

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Monday, 23 May 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Mr Anthony Carbines MP, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers,

Ms Brigid Sunderland, Secretary,

Mr Argiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary, Children, Families, Communities and Disability, and

Mr Andrew Minack, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Delivery Services, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; and

Professor Euan Wallace, Secretary, and

Ms Jodie Geissler, Deputy Secretary, Commissioning and System Improvement, Department of Health.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and as I clearly have a poor voice, the Deputy Chair will read the opening statement on my behalf.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respect to them, their elders past, present and emerging, as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome back the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, as well as officers from the departments. Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement, which will be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr CARBINES: Thank you, Deputy Chair and committee members. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respect to their elders past and present.

Visual presentation.

Mr CARBINES: Over the past two years the Victorian government has built stronger relationships than ever before in the disability, ageing and carers sectors. These connections have been crucial in responding to COVID-19 and will help deliver future programs and services as we continue building a fairer, safer and more inclusive Victoria. The Andrews Labor government is investing in Victorians with disability, seniors and vulnerable communities, ensuring no-one is left behind as we recover from the pandemic. Our aim is to create a fairer and more inclusive Victoria. We are removing barriers to volunteering, helping communities recover from hard times and supporting people to safely contribute to society. We want all voices to be heard and celebrated, and we will create more opportunities for Victorians to feel valued and recognised. We will keep working to reduce inequality and discrimination and promote accessibility and inclusion. We also know how important it is to empower people to take full part in the social, economic and civic life of our state to help people not only reconnect with their communities but also thrive.

We have worked hard to achieve positive outcomes for all Victorians, in particular people with disability, older Victorians and vulnerable members of our community. The recently launched *State Disability Plan 2022–2026*

was designed to make Victoria more inclusive and accessible for the more than 1.1 million Victorians living with a disability. The plan will be backed with a \$15.1 million investment. In 2021–22 Victoria contributed approximately \$2.8 billion to the NDIS and had approximately 138 000 active participants in the scheme, of whom around 70 000 were first-time recipients. It is exactly what the scheme was designed and funded to achieve.

We have supported Victorians and strengthened communities throughout the pandemic, including through the delivery of critical services such as food relief. The government has continued to invest in supports for Victorian seniors and carers, including by making it more affordable for seniors to get out and about with the Victorian seniors card, continuing elder abuse prevention and supports and supporting Victoria's 750 000 unpaid carers through the *Victorian Carer Strategy*, with 44 providers receiving \$21 million annually and for the carer employment program some 22 providers receiving \$2 million in 2021–22 to provide support to carers to enter pathways to training and employment. We are also helping carers take care of themselves, with around \$10 million for additional respite and \$1.9 million in carer grants.

Through the 2022–23 state budget we are investing \$116.6 million over two years to support Victoria's interface with the NDIS and for those who are not eligible for the NDIS. We are providing some \$30.1 million to enable state trustees to fully comply with the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*, ensuring decisions made on behalf of people with limited decision-making capacity are consistent with their will and preferences. Some \$15.1 million will be invested over the next two years towards rolling out the new *State Disability Plan*, and that includes continuing the disability liaison officer health services program. Disability liaison officers provide practical support to people with disability to get vaccinated, including arranging priority bookings and home vaccinations, improving the accessibility of vaccination centres and providing tailored vaccination pathways. The DLO program has helped over 10 740 Victorians with disability to book a COVID-19 vaccination that meets their needs. It includes continuing boosted funding towards the Victorian disability advocacy program, which ensures the rights of Victorians with disability are upheld and that they can access and navigate the national disability insurance scheme. It also includes a new universal design grants program to improve the accessibility of community facilities and an expansion of the Changing Places program to remove barriers for people with disability from getting out and about whether they are close to home or at major tourist sites around the state. We are also funding a second round of advertising for the Change Your Reactions campaign, which has had a positive impact on community understanding and attitudes around the treatment of autistic people.

We are providing more support for the Victorians who need it most, upgrading aged care facilities, boosting the community services workforce and expanding help available to at-risk families in the Victorian budget 2022–23. The budget provides \$146 million to replace and refurbish beds at public sector regional aged care services across the state—some 36 beds at Camperdown Hospital, 72 beds at Mansfield District Hospital and 38 beds at Orbst Regional Health—and to plan for upgrades at facilities in Bright and Heywood. Funding of \$80 000 will plan for a new 60-bed aged care facility at the Mornington Centre, including 30 beds dedicated to a specialist dementia unit and 30 mental health beds.

Victoria's public sector aged care facilities care for some of our state's most vulnerable older people, and these new projects will replace outdated facilities with new, modern, purpose-built homes for residents. These new facilities will be more homelike, giving residents more independence, greater privacy and dignity. Public sector aged care will receive \$29.9 million to continue providing high-quality care to senior Victorians, including those in need of specialised mental health care. Importantly, this investment will ensure we continue to meet nurse-to-patient ratios in public sector residential aged care, which helped to protect residents during the pandemic while also addressing commonwealth service gaps

The past few years have been especially difficult for many older Victorians, and COVID-19 continues to present challenges. Despite this, senior Victorians have shown resilience and great support for each other, their families and communities. The government is committed to supporting senior Victorians by providing opportunities to connect, socialise and enjoy entertainment through the Victorian Seniors Festival. That festival includes online and radio programs as well as First Nations performances and multicultural and in-language content. In particular we are very proud of the support the festival is providing to residents in aged care facilities through the aged care concert and entertainment tour and the recognition program that is recording the life stories of older Victorians for publication.

