing problems when they are in the facilities, but not drug use in the facilities, if that makes sense.

**Ms SHING** — You will be verballing on this anyway — again.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I am not verballing anyone actually, Ms Shing.

**Ms SHING** — You have been.

**Mr T. SMITH** — The simple fact is that you made references before about the number of people coming into the system on ice. Could you provide to the committee an estimate of young people coming into the youth justice system that are afflicted by an ice addiction?

**Ms SHING** — That is a different question.

**Ms WARD** — That is a very different question.

**Mr WILSON** — I am happy to take it on notice, but we have that from, I assume, health assessments and so on when they come into our facility, so I am happy to provide that data. The proportion of people that come into the facilities with — it may be drug and alcohol addictions; I am not sure how specific that would be, Mr Smith, but I am more than happy to provide the committee with that data.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — In fact the Youth Parole Board annual report, which publishes this data, has made the point that a very significant proportion of young offenders are substance affected at the time of committing their offence. This is all in the public domain. We have known about this. This is why we are also enhancing drug rehab programs for young offenders in custody as part of our response to the Armytage-Ogloff review.

**Mr T. SMITH** — How many of these young people are on ice or other drug rehabilitation programs in 18–19?

**Mr WILSON** — Proposed for 18–19?

**Mr T. SMITH** — Are going to be on these sorts of programs in 18–19.

**Ms SHING** — If you could get your crystal ball out, that would be fantastic.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Again, Chair, can we lose the commentary, please?

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Mr T. SMITH** — No. Order there, not here.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry, foolishly I thought I was chairing this meeting.

**Mr T. SMITH** — We often wonder that too, but anyway.

**The CHAIR** — For the purpose of this exercise, I am the chair, Mr Smith, so perhaps you can just repeat your question for the benefit of the witness.

**Mr T. SMITH** — How many are projected to be on ice or other drug rehabilitation programs in 2018–19?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — It is based on demand.

**Mr T. SMITH** — This is an estimates hearing, Minister.

**Mr WILSON** — I can give you the budget estimates for the program. The value of the program is 18.7 million over —

**Mr T. SMITH** — No, drug rehab programs actually, Chair. That was what the question was about.

**The CHAIR** — No, you did not refer to drug rehab programs. You said: how many people would be on drugs in 18–19?

**Mr T. SMITH** — On drug rehabilitation programs in 2018–19.

**The CHAIR** — Perhaps, Mr Smith, you might want to speak more clearly and slowly so those of us can hear you.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I can see the acoustics in here are not particularly good. If you cannot hear my question, ask and I will read it again.

**Mr WILSON** — There is 18.7 million additional funding for various health-related programs, and then I would have to extrapolate out what we would expect to be the demand for drug affected or various other health issues, but I would be happy to do that as well.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thank you, Mr Wilson. Budget paper 3, page 280, the ‘Annual daily average number of young people in custody’ for males is 180 to 220, and 15 to 25 for females. Minister, for the year 2017–18 how many young people have entered youth detention with a drug or alcohol addiction?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — With a drug and alcohol issue?

**Mr T. SMITH** — In 17–18.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Obviously we will need to take specific data like that on notice and provide you with that if we can drill it down to that degree. As the secretary has already alluded, there is health screening that occurs when young people come into custody. They are screened for alcohol and drug dependency issues when they are admitted into custody, either on remand or sentence. There is an initial health assessment conducted by a registered nurse within 24 hours of admission, and that includes issues related to drug usage.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Shing has some questions for Ms Pennicuik, which she will read into Hansard.

**Ms SHING** — Yes. Minister, I will just be asking a couple of questions on behalf of Ms Pennicuik to be taken on notice, please. The first question: in relation to ‘Better Futures — Supporting young care leavers’ at page 72, there is an allocation of \$2.3 million this year and nothing thereafter. That budget line will extend a current trial of ‘a new way of delivering supports to young care leavers’, 16 to 21, in parts of Gippsland and south-east Melbourne. Question 1: how long have these trials been running, and what have the outcomes been so far? Two: how is the impact of those trials being measured? Three: will the program be funded to continue and extend pending the program evaluation?

The second substantive question from Ms Pennicuik is at budget paper 3, page 72, and is as follows: why is the new model of kinship carers not funded beyond next year? If those questions could be taken on notice and provided to the committee in response to Ms Pennicuik over time, that would be fantastic.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. I would have been very happy to respond now, but I am happy to take it on notice.

