

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

**Inquiry into the 2020-21 Financial and Performance Outcomes**

**Department of Families, Fairness and Housing: 12 November 2021**

**RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE**

**Witnesses:**

- Sandy Pitcher, Secretary
- Ben Rimmer, Associate Secretary, Chief Executive Officer, Homes Victoria
- Argiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary, Children, Families, Communities and Disability
- Janine Toomey, Senior Executive Director, Community Services Operations
- Eleri Butler, Deputy Secretary, Family Safety Victoria
- Brigid Monagle, Acting Deputy Secretary, Readiness, Response and Emergency Management
- Nicola Young, Acting Deputy Secretary, Readiness, Response and Emergency Management
- Andrew Minack, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Delivery Services
- Cynthia Lahiff, Chief Finance Officer

## QUESTION [1]

### Danny O'Brien

From new dwellings, how many will be available for victims of family violence? Provide a figure. Please provide the percentage allocated to disability. Provide exact figures for 2020-21 and new builds.

**Mr RIMMER:** There are a range of different systems in place. There are some houses—and my colleague might wish to talk to this—that are really allocated through the family violence system, but the vast majority of the housing support that is provided in social housing for victim-survivors of family violence is provided through the priority access register of the Victorian housing waiting list. I think the proportion of people who have family violence listed as one of their factors is something in the order of 20 or 25 per cent, and I might be able to come back to that—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Could I—

**Mr RIMMER:** Which means—sorry, Mr O'Brien, this is very important—at least a quarter of the houses that we allocate are allocated to victim-survivors of family violence.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes. What I am after, though, is what is being done about the backlog, and can I get a figure for 2020–21 on how many of the new builds were actually allocated for family violence—or are they not specifically allocated?

**Mr RIMMER:** With a few small exceptions housing is created so that it can respond flexibly to the new and emerging circumstances of the community. In some cases that might be someone with a mental health challenge. In some cases that might be someone who is a victim-survivor of family violence. But what we can tell you is that our experience is that a very high proportion of social housing allocations are just people who have experience of family violence.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Just off topic briefly but on the question of what the new builds are going to, is there a percentage allocated to disability housing?

**Mr RIMMER:** I am not trying to be difficult, Mr O'Brien—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I am losing time, so you are, at the moment, with respect.

**Mr RIMMER:** Specialist disability accommodation is a different thing. I am not sure whether that is what you are referring to. Within the normal social housing stock a high number of those houses—I think 5 or 10 per cent—are designed with a very high degree of accessibility built in, which meets the situations of many clients, and all of the new buildings are built to silver standard, which has a high level of accessibility built in.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. Could I perhaps get on notice what that figure actually is—you said 5 per cent or 10 per cent—and obviously for 2020–21 the actual number that were either built or started for that high level of disability?

**Mr RIMMER:** I am happy to take that on notice.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 4]

## RESPONSE

On 15 November 2020, the Victorian Government announced the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build to deliver over 12,000 new homes. Of these, around 2,900 will be affordable dwellings and 9,300 will be social housing properties. Of the 9,300 social housing properties, 1,100 will replace existing stock whilst 8,200 will be new social housing dwellings to help Victorians in need. Social housing is for people on low incomes, with priority given to people who have experienced homelessness, family violence or have other special needs. Nearly one in ten priority applicants on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) are victim survivors of family violence. The Big Housing Build will deliver up to 1,000 social housing properties to provide a safe home for survivors of family violence across Victoria.

A quarter of the total investment in the Big Housing Build is for regional and rural areas, equating to \$1.25 billion for regional projects. This investment comes on top of the \$500 million Building Works Maintenance Stimulus initiative, which includes \$10 million to increase support options for women and children escaping family violence.

The Victorian Government believes that access to safe, stable and affordable housing is vital for women and children who are experiencing family violence. Since 2016, the government:

- has acquired 325 social housing dwellings and head leased 401 medium-term tenancies from the private sector
- has prioritised family violence victim survivors and their families for social housing through the VHR
- is redeveloping 17 Homes Victoria owned family violence refuges to the ‘core and cluster’ model and constructing three new Aboriginal family violence refuges including a new Aboriginal family violence refuge in the Horsham region through a \$9.1 million investment announced in the 2021-22 State budget
- is providing over 6,500 flexible support packages each year to help victim survivors.