In 2022 the commissioner for senior Victorians will undertake a review of digital connectedness of older Victorians. We will continue the vital work of supporting unpaid carers to take up training and employment opportunities through the carer employment program, with a further \$2.3 million in 2022–23. We are investing \$2.9 million to address elder abuse. This includes \$620 000 for elder abuse prevention through financial counselling in bushfire-affected communities in East Gippsland, Alpine and Towong. This includes raising awareness of the available assistance through the financial counsellors delivering a dedicated elder abuse financial counselling service and capacity building in the banking, finance and insurance sectors to identify and respond to elder abuse. There is \$1.75 million to continue the integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse at five of our public health services, to strengthen the capability of professionals who interact with older people, such as medical professionals, to identify the signs of elder abuse and to respond and to support older people. This includes workforce training, counselling and mediation services, including financial counselling, as well as liaison officers at health service sites. It also includes \$480 000 to continue the elder abuse prevention networks, to deliver local action, to raise awareness and to prevent elder abuse occurring.

Community organisations played a significant role in supporting Victorians during the pandemic, including by delivering critical services such as food relief and connecting individuals and families to supports. Investing in this sector is so important to our social recovery, and the budget invests some \$12.2 million in funding for the neighbourhood house coordination program over two years, continuing a 2018 initiative where the Andrews Labor government established 27 new houses, boosted funding for 162 houses and supported 16 networks. This continued funding will allow them to continue their fantastic work in local communities.

A \$4.04 million investment in community food relief will also support access to food relief for Victorians. This includes funding for chilled freight and for Sikh Volunteers and Uniting Prahran to tackle food insecurity in their local areas. Pop-up food relief markets will also be established in metropolitan Melbourne. These will give people who need help getting a meal on the table an easier way to access healthier and culturally appropriate food. We are supporting regional food relief through funding to Foodbank to collect and distribute food across regional Victoria. We are also providing funding for six regional food hubs; it includes new operational funding for Shepparton Foodshare in addition to the five food shares that have been funded since last year's budget in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura and Warrnambool. The food relief task force, which advises government how to strengthen our food relief sector, will also be extended over the next year, and the task force is pursuing priority projects including a Victorian food stress index, food relief guidelines for the sector and an analysis of where the food relief sector is at now and where future trends might take us.

In closing, the Victorian disability, ageing and carers portfolio has adapted to the challenges of the pandemic. We are investing to support Victorians as we recover to ensure we continue building a fairer, safer and more inclusive Victoria; we are creating policies and programs where the people affected by policies have a seat at the table during planning, design and delivery; and we are working with community and sector partners to build a Victoria where everyone has a say and a future and a chance to lead a fulfilling life. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Welcome back, Minister. I will get straight into budget paper 3, page 197. It reflects, under 'Office for Disability', a massive 50 per cent cut in funding in this year's budget. Yet in the same budget paper on page 207 it indicates that the office will still service the exact same number of disability clients. How can that possibly be, with a 50 per cent cut, Minister?

Mr CARBINES: Explaining, generally, some of the variations that are greater in our budget, I want to go to a couple of those. So if you go to the lower 2022–23 target for the Office for Disability, that primarily reflects the completion of government policy commitments, including building the inclusive and safe communities for Victorians with disability. That initiative was renewed as the Victorian state disability plan, but the funding was instead allocated to disability services output in the 2022–23 budget papers. So the 2022–23 'Victorian state disability plan', that initiative of \$15.1 million over two years, was attributed to disability services output in error when it should have been attributed to the Office for Disability output.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, I am having a bit of trouble hearing you, Minister. Can you bring the microphone forward a bit?

Mr CARBINES: Sorry. You want me to move it closer. Yes, sure. So the 2022–23 Vic state disability plan initiative, the \$15.1 million for two years, was attributed to the disability services output in error when it should have been attributed to the Office for Disability output. Had that not occurred, funding for the Office for Disability output would have increased in 2022–23. That will need to be picked up, obviously.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. But the note on page 207 indicates that the reduction in funding reflects the:

... completion of Government policy commitments including building inclusive and safe communities for Victorians with disability.

Are we not doing that anymore?

Mr CARBINES: Mr O'Brien, I outlined to you it is just wrong in the way in which it has been allocated, and I outlined to you there has not been any reduction. It has just been the way in which it has been presented there. The outputs are in error, and that will need to be corrected.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So what is now in under disability services—did you call it, sorry, the strategic action plan or something?

Mr CARBINES: Yes. So the 2022–23 state disability plan initiative of \$15 million over two years was attributed in the disability services output in error, and it should have been attributed to the Office for Disability output. Had that not occurred, funding for the Office for Disability output would have increased in 2022–23, and that will need to be amended.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So let us be clear: the Office for Disability has got an extra \$15 million?

Mr CARBINES: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And what is it going to do with that money?