**Ms SHING** — Minister, I will take you to budget paper 3, page 76, and the addition of 450 extra child protection workers to the system. This is something which you have referred to not only in your presentation but also in relation to the questions that have been answered by you and Ms Peake in the course of this particular hearing. We know that the challenges faced by child protection workers are ongoing and significant and that the occupational tests to their stamina and their resilience are numerous, and we know also that the addition of workers to the workforce is one part of being able to provide better time limits in answering calls and providing emergency options, but one of the things that I am keen to explore in relation to the increasing quantum of childcare workers is how that will assist not just clients and consumers of the system but also child protection workers themselves, who are often taken offline in order to do admin work or other duties such as driving children to and from contact visits. I say this having seen firsthand, as the child of a long, long-serving child protection worker, just how taxing that can be. What sort of roles will these 450 child protection workers undertake, and what will be the qualitative output as far as benefits to their workplace health and wellbeing and the productivity insofar as client and consumer management goes throughout the system?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, Ms Shing, for your question. I acknowledge your mum’s work in that area, but for all of our dedicated child protection workers, they do incredibly important work. It is very challenging work —

**Ms SHING** — Enormously challenging.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — inherently stressful work. I guess the point I would make at the outset is to say that, unlike many other frontline workers in our community, there probably would not be too many clients who would voluntarily welcome contact from child protection, so therefore it makes it challenging work but incredibly important work in terms of ensuring the safety of children in our state. So we have made a very significant investment in our child protection staff, starting from our first budget and building on that. In every successive budget we have had investment for building up our child protection workforce, and that is because we value very much the important work that they are doing.

At the time that we came into government there were 1348.7 FTE, and as of 18 April this year that number stands at 1840.2, so just during that period — and obviously we continue to build up our workforce numbers — the child protection workforce has grown by 36.4 per cent. So it is the biggest ever increase as well as the biggest ever investment in our child protection workforce in Victoria’s history. I referred earlier to the significant cuts that were made during the time of the previous government — 600 workers from the Department of Human Services. This is why when we talk about frontline staff and people kind of assume that those in the back room are somehow twiddling their thumbs, that is not correct. You take away that admin support, that does have an impact on child protection workers and the frontline staff.

We are doing innovative things like trialling using other admin support workers to do things like organising contact visits. So if the Children's Court regularly orders regular contact between parents and children if the child is placed in out-of-home care, we want to ensure that it is not our child protection workers that are needing to organise all of these contact visits. We want them to be engaged in their core activities of investigating and responding to abuse and neglect, so we are now doing innovative things like using other admin support workers to engage in this type of work.

**Ms SHING** — So how does that sit alongside? There is an after-hours unit and specialist intervention. These sorts of, I suppose, streams of assistance must also be designed to reduce the substantive workload that spreads child protection workers so thin. How do they fit then into the picture of being more streamlined and efficient in the way that workers do the work?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, Ms Shing, I will come to the after-hours in a moment, if I may. I just wanted to also add that the other things that we are doing in terms of using these additional administrative staff as part of our support for our frontline workers is also in relation to subpoenas. So our child protection practitioners are no longer required to prepare subpoenas. This function is now undertaken by specialised administrative staff. On average these subpoenas can be hundreds of pages long, so this represents a significant reduction in the amount of time saved by our child protection workforce on this important function that they are undertaking. I refer obviously to transportation as well.

Just in relation to the transport issue and doing those contact visits, the trial that we are seeing has reduced the time practitioners typically spend on this activity from 30 per cent of their time to 5 per cent of their time. So this is a very significant reform. That will improve the allocation rate. That will continue to improve also the ability of our dedicated child protection workers to focus on their key activity, what they signed up to do — that is, to prevent the abuse and neglect of children.

**Ms SHING** — Before you go on, Minister — and I do want to still hear about the after-hours service and specialist intervention — when we are looking at getting this volume of additional workers into the system, this extra 450, firstly, we are looking at new workers, and so the supports that are needed there to help them into an extremely stressful and rather extraordinary working environment; and secondly, how are we helping with retention? Because it seems to me there is a two-pronged set of stressors there. How are they being managed, then, to not lose these gains?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. Thank you for that further question as well. In January this year I launched the *Child Protection Workforce Strategy 2017–2020*. This strategy ensures that our child protection workers have the tools to progress their careers and enhanced wellbeing outcomes. It also provides that better supervisory practices are in place to ensure that our child protection workers get immediate and regular support to enable them to reflect on their practice and debrief on difficult situations. All of these types of investments and reform are actually seeing an improvement to the attrition rate. The attrition rate in 2012–13 was 17 per cent; it is now less than 13 per cent currently. As of this month we are providing additional psychological first-aid training. We value the employee assistance program; it may not be valued by the opposition.