Five years on from the commencement of these reforms, even more housing options are available, so that victim survivors do not feel they have to remain in or return to violent relationships.

At least 5 per cent of new social housing delivered under the Big Housing Build will have a high level of accessibility for people with a disability, and includes accessible kitchens, bathrooms, and storage, as well as accessible drop-off areas, paths, lifts, and car parking.

The Big Housing Build will also enable 2,000 dwellings or allocations from the VHR to be delivered as supported housing for people living with mental illness, including people with psychosocial disability, who require ongoing intensive treatment care and support. From the Big Housing Build, \$1.38 billion has been allocated to the Social Housing Growth Fund. Grants will be provided to the community housing sector to grow the supply of social housing. The Social Housing Growth Fund forward program includes a Mental Health Supported Housing Round. This will deliver social housing for Victorians living with ongoing mental illness. A co-design process with people with lived experience of mental illness, families, carers and supports and other stakeholders will inform the building and support model/s, in line with the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System recommendations. This is expected to commence in early 2022.

The needs of victim survivors of family violence and people with disability will be recognised in the 10 Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing, to be released in late 2021.

Based on current planning, the Big Housing Build program is on track to deliver against the cumulative commencement targets as follows:

Dwellings commencement timeline	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Dwelling Commencement	6,100	11,100	12,300
Cumulative Total			

All dwellings will be commenced by 30 June 2024 and be completed by financial year 2026-27.

## QUESTION [2]

### Danny O'Brien

High rise towers – when were the external windows of the high-rise towers they last cleaned? Provide with a breakdown by tower, so Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Kensington et cetera.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. On a related but very different issue, when were the external windows of the high-rise towers in the inner city last cleaned?

**Mr RIMMER:** Oh.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You are going to take that on notice?

**Mr RIMMER:** Mr O'Brien, you have me. I have mountains of material in front of me. I literally have a large amount of data in front of me, but I cannot tell you the answer to that question.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Could you take it on notice—

**Ms PITCHER:** But we will take that on notice, yes.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** perhaps with a breakdown by tower, so Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Kensington et cetera. If you could provide that on notice, that would be welcome.

**Mr RIMMER:** With pleasure. I would be interested in the answer myself.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 6]

## RESPONSE

In 2010 the option of cleaning high-rise tower windows externally was explored, but due to the high cost, the program was not considered to be sustainable. The corridor windows of all high-rise towers are cleaned internally as part of the routine cleaning program every fourteen days.

In 2015 the department arranged for the cleaning of selected high-rise towers to remove pigeon waste from windows and installed bird spikes to help reduce birds nesting on the external ledges. The table below shows the high rise towers which were part of this program and the levels of each building which were cleaned.

No	Street	Suburb	Windows to be cleaned
1	1 Surrey Rd	South Yarra	Levels one to six of the Eastern face and levels one to eight, in the North West corner.
2	150 Inkerman St	St Kilda	Levels one to four of the North West corner of the building and levels one to twelve over the North East corner over the foyer area.
3	232 Park St	South Melbourne	East face – Ground floor round floor to 5, North East corridor corner – Ground floor to 5, North side of lift shaft – Ground floor to 8.
4	127 Gordon St	Footscray	North East corner by hopper driveway and 3 panes along Ground floor North corridor – Ground floor to level 12. North face, 2 panes wide directly over North entry – Ground floor to level 12
5	12 Sutton St	North Melbourne	South East corner near hopper drive and 5 panes along Ground floor corridor – Ground floor to level 20, East face Ground floor to level 10.
6	159 Melrose St	North Melbourne	North face – Ground floor to level 6.
7	12 Holland Crt	Flemington	North end – Ground floor to level 10, North face east side of lift shaft over the foyer – Ground floor to level 20, all windows, North face section projecting round floor above foyer Ground floor to level 10, SE corner return near hopper driveway, and 5 panes along ground floor corridor Ground floor to level 20.
8	120 Racecourse Rd	Flemington	North face of North wing ground floor, Ground floor to level 10, West face, Northern end, 4 bays wide, - Ground floor to level 8.
9	126 Racecourse Rd	Flemington	South East corner 6 panes along Ground floor corridor, adjacent to hopper drive – Ground floor to 20, East face – Ground floor to level 12.