Mr CARBINES: Part of that funding goes to—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Does it continue to do all of the things that the budget papers—

Mr CARBINES: That is that state disability plan money. That is what is our implementation of the disability state plan. And so that is what we have allocated as additional funding over the two years to deliver and work on the initial initiatives from the state disability plan. It is just that in the papers it was attributed to the disability services output in error. That will need to be amended, because it should have gone to the Office for Disability output. And if you go to the tables, you can see that in the budget paper, where it has been incorrectly allocated. It adds up.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, if I go to what table?

Mr CARBINES: Okay. Well, we can go there too. Go to page 38 of BP3. If you go halfway down to—where is it; I will just find it for you—'Victorian state disability plan', \$14.6 million and \$0.5 million on page 38, table 1.8, under 'Disability services'. When we add that up we get our \$15.1 million.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But presumably the note is still correct about the completion of government programs, including building inclusive and safe communities for Victorians with a disability. Is that now completed altogether? There is no more funding for that?

Mr CARBINES: Well, over the past four years in relation to our COVID initiatives, yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, but we still obviously need to build inclusivity for people with disabilities.

Mr CARBINES: Absolutely. And that is why this budget—

Mr D O'BRIEN: So where are you doing that?

Mr CARBINES: Well, this budget allocates now \$15.1 million in table 1.8. That is the new funding to implement the priorities out of the state disability plan, and that is over the next two years. The \$15.1 million—that is what that is for.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Are there any reductions in staffing in the office?

Mr CARBINES: No.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No? Are there any increases in staffing in the office?

Mr CARBINES: Well, I can ask if my colleagues want to add anything about operational matters in relation to staff.

Ms SUNDERLAND: Not at this point.

Mr D O'BRIEN: 'No' is the answer?

Mr CARBINES: But I would expect that there is further investment that we have made that will provide the opportunity to address that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Chair. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Minister, if I could take you to the topic of the Victorian state disability plan and budget paper 3, table 1.8 on page 38. Would you be able to explain how the \$15.1 million will support the plan?

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Maas. The Andrews Labor government believes that every Victorian deserves to have access to services and infrastructure that meet their needs and improve their lives. Before I go into the details of what is funded in the budget, it is important to understand the work in the background of the state disability plan in guiding the government's funding priorities. The state disability plan is our main tool for meeting its international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and serves as Victoria's primary implementation tool for *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–31*. More than meeting these objectives, though, it provides a framework to ensure that all Victorians can enjoy equal participation, opportunities and life outcomes.

In March we proudly released our *Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022–2026*. *Inclusive Victoria* outlines an inclusion agenda that responds to the ongoing complex impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. It seeks to transform the way the government works through six systemic reforms, those being co-design with people with disability, Aboriginal self-determination, intersectional approaches, universal design and accessible communications, disability-confident and inclusive workforces and effective data and outcome reporting. In addition to those six reforms, the plan includes 22 priority areas and 175 actions to improve outcomes for people with disability across the education, health, mental health, housing, transport and justice systems and in family violence and sport and recreation. Other priority areas include changing community attitudes, supporting access to a high-quality NDIS and interfaces and the new areas relating to digital inclusion, the right to expression of sexuality and gender identity, pride and recognition. Produced during the pandemic, it captures the evolving questions around what we all need from our community—important things like inclusion, connection, opportunity, recognition and purpose. And like the best plans for the future, it is directly shaped by the lived experience of Victorians with disability. But it is not enough just to have a plan. Changing lives requires action, and that is why our government will back that vision as set out in the document and ensure the community sees long-lasting change for people with disabilities. The state budget begins that process.

While considering the state disability plan, it is important to recognise two key things: firstly, the achievements of the Victorian Disability Advisory Council in bringing the perspectives of the disabled community to bear on our work in developing the plan. I commend Dr George Taleporos for his leadership of VDAC. Their guidance and advice were invaluable in developing the plan, and I do deeply appreciate it. The second thing to keep in mind is the coronavirus pandemic and what it has meant for people with a disability. For many it has been a time of isolation and uncertainty. It has been a time where we saw the best of the community in coming forward to advocate on critical matters to them and ensuring decisions were made. People often would say that all decisions needed to be made with them that were about them, so 'Nothing about us without us' is very much a clear message for people with disabilities and their engagement on these matters. This work in advocacy, working alongside our government, substantially has shaped and improved our response to the pandemic and

helped bring to life initiatives like the disability liaison officer program in our hospitals, and the funding and priorities of the state budget through the Victorian state disability plan move us towards our goal of breaking down those barriers that limit people with disability from fully participating in all aspects of our community, because Victorians with disability deserve no less. I certainly commend the plan to committee members.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Minister. Referring to service delivery in budget paper 3, page 44, can you explain what the Changing Places initiative is as part of the Victorian state disability plan?

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Maas. The 2022–23 budget will deliver 30 new fully accessible public toilet facilities across the state. Changing Places provides suitable facilities for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets, and a Changing Places facility allows people with high support needs to fully participate in the community. That may include people with an acquired brain injury, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida, motor neurone disease as well as many other people with a disability. What makes Changing Places different to regular facilities is that they provide height-adjustable adult-sized change tables, a constant charging ceiling track hoist system, a centrally located peninsular toilet and circulation spaces as defined in the design specifications. So there are a range of processes there that make our Changing Places program in the budget very effective and welcome to people with disability and their families.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Barton.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Referring to budget paper 3, page 44, the state disability plan and how to make Victoria more inclusive for those with a disability, how do you think the multipurpose taxi program could be improved to assist in making Victoria more inclusive, particularly taking into account the challenges in rural and regional Victoria?