**The CHAIR** — Order! You might come back to that.

**Ms SHING** — If I could get those answers on notice. Thanks very much.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I have got one question, and then I will be passing to Mr O'Brien. Secretary, contraband in youth justice facilities is an important issue. Could you provide a list to the committee of contraband that had been collected by your staff over the last year?

**Mr WILSON** — Yes.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thank you very much.

**Mr WILSON** — Sorry, Mr Smith, if I could add, I have just got information about the offenders with drug addictions. In the Youth Parole Board annual report, their annual survey, which was 2016, of those detained on sentence and on remand, 65 per cent had a history of both alcohol and drug misuse, and operationally I think my people would say that probably, over the last year or two, may have actually increased a bit, but we will confirm that.

**Mr T. SMITH** — That 2016 year, and you will come back to us?

**Mr WILSON** — September 2016. That was the annual survey of 176 males and eight females. Just on two-thirds had a history of drug and alcohol misuse, but I am happy to confirm that.

**Mr T. SMITH** — And we will take contraband on notice too.

**Mr WILSON** — Yes.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thank you very much.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — To add, the fact that we have invested in an intelligence capability in our youth justice precinct actually enables us to pick up any contraband coming in, and the staff do a very good job in picking up these issues as they present.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, when you say that 65 per cent had a drug or alcohol problem, is it broken down any further by type? I appreciate many will have both a drug and alcohol or an ice and heroin problem, or whatever it might be.

**Mr WILSON** — Yes, and all of the above; possibly. There is the report itself: 4 per cent had a history of alcohol abuse; 18 per cent had a history of drug misuse; and 65 had both; and then there are various statistics on offences committed whilst they were under the influence of both in that year. So that is a public report by the adult parole board.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry, I just missed that — a public report?

**Mr WILSON** — Sorry, of the Youth Parole Board — I'm confusing my corrections role up here — annual survey, which is a public report. We will do our best, as I say, to get the latest figures directly from my youth justice people.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Is that available on the Youth Parole Board website?

**Mr WILSON** — This is the annual report for 16–17.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — The annual report, okay.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — It is tabled in the parliament —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Do those offenders get an automatic rehab? What sort of rehab do they receive?

**Mr WILSON** — I might ask Ms Henderson, who looks after these things, to explain. But essentially it all commences with the assessments when they come into our facilities, and then we design tailored programs as part of our rehabilitation objectives. But I might ask Ms Henderson just to explain that a bit further.

**Ms HENDERSON** — Thank you, Mr Wilson. So all young people upon entry into our custodial services receive a screen within 24 hours. For Aboriginal young children or young people, that is down to 12 hours. And then there is a further screen by medical, so GP —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Is the first screen a blood test, urine test?

**Ms HENDERSON** — Mental health, an immediate mental screen, just to make sure that the safety of the young person is considered in that vulnerable 12-to-24-hour period — around suicide, self-harm in particular. Then further to that the 72-hour screen is a more comprehensive physical, psychological, as well as the extension of a mental health, if further treatment is required.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Does that more extensive one include blood or urine screening or testing?

**Ms HENDERSON** — It can, depending on the need —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — If there is a risk?

**Ms HENDERSON** — Yes. It depends on the needs of the young person individually. Then, depending on what we find out over that period, when a young person is remanded or sentenced for the first time we usually spend about seven to 10 days assessing that young person in a range of criteria. Then once we devise a care team plan, that young person can be referred on to various specialists, including drug and alcohol treatment, and that will form part of their plan moving forward in custody. It is similar for the young people on community-based orders. So if a young person has offended whilst under the influence of drugs and alcohol, or it is a precursor to their offending, and they go to court, they may get an order and have as part of the conditions of their order to attend drug and alcohol counselling to deal with their offending behaviour —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That counselling or rehab, is that all offered onsite, or is it potentially a mix of offsite and —

**Ms HENDERSON** — Both. It is available within our custodial centres as well as in the community, because they might start in custody but the average length of stay is less than six months, and then they need to continue that out into the community as they progress.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Thank you very much for that clarification. Can I just move on. Minister, budget paper 4, page 69, has the funding for the new youth justice facility at Cherry Creek, and there is a note there, note (i), on the next page that has the TEI — total estimated investment — reduced by 10.2 million, having been transferred to output funding. Can you confirm where the \$10.291 million through output funding has been reprioritised to?