10	235 Nelson Pl,	Williamstown	North face – Ground floor to level 5, 4 bays from eastern corner.
11	139 Highett St	Richmond	North side – Ground floor to level 6.
12	229 Hoddle St	Collingwood	North side over office courtyard, 2 panes - Ground floor to level 8.
13	240 Wellington St	Collingwood	East side, central block, – Ground floor to level 14, North wing ground floor inset panels Ground floor to level 20.
14	140 Brunswick St	Fitzroy	South East side – Ground floor to level 7, South East corner by stairwell – Ground floor to level 7.
15	90 Brunswick St	Fitzroy	North wing Ground floor, Ground floor to level 14, South East corner over foyer, 2 panes wide – Ground floor to level 7.
16	95 Napier St,	Fitzroy	East face – Ground floor to level 4 over foyer, 3 bays wide, South East corner near hopper, 5 panes wide, Ground floor to level 12.

### General Cleaning

The department has contracts in place for cleaning all high-rise towers. This work includes:

- daily cleaning of the ground floor foyer, lifts and public toilets, rubbish removal and spot cleaning of all levels and stairwells, cleaning of all internal surfaces up to 2m in height on ground floor, removal of incorrectly disposed household rubbish on all levels, plus additional cleaning for any daily spills in stairwells or corridors as notified by the renters, local office or Housing Call Centre.

Each corridor level of all high-rise towers is cleaned every fortnight and includes:

- sweeping and mopping floors, cleaning all surfaces in laundry and drying rooms (including washing machines, dryers, and clothes lines up to 2 meters, cleaning around rubbish chutes and the Internal cleaning of corridor windows.

### Covid-19 Cleaning

Covid-19 cleaning is being conducted in accordance with the Department of Health advice. This work includes touch point sanitisation cleaning on every floor 3 times a day, 7 days a week. Cleaners record the time and date for touch point cleaning on their daily work sheet. The cleaning of the ground floor foyer of each building including door handles, lift buttons, stair rail, laundry surfaces and rubbish chutes.

Hand sanitiser dispensers have been installed on every floor, in the foyer, laundry and toilets of all high-rise towers and are inspected daily, refilled and replaced when required.

If a resident on a high-rise estate has COVID-19, the level the resident lives on will be deep cleaned in accordance with Department of Health advice. This includes deep sanitisation cleaning of communal areas including lifts, and laundries on that level.

## QUESTION [3]

### Danny O'Brien

What percentage of children in out-of-home-care have received their COVID vaccinations (first and both), as at 30 June 2021, and currently. Provide both percentage and actual numbers of children.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes. Thank you. I think it is an issue that has been raised. Can I move to out-of-home care. Presumably, Secretary, going back to the start of the vaccination program in February or March, the department would have a policy, a program, a plan for helping to ensure that kids in out-of-home care and foster care were vaccinated. Would that be correct?

**Ms PITCHER:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Can you tell me what percentage of out-of-home care children have received their COVID vaccinations? Perhaps as at 30 June, unless you have got an update for now. That would be useful.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Mr O'Brien, we might need to take that one on notice just in terms of the time period that you are asking for. So are you saying back on 30 June, as of 30 June?

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Well, consistent with the outcomes hearings, that would be the ideal, but noting that that is going to be very out of date, if you can provide a more current figure.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** We can provide a figure relating back to that time, but it is fair to say that we have been doing a lot of work across our services and with our service providers to engage and support both carers and young people that are being cared for to get vaccinated. There are a whole range of initiatives that have been put in place, including pop-up clinics and encouragement through the Department of Health to really get our carers—particularly in home-based care significant numbers of children have been vaccinated.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Could I get both first and fully vaccinated percentage figures if you will.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Yes, we can come back to you.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Both percentages and actual numbers, if you can. That would be great.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Indeed.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 6]

## RESPONSE

Children 12 years and over became eligible for COVID-19 vaccination from 13 September 2021. Since then, there has been a concerted effort to vaccinate eligible children in out of home care, with an initial focus on children in Residential Care, Lead Tenant and Supported Independent Living, as they were deemed at highest risk of contracting COVID-19.