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Barton. It is important to highlight, I think, in the first instance some of the investments the government is making that do not exist in isolation and are complemented by our other investments in programs like the multipurpose taxi program, which I know Mr Barton is a passionate proponent of, alongside the state disability plan that I was just referring to, that make our state more inclusive. That multipurpose taxi program supports some 86 000 people, including 15 125 wheelchair users with accessibility and mobility needs, by paying half the cost of each commercial passenger vehicle trip up to a total of \$60. Last financial year the program budget was some \$99.7 million. As part of the multipurpose taxi program the government also provided a specific financial incentive by paying a wheelchair-lifting fee when a driver loads and unloads a participating passenger travelling in a wheelchair or scooter.

An additional \$5 million per year has been budgeted between 2020–21 and 2024–25 for this initiative. These investments in the multipurpose taxi program have seen some substantial improvements both in the amount of wheelchair-accessible vehicles on the roads and decreased waiting times. For example, in June 2017 we saw some 637 accessible vehicles, while in April 2022 that number had grown to some 949 accessible vehicles. In terms of wait times, in 2016–17 the average wait time for a wheelchair-accessible vehicle was 26.4 minutes, and then in 2019–20, which was the last period not obviously significantly affected by COVID-19, that reduced to 10.1 minutes. The average wheelchair accessible vehicle wait time in the third quarter of 2021–22 is 8.2 minutes.

That is where the investments we make in these areas have worked together. Using the example of the Changing Places investment we have now made in multiple budgets to dramatically ramp up installation of those facilities, it is a complete game changer for people with disabilities who use these facilities, because it allows those people with high support needs to fully participate in the community. As I touched on earlier with Mr Maas, in combination here with what you have raised, Mr Barton, someone who wanted to go to Melbourne Zoo that previously would have been limited because of inadequate facilities or they did not have Changing Places facilities—the difference is between being able to go and not being able to go in comfort and enjoy one of the great tourist attractions of Melbourne. That has changed now. We have provided more opportunity because the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program comes into play. That means people who then use Changing Places are supported throughout their journey, and it means our government are supporting this cohort to be able to attend popular venues and to get the full experience with dignity. Also there is a benefit to tourism and the tourism economy, in both the regions and in metropolitan Melbourne, where people with disability and their

families can make plans to get to more parts of the state, engage in more activities and more of the tourism economy and make a contribution themselves, because many of the journeys and the visits are mapped out based on Changing Places and the support that is provided to those more independently who want to use the multipurpose taxi program.

Mr BARTON: I think we might challenge some of those numbers. You might want to read the report from the inquiry into the multipurpose taxi program. We are not so agreeable with what you have just said, Minister.

Mr CARBINES: Mr Barton, I would be keen to be enlightened with some of your things. I know that the work that you have done there certainly has helped to try to inform some of the work around the plan, so I would certainly welcome the opportunity—

Mr BARTON: We have actually got a declining wheelchair fleet, particularly in rural and regional Victoria.

Mr CARBINES: Right.

Mrs McARTHUR: He has not read the report.

Mr BARTON: Not yet. If I can just go to the NDIS, referring to budget paper 5 and to Victoria's contributions to the NDIS, how will the multipurpose taxi program in the longer term be impacted by the NDIS, or what is the government position?

Mr CARBINES: Could you just—

Mr BARTON: Is the multipurpose taxi program going to be swallowed up by the NDIS?

Mr CARBINES: Well, I would have thought that the new NDIS transport policy that is in place would allow more members to be contacted to let them know how the NDIS is going to affect them. What we have probably seen through the budget is that we are committed to having more access to the services that people need. Perhaps there are some further conversations to be had with Minister Carroll and us about how the interface between the NDIS and the multipurpose taxi system operates, because there will clearly be some further transition off our state-based programs around transport. So I think there is some further work that we could do there, Mr Barton.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr Barton. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister and officials, again for your time and for the work that you are doing in this important portfolio. I would like to continue along the path that Mr Maas was exploring and particularly refer you to budget paper 3, page 44, and get an understanding of how the disability liaison program continues to be funded through this budget.

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Ms Richards. The disability liaison program, by way of background, was a joint initiative between the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The disability liaison officer, or DLO, program was established early in the pandemic to identify and address barriers in accessing health services, including COVID-19 assessment, treatment and vaccination as well as other critical services for people with disabilities. In May 2020 the Victorian government established a six-month DLO program in health services. The program was subsequently extended through the November 2020 and May 2021 state budget state disability plan allocations and then through to July this year. Over 2021–22 the focus of the program shifted from broad health service accessibility to a more targeted focus on supporting access to COVID-19 vaccinations for people with disability. In October 2021 the Department of Health allocated additional funding of some \$4.195 million to boost the number of positions across the state and increase the program's capacity to support vaccination access and uptake among people with disability. The success of the DLO program can be measured in the vaccination success, with 10 000 individuals accessing the program to get access to a COVID vaccination. The state budget continues the funding for 22 DLOs, or one for each of our local health areas, as we move into the next phase of the pandemic to continue that important work.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. I am also interested in understanding the funding for the Victorian disability advocacy program, and to do that I will refer you to budget paper 3, page 44.