**Mr WILSON** — Perhaps if I may, Mr O'Brien, it was not a reprioritisation; it was actually a transfer from capital to operating, but I can get that — or perhaps Mr Wittmack can explain. He is leading the project. I think it was really an asset versus output transfer.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Still within Cherry Creek?

**Mr WILSON** — Yes, still within the Cherry Creek project. It has not been diverted somewhere else.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — What has it changed to? Why has it changed to output?

**Mr WITTMACK** — Richard Wittmack, Director of Major Programs and Projects. Some of the costs against the total project can be capitalised and some have to be expensed. The \$10 million is an expense item, so it has been moved from the asset component to the output component.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Right; so it is an accounting treatment basically?

**Mr WITTMACK** — That is correct.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — With reference to the \$288.7 million of original investment allocated for the facility, 1 million was estimated to be expended by 30 June 2017. Minister, can you confirm whether the 1 million was in fact spent and what has in fact been spent so far on this facility?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Again, I might ask Mr Wittmack —

**Mr WITTMACK** — I would have to take that on notice and come back to the committee.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Can I just add: there is a lot of work that has been happening in relation to the new facility at Cherry Creek. We had a rigorous tender and selection process in the middle of last year designed to —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Sorry to interrupt, Minister, but does that account for why some of it — tenders, for example, and other contracts — has gone to output rather than capital?

**Mr WITTMACK** — Some of that would be in that component, yes.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — We will provide you with some advice in relation to that —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Yes, if you could provide on notice what —

**Ms MIKAKOS** — But just to make it clear, since the original announcement there has been a lot of work happening in relation to Cherry Creek.

**The CHAIR** — Order! We might come back to that, Minister.

**Ms WARD** — Minister, could I get you to turn your mind, please, to the Aboriginal children and families agreement. It is mentioned in budget paper 3, page 3. Minister, could you outline how the Aboriginal children and families agreement will reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the out-of-home care system?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, Ms Ward. The *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement* is a groundbreaking tripartite partnership between Aboriginal communities, government and community service organisations. The agreement and the accompanying strategic action plan aim to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in our child protection and care system by continuing assistance for Aboriginal organisations to allow them to support all Aboriginal children and young people on protection orders, by transitioning case management of more Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, by improving cultural connection for Aboriginal young people in care and by strengthening evidence-based policy and practice for services involving Aboriginal families and children.

We recognise that Aboriginal children in care have better outcomes when they are managed by Aboriginal organisations, and this agreement furthers the Andrews Labor government's commitment to self-determination by further extending Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care to two more Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. As minister I am very proud that we have been the first state to implement Aboriginal legal guardianship here in Victoria, something that I know other states are watching with some interest. This has effectively enabled the CEO of VACCA, being the first such Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, to take on the responsibilities of my secretary and be able to make those legal guardianship decisions for children.

We have tested this in an as-if trial. Firstly, we found that a significant number of children, as part of that trial, were actually able to return to their families, so we have seen that these types of approaches can actually deliver better outcomes. The funding in the budget this year will enable us to expand this Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program to enable further Aboriginal organisations to take on this important legal responsibility. We also have funding as part of this agreement for greater support for young people to remain connected to their community and culture. Again we know that when Aboriginal children are strongly connected to their community, to their culture, they do better, and that is why we continue support for that, as well as the ACSASS service that provides advice to my department for children coming into the child protection system.

We know that some Aboriginal children are from families with persistent poor outcomes and lifelong difficulties and hardship as a result of transgenerational trauma and the complex and multifaceted disadvantage that Aboriginal families and people have faced in this country. We are absolutely committed to providing more support to Aboriginal families to enable them to heal and to provide a more supportive environment for children to thrive in.

I guess we tend to talk about these matters in a deficit sense. I just want to strongly make the point that the vast majority of Aboriginal children in our state are doing very well and are well looked after by their families and their communities, and that is something that I am at pains to put on the record because I see these children all the time as I move around the state, and I know how loved and supported they are by their families and by their communities, but we want to make sure that we can give all Aboriginal children that same support and opportunities to thrive.