As of 17 November 2021:

- 298 (74%) of the 402 children in residential care have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. 187 (47%) are partially vaccinated and 111 (28%) are fully vaccinated.
- 40 (41%) of the 98 children in Lead Tenant have received at least one dose of COVID vaccine. 27 (28%) are partially vaccinated and 13 (13%) are fully vaccinated.
- 28 (42%) of the 66 children in Supported Independent Living arrangements have received at least one dose of COVID vaccine. 19 (29%) are partially vaccinated and 9 (14%) are fully vaccinated.

## QUESTION [4]

**Danny O'Brien**

Is the vaccination mandatory for carers? Provide percentage and actual on first and fully vaccinated figures? How many carers were lost due to the mandate? Provide exact figures.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Has the department made a determination that carers and foster carers need to be vaccinated?

**Ms PITCHER:** Yes.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Yes.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So that will be compulsory?

**Ms PITCHER:** Yes.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Do you know what percentage are currently fully vaccinated?

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Again, we could come back to you with the actual numbers, Mr O'Brien, but we would say on the residential care side of it, particularly with paid personnel that are looking after children, they are required to be—mandated to be—vaccinated. A large majority of them, so probably in the vicinity of about 85 to 90 per cent, are vaccinated. Of course there are variations across the provider cohort, but that is the sort of line that we are at at the moment.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Consistent with the wider community.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Correct.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Can you perhaps take on notice whether we have lost—and if so, how many—foster and emergency foster carers as a result of the mandate for vaccination?

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Yes, we can do that. I have not heard of foster carers that we have lost, but in terms of residential care staff, there is a very small proportion of our residential care staff that are either hesitant or anxious about being vaccinated, but it really is a very small proportion.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 7]

## RESPONSE

As at 30 June 2021 carers were not included in the COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination (Workers) Directions. Please see below for vaccination status for each care type.

### Vaccination status of foster and kinship carers

- Foster and kinship carers are not required to be vaccinated under the Directions of the Chief Health Officer, but vaccination is being strongly encouraged to protect carers, children and others from COVID-19. Data on the number and proportion of foster and kinship carers who are vaccinated against COVID-19 is unavailable.

### Vaccination status of Residential care staff

- From 15 October 2021, all staff who work outside their home must have received their first COVID-19 vaccination. This includes Child Protection, Child and Family Services and Residential Care workers, along with ancillary support such as cleaners, tutors and contractors. Any workers who have not provided evidence of vaccination are unable to work onsite.
- The department is working with residential care providers and labour hire firms to monitor the number of residential care staff who choose not to receive a COVID-19 vaccination and identify how the department can support the continued availability of trained Residential Care workers able to provide high quality care now and into the future.

- The data for the residential care and labour hire workforce is collected manually and as at 12 November 2021, 88% of residential care and labour hire workers were partially or fully vaccinated or medically exempt.

**Number and proportion of residential care staff lost due to vaccine hesitancy or refusal**

- The number of residential care staff lost due to vaccine hesitancy or refusal is not available.

## QUESTION [5]

**Danny O'Brien**

How many foster care or child protection data breaches occurred during the reporting period. If possible, provide a detailed list of each breach to the Committee.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Secretary, how many foster care or child protection data breaches occurred during the reporting period?

If you want to take it on notice if you do not have it, Secretary, I am interested also in a detailed list of each breach that can be provided to the committee, if you can.

**Ms PITCHER:** Well, I am happy to take that on notice, because I cannot put my finger on that data at the moment. So yes, we are happy to report to you on just the number of breaches and the nature of those breaches.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 7]

## RESPONSE

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (including the period 1 July 2020 to 31 January 2021 as the Department of Health and Human Services) recorded 149 Child Protection program (including Foster Care) related privacy incidents between 1 July 2020 - 30 June 2021. Contracted service providers are required to notify the department of privacy incidents and these figures include those reports.

Generally these incidents have related to mis-typed email addresses which were subsequently recalled from, or deleted by, recipients shortly after sending.