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Ms Richards. The Victorian budget 2022–23 will deliver \$1.7 million in further funding to 23 organisations funded through the Victorian disability advocacy program. That is a 50 per cent increase in our core funding to strengthen the rights of Victorians with a disability. Advocacy and self-advocacy remain primary mechanisms for upholding rights and supporting the leadership of people with disability as key tools for identifying and redressing harm and discrimination. However, as the pandemic hit and with the cuts by stealth to the NDIS that we saw by the former government, we have seen demand spike in recent years and challenge the capacity of the Victorian disability advocacy sector. They have really had their work cut out for them. So to help address this, our government has provided a 50 per cent boost to organisations who receive core funding to provide advocacy support. I am pleased to say that the government is again maintaining a 50 per cent boost to this program to address the ongoing need for advocacy work at a time of high demand, and that program will provide a range of advocacy work, including systemic advocacy, individual advocacy and support for self-advocacy. As of 31 December 2021 the program had supported something like 1519 individuals, so that 50 per cent funding boost that is continued through this year's budget means these organisations can continue to provide boosted support, with their output target measure moving from a baseline of some 1700 receiving support to 2500 people for the upcoming period.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. Just with the bit of time I have got left, I am interested in understanding, using the same budget paper reference, funding for the public education campaign to promote better attitudes and behaviours particularly towards people with autism.

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Ms Richards. Our Change Your Reactions campaign in the budget this year—\$1 million over two years to deliver phase 2 of that program—is part of the *Victorian Autism Plan*. When we launched that first stage of the plan, the Change Your Reactions campaign, we knew there was a lack of community understanding. That is one of the main barriers that can lead to autistic Victorians missing out on opportunities in life. We wanted Victorians to know some of the ways autism can impact people and the helpful ways in which they can respond to build greater understanding and inclusion. No-one wants to feel judged and unwelcome in their own community, but many autistic people and their families experience that every day. So Change Your Reactions encourages Victorians to recognise some of those challenges autistic people face and to understand those impacts of community actions and reactions. Phase 1 of the campaign saw Amaze work with autistic Victorians and their families on the campaign, including access across TV, radio and digital and social media. I am pleased we have been able to fund phase 2 of this important awareness program. I know the Member for Mordialloc well knows about that work in his role in education.

Ms RICHARDS: Great. Thanks very much, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Minister, can I take you to page 208 of budget paper 3 and specifically the first line item, 'Pension-level beds available in assisted supported residential services facilities'. Have you got that? 208—have you got that?

Mr CARBINES: Of BP3, did you say?

Mr NEWBURY: Page 208 of BP3—

Mr CARBINES: Yes.

Mr NEWBURY: and the pension-level beds available in assisted supported residential facilities. There is a difference between the target and outcome of 103 places reduced—lower—and there is a note that says the lower target is due to recent closures of some pension-level supported residential services. Where are, specifically, those 103 reduced pension-level supported residential services beds?

Mr CARBINES: Mr Newbury, we will have to come back to you on some of that detail. We will take that on notice, if that is all right, and we will get you some details in regard to those.

Mr NEWBURY: Do the department have any detail with them in relation to that note? I mean, even if you do not have specifically where they are, and I would appreciate if you can take that on notice—and perhaps it is best directed to the department—is there any reasoning behind those closures?

Mr CARBINES: No. I think we are going to have to come back to you with some detail about that.

Mr NEWBURY: No detail at all—okay. So we are just closing—we just do not know.

Mr CARBINES: Well, they are independently operated. We could speculate, but let us take it on notice and provide you with the details that you have requested.

Mrs McARTHUR: Cutting beds, but they do not know where.

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, I know—they are cutting beds but do not know where or what.

Mrs McARTHUR: They do not know where; it is amazing.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, the Minister—

Mr NEWBURY: Can I then ask you more generally speaking, Minister, as we do not seem to know why or where: are you concerned that there is a reduction? Just principally speaking, are you concerned that there is a reduction?

Mr CARBINES: Supported residential services are operated, in many cases, by a range of different organisations—

Mrs McARTHUR: Could you speak up, Minister?

Mr CARBINES: and individuals. So as I have said to you, we will take the question on notice and provide you with the details of the specific ones.

Mr NEWBURY: I am not asking specifically about this, I am saying there is a reduction. It is reflected in the budget. And I am just saying on a principle level, setting aside the specifics, which I take you are going to take on notice, are you concerned that there have been, in your own words in the budget, recent closures at a time when there is increasing demand?

Ms SUNDERLAND: Mr Newbury, we might just have to take that on notice. It may just be a transfer—

Mr NEWBURY: A principle-based question.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, could you please allow the Secretary to answer the question. The witnesses are attempting to be helpful and answer your questions, if you could stop interrupting, please.

Ms SUNDERLAND: We would need to take it on notice. I think some of that performance measure has moved from the Department of Health into DFFH, and vice versa, post the machinery-of-government change. That is why we are just finding it a little bit difficult to find the exact number that you referring to. We will take that one on notice because it may in fact not be quite the way it looks.

Mr NEWBURY: I am not sure anyone needing a bed is worried about a machinery-of-government change.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury.

Ms SUNDERLAND: No, of course, but just in terms of where it is reflected in the papers.