**Ms WARD** — With that in mind, Minister, how will the plan be measured? How will you measure its success?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Look, this has been a very important partnership and a very genuine partnership that we have engaged in as a government. One of the very first things that I did as the minister was to establish a quarterly Aboriginal children's forum that I co-chair together with a CEO of an Aboriginal organisation, and we have had the great pleasure now to meet in different parts of the state with these forums. So we will be accountable back to that forum. We will be providing reports at each of these forums about the progress to date

in implementing this Aboriginal children and families agreement, as we have been providing a whole lot of information and sharing data. As we are a very transparent government, we have been very forthcoming in sharing with our community services sector — both our Aboriginal community organisations as well as our mainstream CSOs — how we are doing in relation to these matters. And I am proud that we have seen about 30 per cent of Aboriginal children in care transition to Aboriginal community organisations already, and we are absolutely committed to making sure that all Aboriginal children can be managed by an Aboriginal organisation, because we know that they deliver better outcomes, and what we want is the best possible outcomes for all children in our state.

**Ms WARD** — Can I just take you back to an earlier comment where you spoke about ensuring that children in out-of-home care are connected to culture. Could you just elaborate on that a little bit more, please, and talk us through how you are helping children stay connected to culture? We know how important this is in terms of Aboriginal community health and children's health.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Sure. Thank you. Actions that we have undertaken include \$2.3 million to help reconnect Aboriginal children with their family and extended family. We have established a Finding Families and a Return to Country program that help connect children with extended family on their family land. We have also co-designed a new cultural planning model co-designed with the Aboriginal sector and supported by 18 new cultural planning advisers who work with child protection practitioners and care teams to develop detailed cultural plans to involve Aboriginal children in cultural activities and events within their local communities. VACCA has also led the development of an Aboriginal cultural information portal to improve access to information about cultural history, significant dates and upcoming events. So we are doing a range of things. This is making a difference. In 2017, 78 per cent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care were placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, compared to 67 per cent in 2014, and the 2018 —

**Ms WARD** — Sorry, Minister, could you just repeat that again?

**Ms MIKAKOS** — In 2017, 78 per cent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care were placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle — something that is legislated for — compared to 67 per cent in 2014. The ROGS data in 2018 also showed that Victoria has the second highest rate of adherence to that principle, well above the national average of 68 per cent. Clearly there is more that we can do, and we as a government are absolutely committed to doing more in this space.

**Ms WARD** — That is terrific, Minister. Thank you very much for that. It is really good.

**Ms SHING** — Also, thanks for the forum in Gippsland, by the way. The feedback in relation to the Aboriginal stakeholder forum and the governance and self-determination process has been unilaterally very, very positive.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you for your attendance at that forum, Ms Shing.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Can I just go back, and I might need Mr Wittmack back again potentially on the question with respect to the Cherry Creek facility. There was a report on 7 April this year about environmental costs with respect to endangered animals costing \$3 million. Is that part of the change to the output funding? Has there been a need to spend more money on environmental studies and consultancies?

**Mr WITTMACK** — We have made an allowance within the \$288 million for environmental. It is an estimate. We have not got the final figures for the environmental allowances at this point in time, so the change in treatment is some for the environmental allowances, yes.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Can I just add further to that, if I may. This offset process is exactly what was followed by the previous government for the Ravenhall project. It is a typical thing to happen in these types of projects.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — It would be required under the EPBC act, I imagine, Minister.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Yes.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So I am just asking what it actually is. Is there likely to be additional costs encountered, do you believe, Mr Wittmack?

**Mr WITTMACK** — My estimates at this stage are no.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Right, okay. Is the \$3 million figure correct on the offsets?

**Mr WITTMACK** — For the state figure as the estimate, yes.

**Mr WILSON** — So it is the allowance, but it is not our — I mean, out of respect for the commonwealth process we cannot get too definitive about it, so we have made an allowance, but we are providing them with all the relevant information. They have asked a few questions of us. We have provided answers to that, but ultimately the extent of the offsets and the types of conditions and so on are a matter for the commonwealth. But as Mr Wittmack said, that is the allowance we have made, but we will just have to wait and see.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — If I can help you further, Mr O'Brien, because I can see where you are going with these questions. I know there have been some media reports around endangered animals, and I can tell you that there were no striped legless lizards identified on the site following the completion of targeted surveys.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Right.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Nor were there previous records of a large habitat of red-chested button quails on the site. I know there were some media reports, but they were incorrect.