## QUESTION [6]

### Danny O'Brien

How many unallocated clients, as in unallocated cases, have there been in the child protection sector for the year in question. Provide a figure of how many unallocated child protection cases there are, an average over four quarters or as at 30 June 2021. Provide an actual number, not as a percentage.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. That would be good. This is a question that for my sins I have been asking for about seven years now, but can you tell me how many unallocated clients, as in unallocated cases, there have been in the child protection sector for the year in question? I think there is a percentage attached to the annual report, but I am after the actual number.

**Ms PITCHER:** Well, we talk about the percentages because it is a very dynamic system. I know that conversation has happened in the past. We have got an unallocated case percentage change I think of minus 10.8 per cent, so that is a variation in this financial year. And the rate is very dynamic and changes throughout the year.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Well, I think the data at the end of the annual report in an appendix gives it a breakdown percentage by quarter, and so could I get the actual number at 30 June—the number of unallocated child protection cases?

**Ms PITCHER:** Do you want it to be the number though on that date, or do you want us to look across—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Well, whatever you can provide, but given, as you say, it will go up and down, if you can provide an average over the four quarters, that would be useful. But an actual number, not just a percentage.

**Ms PITCHER:** Yes. We are just very conscious that, because of the dynamic nature of it, giving an actual number at any point in time probably does not really tell the full picture.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** We have had it in the past, Secretary. There has been a number provided, so if you could do so, that would be great.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 7]

## RESPONSE

The average number of child protection cases awaiting allocation over the 2020-21 financial year was 1,756. This is an average over 12 months.

## QUESTION [7]

**Sam Hibbins**

Provide breakdown of expenditure, by tower if possible, on total cost of maintenance in 2020-21 reporting period.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay, thank you. Can I ask now in terms of the response to the pandemic: obviously a lot of public housing tenants, particularly in the high-rise towers, were having to spend a lot of time at home—study from home, work from home and what have you. Was any assistance or any thought given to increasing or supporting digital access for tenants in high-rise towers, given obviously there have been some reports of patchy internet and really struggling in that regard?

**Mr RIMMER:** Yes, so the answer to that, Mr Hibbins, is that this is something that we think about quite a lot. At various stages in the pandemic we have talked to Telstra and other providers about it. When you talk to tenants, when you talk to renters, there is just such a wide diversity of ways in which people now access the internet and their expectations about accessing the internet. All of our high-rise buildings are enabled for the NBN. Some tenants connect through the NBN, some do not. Most, many, have access to mobile phones, which now have pretty good data connections and which people hotspot. So maybe if you think about it through the lens of five or 10 years ago, you might have thought—and we have had this thought process ourselves—‘Maybe we should just put wi-fi in or something’. There are some technical challenges about the thickness of the concrete walls and whatever, because we have looked at that, but the reality is that there is just such a diversity of ways in which people get access to internet that it is quite hard to work out exactly how to improve that as an initiative, if I can put it like that.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes, okay. Thank you. Can I get now some just breakdown of some expenditure figures in 2020–21—feel free to take this on notice if you want—with regard to the total cost of security across public housing towers and, if it can be provided, breakdown versus per tower. The same with the total expenditure on cleaning, the same with the total expenditure on maintenance and then the same with the total expenditure on unit upgrades.

**Mr RIMMER:** Mr Hibbins, I can give you some of those numbers now. For cleaning in 2020–21, our total expenditure was \$76.19 million. Quite a lot of that was specifically related to COVID—enhanced initiatives and the kind of deep cleans that happened frequently throughout that period. On security, the amount for 2020–21 is \$43.76 million, and again about \$23.5 million of that is what you might describe as ordinary spend and about \$20 million of that is COVID-specific spend because we had, you know, a wide variety of people on at stages. We had nurses going door to door doing testing and vaccination and other things, so in some cases they had security arrangements with them. And so, yes, \$43.76 million was the total.

**Mr HIBBINS:** And then on maintenance?

**Mr RIMMER:** The maintenance number I do not think I have in front of me. Actually, hold on.

**Ms PITCHER :** We did of course have stimulus maintenance as well, which supplemented. The Victorian government had the \$2.7 billion statewide building works infrastructure program and within that we had \$498 million to fund the maintenance and upgrade, which was 23 000 social housing properties and 168 new social housing dwellings. Were you after maintenance just in the towers as opposed to across the—

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes.