Mr NEWBURY: Could I ask—

Mr CARBINES: If I could add something further—

Mr NEWBURY: Please.

Mr CARBINES: We are also investing over \$13.6 million a year to assist the viability of some 70 participating supported residential services through our supported accommodation for vulnerable Victorians initiative. That includes the subprogram, the pension-level projects, which support some 20 of the 70 SRSs. So there is a range of supports that we do provide to our supported residential services. But to go to some of the further detail, there is an opportunity for us to take that on notice and provide that to you.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. I note your answer. Is there a plan to actually restore those beds?

Mr CARBINES: We would need to take on notice the question to get to the detail that you have asked for, which we will provide.

Mr NEWBURY: Setting aside the specific 103, is there a plan to increase beds more generally?

Mr CARBINES: Well, as I outlined to you, we are already providing over \$13.6 million a year to assist the viability of some 70 participating SRSs across the state through that supporting accommodation for vulnerable Victorians.

Mr NEWBURY: Sorry. What did you say? I cannot quite hear you.

Mrs McARTHUR: It is impossible to hear.

Mr NEWBURY: We just cannot hear you, Minister.

Mr CARBINES: As I said to you, the Victorian government is investing some \$13.6 million a year to assist the viability of 70 participating supported residential services, and we are doing that through our supporting accommodation of vulnerable Victorians initiative. That includes the subprogram, the pension-level projects which support 20 of 70 SRSs. We do support many SRS services across the state, and I welcome the opportunity to provide some further detail to you on your specific query.

Mr NEWBURY: That would be really appreciated as to where those cuts occur, and why.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Newbury. Your time has expired. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. I was wanting to refer you to the rural and regional budget paper, page 6. Could you please explain how \$146 million will revitalise rural and regional public sector residential aged care services?

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Ms Taylor. The Andrews government is committed to providing access to aged care services for some of our more vulnerable older Victorians. We have the largest public sector residential aged care sector in this state. Our jurisdiction has some 178 services operating about 5600 beds across Victoria, and public aged care plays a critical role in delivering aged care for older Victorians who would otherwise struggle to find appropriate care, whether due to the complexity of their care needs or location. Approximately 86 per cent of public sector residential care facilities are located in rural and regional locations, where the local facility is often the largest employer in town and often the only aged care provider, allowing locals to age in place, close to family and communities, and providing jobs close to home. In rural Victoria public sector residential aged care services play a key role in providing aged care to older people in their own community and are typically co-located with a health service, delivering cost-effective, integrated and holistic health services to the community. In many instances public sector residential aged care beds in small rural health services constitute the majority of our bed-based services. They are contributing to the overall critical mass that is needed to sustain cost-effective delivery of a range of health services to these communities.

In Victoria, unlike other jurisdictions, the public sector maintains a significant role in residential aged care, accounting for around 10 per cent of available residential aged care places in the state, compared to around 4.4 per cent in Queensland and even less in other states. Knowing how important those services are to older Victorians, the government is investing to replace outdated public aged care homes with modern purpose-built facilities. Since 2014 in December, more than \$473 million has been invested in improving the quality, amenity and safety of public sector residential aged care services. The 2022–23 state budget will invest over \$146 million to modernise and upgrade public residential aged care services in regional Victoria, and we are going to provide a safe and homelike environment for those residents. That funding is going to deliver a replacement of 36 beds at Camperdown, a replacement of 30 beds and the refurbishment of a further 42 beds at Mansfield and a replacement of 38 beds at Orbost, as well as planning for 40 beds at Bright and 45 beds at Heywood. These investments are on top of the government's investment of some \$65 million in the 2021–22 state budget to support rural public sector residential aged care. That includes some \$57.12 million to redevelop the Glenview nursing home in Rutherglen, for which designs were recently released. Glenview is the only aged care provider in Rutherglen and there is strong demand, despite out-of-date facilities, so that investment will

provide residents with high-quality facilities better suited to their wellbeing and provide contemporary models of care.

The government also plans to continue to support the operation of public sector residential aged care services with a further \$29.9 million in the 2022–23 state budget to maintain operations across the state. New facilities we are building across the state will improve wellbeing for both aged care residents and staff. Each facility will be purpose designed to enable contemporary aged care practice and meet the complex physical health and mental health needs of residents. They will also provide residents with independence, greater privacy and dignity, and support many of the psychosocial needs in an environment that enhances safety and amenity by providing more up-to-date services designed around those contemporary models of care. Those new services will be better able to enable ageing in place for residents as their care needs increase, diverting people with complex needs from admissions to acute health services that would otherwise impact on individual outcomes at hospital and patient flow. It will also provide better arrangements and care for extended family in regional communities to be able to be engaged and involved in the care and support needs of those who are residents of those aged care facilities in regional Victoria. It also provides a significant opportunity—that investment and expansion—in many cases for employment and also attracts more professional healthcare workers to our regional aged care facilities because they can work in modern, safe and great environments that you want to contribute to your working life in, and that is another big bonus of the work of this investment in rural and regional aged care services.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Back to the Secretary: following on from Mr Newbury's question about the 103 beds, you do not know where they have closed—you are going to confirm this—and why they have closed, can you also confirm the locations of those closures, please, on notice?

Ms SUNDERLAND: I think I took that question on notice already.