**Ms SHING** — There we go. You heard it here.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I was going to say to the secretary, you talked about with respect to the commonwealth process.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — I was reading your mind, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I am not sure that we all have respect for the commonwealth process sometimes, but that is just a personal view.

Secretary Peake now, with respect to the DHHS annual reports 15–16 and 16–17 — and I am getting there — you funded a total amount of \$1.264 million for consultancy engagements to conduct reviews, evaluation and design of Victoria's out-of-home care system. What were the concerns of the current out-of-home system and what is now being proposed as a result of those consultancies?

**Ms PEAKE** — Certainly. Mr O'Brien, I think there have been longstanding concerns about the evidence base that children really need consistent, reliable relationships in order to thrive. And one of the features of the residential care part of our system is that there is inevitably going to be change in staff, and so that reliable, consistent relationship is something that we have been very focused on developing. That is why we have been trialling some different models in the south region of the state to look at rather than relying on residential care as the model of support for children with really complex needs, how we can start moving to a model where we provide more support through our foster care system to support children with complex needs. And there has been a trial of a more therapeutic model, a professionalised foster care model that Anglicare has been operating for us, as well as OzChild, to look at how home-based care can be used for that group of children.

We have also been trialling a stronger partnership between mental health services and out-of-home care services to look at how where children are not stable enough to be able to be supported in a professionalised foster care setting yet we can provide a treatment model of residential care, so an intensive period of time where they are supported to really overcome the trauma of abuse and neglect and then be able to be placed with a foster carer with supports put back with that foster care support. So a big part of the work was to look at what the evidence told us from around the world were models of out-of-home care for children with really complex needs.

Another part of the work was really looking at kinship care and the sorts of supports that our kinship carers, who provide about 96 per cent of care for children who cannot live safely at home, really need in order to be able to sustain their support for those children. I think the minister in an earlier answer or in the opening presentation referred to the new kinship care model that we have been rolling out, which really provides a combination of training, mentoring and networking, as well as some extra both counselling and professional supports as well as practical supports to kinship carers. We have had an historical view that because kinship carers are extended family that they should wear the burden of the additional support that a child who has

experienced abuse and neglect inevitably needs. This body of work has really shown that we need to focus on the outcomes for the child rather than the type of carer — so the needs of really complex children and what we have been doing around professionalised foster care, the new models of mental health, partnering with out-of-home care for intensive support and then the different types of support for kinship care.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, there was a consultancy in that period by Susan Baidawi on sexual abuse and exploitation in residential care. Can you outline what the findings of that were, what actions have been taken and if the committee could have a copy of that report?

**Ms PEAKE** — Certainly, so in terms of the work that has come out of that study, there has been —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Is that study publicly available, that consultancy?

**Ms PEAKE** — Let me check that for you, but I will just start by working through what we have been doing in relation to really responding more strongly to children who are sexually exploited. There was a whole-of-government strategy that was released that really sets through how we work differently with police, as well as how we work differently with support services so that we identify and disrupt perpetrators and also try and change the vulnerability of the children.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Secretary, did the report actually have numbers on how many children have been sexually abused in residential care?

**Ms PEAKE** — Sexually exploited?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Or exploited?

**Ms PEAKE** — There is data that is released by the Commission for Children and Young People in their annual report around the numbers, and in fact I think the most recent — and they provide numbers, not just percentages, but I am about to give you a percentage —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Don't start me, Secretary.

**Ms PEAKE** — The 2016–17 annual report showed that there was a 4 per cent decrease in category one behaviour related to sexual exploitation from 412 to 394 cases of sexual exploitation, so that is between 2015–16 and 2016–17. So that data is reported by the commissioner on an annual basis, but I did just also want to mention that the efforts of police and child protection in disrupting offenders has reduced the risk of exploitation from 90 children over the last six months —

**The CHAIR** — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance, and the minister for —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Chair, before you wrap up, the secretary promised to take on notice whether she could get the actual data for unallocated cases, just whether that has been done?

**Ms PEAKE** — I have taken that on. We will come back to you out of session.

**The CHAIR** — I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Families and Children, the Honourable Jenny Mikakos, MLC; Mr Wilson, Ms Griffith, Ms Henderson, Ms Peake, Mr Wittmack, Mr Stenton, Ms Asquini, Ms Lancy, Mr Alisandratos, Mr Naughton and Mr Lindner. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response should be provided within 10 business days of that request.

**Witnesses withdrew.**