Mrs McARTHUR: I am just adding the locations.

Ms SUNDERLAND: Sure, of course.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you very much indeed. That is very helpful. Also, since we do not know where we are closing beds, maybe we will go to where you have got some new beds that you mentioned. Thirty-eight new aged care beds in Orbost—now, Orbost already has 38 beds, so is this 38 new beds in addition to the existing 38, or are you just confirming you have already got 38 beds in Orbost? Are we refurbishing the beds, perhaps? So is it new beds, refurbishment or repeating that we have got 38 beds in Orbost?

Mr CARBINES: The investment at Orbost is new beds.

Mrs McARTHUR: So we are going to have 76 beds in Orbost? Just confirming, Minister: 76 beds in Orbost?

Prof. WALLACE: Yes, the \$45 million investment in this year's budget is for 38 new beds in Orbost, and we expect that those are in development and the completion date is yet to be determined based on the planning, but funding for—

Mrs McARTHUR: But 76 beds in Orbost?

Ms SUNDERLAND: Well, the funding is for 38 new public sector aged care beds.

Mrs McARTHUR: And we are going to keep the 38 existing beds—we might refurbish the pillows or something, but we are going to keep them?

Prof. WALLACE: Well, the funding of \$45.362 million is for 38 new beds in Orbost.

Mrs McARTHUR: Good. We are not going to ditch the old ones, though, are we? We are keeping the 38 old beds as well?

Prof. WALLACE: As far as I am aware. We will take that on notice and come back to you with certainty.

Mrs McARTHUR: Can you take that on notice?

Prof. WALLACE: Absolutely.

Mrs McARTHUR: We want new and old. Great.

Mr CARBINES: I would add, Chair, that a \$45.362 million investment at Orbost Regional Health service for 38 new beds is a significant investment in the Orbost community. It has been welcomed by the Orbost community. It is part of a \$146 million public sector residential aged care capital upgrade investment by this government for rural and regional communities in some of the most remote parts of our state.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr CARBINES: It is welcomed by those communities in Orbost, in Mansfield, in Camperdown—

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes, I know. We heard about the Camperdown beds about twice—from another minister as well. They have got a good run, the beds in Camperdown.

Mr CARBINES: and I would encourage you to do that, because they are very, very welcoming of those opportunities.

Mrs McARTHUR: Excellent. I refer to page 228 of budget paper 3, which relates to age support services outputs. In 2016 the Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee conducted a parliamentary inquiry into management practices, pricing and dispute resolution within the retirement housing sector. One of the recommendations of the inquiry was that the Victorian government establish an ombudsman to provide retirement village residents with a fast, free and fair forum to resolve their housing disputes. The minister responded, happily, in 2017—that is five years ago—by saying the government would investigate further. Given this remains a request of seniors groups some five years later, why has this recommendation not been implemented, Minister?

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Mrs McArthur. The regulation and administration of the retirement villages is a matter for the minister for consumer affairs, so I suggest that when she appears—I think on Friday—you put that question to her.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, that is most helpful, Minister. So retirement issues are not in your bailiwick?

Mr CARBINES: We all have an interest in matters of retirement, and some of us may be closer to it than others or may be engaging in retirement matters. I plan to continue working hard for people in my community for a long time yet. But as I said to you—

Mrs McARTHUR: You are not retiring, Minister?

Mr CARBINES: the matters of retirement villages are matters under the administration of the minister for consumer affairs, and I suggest that you pursue those matters with the relevant minister.

Mrs McARTHUR: Excellent, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and department representatives, for joining us. Thank goodness there is more to aged care than fluffing the pillows. Goodness me! Public aged care in Victoria is so much more significant than that. Maybe that is why there were issues federally—from the lack of understanding of aged care. But if I can go to the strengthening of the NDIS interface and take you, Minister, to the service delivery part of budget paper 3, page 43, I am wondering if you could explain for the committee how the Victorian government is strengthening Victoria's interface with the NDIS.

Mr CARBINES: Thanks, Mr Richardson. The Andrews Labor government is a strong supporter of the NDIS. The NDIS is a disability safety net for all Victorians, and it is a great Labor reform alongside Medicare and superannuation. We are proud to be contributing some \$2.9 billion this coming financial year to the

scheme, of which the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing will contribute \$1.8 billion. The remaining contribution of \$1.1 billion comes from other areas of the Victorian government and includes some \$271 million for the DisabilityCare Australia Fund. It is a fund that was established to reimburse state and territories and the commonwealth government for some of the additional expenditure incurred in relation to the scheme. As of 31 March the NDIS is supporting some 137 891 Victorian participants, with a further 4747 people determined eligible, who are undergoing preplanning on their first plan. Of those participants, we know that for nearly 64 000—64 000 to 70 000, around that number—it is the first time they have received disability supports, and of course that is really at the nub and the heart of the NDIS, to provide also an opportunity for those who have never been engaged as clients of the system and never had that intensive support, to be engaged, involved and supported. We know that as the NDIS has evolved it has had its challenges for many people with disabilities, and being able to navigate the scheme is a challenge. It has been especially true throughout the pandemic, which has left many people with a disability feeling isolated and vulnerable, so ensuring access and support to the packages that they have is critical.

In response to the challenges experienced by Victorians with complex disability needs in their NDIS journey, our government has funded the intensive support team, IST. The IST is to help Victorians navigate that NDIS system and access appropriate supports that fulfil their needs. Since its inception in April 2017 the IST has provided support to approximately 2600 Victorians with disability and their families in addition to providing those disability-focused supports in emergency responses, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first quarter of 2022, from 1 January through to 31 March, the IST accepted some 159 requests for support. It is anticipated the IST will accept approximately another 900 referrals to support Victorians with a disability by 30 June this year. So it is a program that I have seen time and time again help vulnerable Victorians who often do not know where to go or where to look, and we have seen the families of individuals who have received support from the IST have this sense of relief—the program has meant somebody with expertise has been in their corner. As someone who knows—I know many MPs who have referred cases of their constituents to my office do share this view—I am pleased to be able to inform you that important service continues to be funded as part of the 2022–23 budget, so \$2.7 million to continue to allow us to provide assistance to Victorians with complex needs who have really benefited from that work.

The program is also one of the ways that we are able to help people navigate the NDIS and provide advocacy for people who use the NDIS. As I mentioned in a previous response, the Victorian disability advocacy program, which provides that funding to support organisations to provide advocacy, has seen a large growth in demand through COVID, but demand has also grown for requests for help in advocacy in interacting with the NDIS, both individual and self-advocacy. Those organisations are often specialised in the particular needs and sensitivities of the communities they work in, which may be across people of CALD backgrounds with a disability, young people with a disability or people from particular regions, and we have continued the 50 per cent boost in funding that I touched on earlier, where we provide support to those organisations to do that important work.

So we are playing an active and supportive role in helping those individual Victorians get the most out of the NDIS system, but we also note that there are many people with disabilities living in Victoria who fall outside the current eligibility requirements for being able to get an NDIS plan. That is why we know we have responsibility for providing supports outside the scope of the plan, of the scheme, and it is a big feature of what we see as our hands-on role—since the NDIS has changed the position of the Vic government; we are not the direct provider of many of those services—with the NDIS.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you.

Mr CARBINES: Thank you, Mr Richardson. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. I would just acknowledge that in your presentation you noted the extra funding for Uniting Prahran, which I know will be very well received there and will go a long way to supporting vulnerable residents in Prahran.

But I did want to ask you, first, about supported residential services, and I see that there is some funding within the budget for establishing the Social Services Regulator. Now, I understand that regulator will actually be

responsible for supported residential services. Is that the case, and is there any additional funding to improve oversight and regulation of SRSs?

Mr CARBINES: Mr Hibbins, there is still obviously some work ongoing at the moment around what the regulations are, coming off the back of the legislation that Parliament has passed in relation to the Social Services Regulator. I would have an expectation that that sector will have oversight from the Social Services Regulator, and I think—I will confirm—there was about \$300 000 in the budget for ongoing work around the Social Services Regulator and its establishment. But clearly, as the regulatory work is concluded and with the step-up of the Social Services Regulator into 2023, we are then going to find a further establishment in the budget for the ongoing work of the Social Services Regulator, and I would have an expectation, in the consultation work that is happening with the sector, that there will be a role for the Social Services Regulator around supported residential services.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you. The Office of the Public Advocate has called for systemic change within the SRSs to address a number of significant issues that have come out of SRSs. Is that something that the government is looking to act on?

Mr CARBINES: Look, I think there is always more that we can be doing around supporting the rights of vulnerable communities, particularly around investment of that \$13 million I touched on earlier to assist the viability of 70 of our participating supported residential services. So I think there is a need for that service. But as you would also be aware, we have had the potential revocation of SRS registrations in certain locations around Sydenham Grace and Gracemanor, and so the department does uphold the safety rights and wellbeing—the government does—of vulnerable Victorians that are living in those shared residential settings, including particularly around those SRS accommodations. And so there is further work that we will need to do there. But it is always an ongoing challenge around what are registered organisations that run our SRS accommodation for vulnerable people, and I think that part of the work that Parliament has done—passing legislation on the human services regulator and the engagement we are having with the community services sector around the regulations, the detail and the teeth the human services regulator will have responsibility for—allows us then to see what further accountabilities the SRS sector will face under the work of the human services regulator.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you. Can I go now to the funding of the state disability plan, which also includes the Victorian disability advocacy program. Can I ask how much of that funding will go to disability advocacy organisations?

Mr CARBINES: We are committed to further work around our disability investment of \$1.8 million for VDAP, so the Victorian disability advocacy program in the budget includes \$1.8 million. Disability advocacy of course is critical, and as I just touched on with Mr Richardson before, particularly around the advocacy and navigation of the national disability insurance scheme and maintaining the capacity around some of the reforms that are now coming out of the disability royal commission, we felt that there was a need to demonstrate further investment and support. So that \$1.8 million in 2022–23 is about continuing to address the demand that the Victorian disability advocacy program is receiving. The advocacy sector played a very critical role not just through the pandemic but with the royal commission and with engaging with the NDIS, and those organisations that deliver advocacy services through VDAP will continue to receive that funding boost to meet demand and keep people with disability safe.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the estimates with you today. Thank you for appearing before the committee. The committee will follow up on questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days.

The committee will take a short break before moving to consideration of the estimates with Minister Wynne.

Thank you for your time today. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.