**Mr RIMMER:** Perhaps we should take that on notice.

**Ms PITCHER :** We can take that on notice, yes.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Thank you. Of that \$498 million you have

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 12]

## RESPONSE

The department of Families, Fairness and Housing provides a range of programmed and responsive maintenance services across the 44 high rise towers. Listed in the table below is a summary of the maintenance costs by high rise estates for 2020-2021.

<b>2020/21 HIGH RISE MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE</b>		
<b>Estate</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Total Maintenance Cost</b>
Atherton Gardens	90 - 140 Brunswick Street and 95-125 Napier Street, Fitzroy	\$2,584,797
Barkly Street Estate	351 Barkly Street, Brunswick	\$393,465
Collingwood Estate	240 Wellington Street, Collingwood ;229-253 Hoddle Street, Collingwood	\$2,310,352
Crown Street Estate	29 Crown Street, Flemington	\$386,481
Debney Park Estate	120-130 Racecourse Road and 12 Holland Court Flemington	\$4,715,036
Elgin/Nicholson Street Estate	141 Nicholson Street and 20 Elgin Street, Carlton	\$945,056
Emerald Hill	200 Dorcas Street, South Melbourne	\$604,469
Floyd Lodge	63 Hanmer Street, Williamstown	\$264,044
Frank Wilkes Court	1 Holmes Road, Northcote	\$356,834
Gaskin Gardens	123-127 Gordon Street, Footscray	\$324,108
Horace Petty	259 Malvern Road & 2 Simmons Street & 1 Surrey Road, South Yarra	\$2,507,485
Hotham Estate	76 Canning Street, North Melbourne	\$400,513
Inkerman Heights	150 Inkerman Street, St Kilda	\$338,439
Kensington Estate	94 Ormond Street and 56 Derby Street, Kensington	\$560,235
King Street Estate	25-27 King Street, Prahran	\$728,382
Langdon Park	106 – 112 Elizabeth Street, & 139 Highett Street, Richmond	\$3,340,434
Layfield Court	146-156 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park	\$431,561
Loxton Lodge	49 Union Street , Windsor	\$375,012
Lygon Street Estate	480-530 Lygon Street and 478 Drummond Street, Carlton	\$1,476,522
Nelson Heights	235 Nelson Place, Williamstown	\$548,408
North Melbourne Estate	33 Alfred Street, 12 Sutton Street and 159 Melrose Place, North Melbourne	\$2,088,669
Park Towers	332 Park Street, South Melbourne	\$1,206,596
		<b>\$26,886,896</b>

## QUESTION [8]

**Sam Hibbins**

Has the youth refuges redesign report (which was commissioned in 2017), been used to inform any expenditure within youth refuges. Include any actions or outcomes that have come from this report.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. All right. Terrific. Thank you. Can I ask now about—budget paper 3, page 241—the housing assistance output, which is used for, amongst many things, accommodation for refuges. Can I ask: in terms of the youth refuges redesign report, which was commissioned in 2017, has that been used at all to inform any of the expenditure within youth refuges?

**Mr RIMMER:** I would have to take that on notice, I am afraid, Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. All right. And then any further update in terms of any actions or outcomes that have come from that report, Obviously that had a lot of significant sector involvement there.

**Mr RIMMER:** If I can just say one thing, which is we have been talking a little bit about the Big Housing Build supporting specific cohorts; one cohort that we are pretty focused on, for obvious reasons, is young people. There is some excellent work that is being done through Argiri's team on, for example, the Home Stretch program and that kind of thing, which is one angle into the youth housing challenge, but there are other angles as well. So we hope to be able over the coming months to say a little bit more about a cohort-specific engagement resulting from the Big Housing Build that has some youth engagement.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 13]

## RESPONSE

The report referred to from 2017 is titled “Current state and future possibilities Youth Refuges Redesign” and was commissioned by the former Department of Health and Human Services as an independent review into service challenges affecting youth refuges in Victoria.

In implementing the recommendations, Homes Victoria is engaging in a three-phase process of reform, working with youth refuge organisations, ancillary service providers and the Council to Homeless Persons to improve housing and quality of life outcomes youth refuges can provide to young people.

Since the report was published, new youth refuges have been delivered to support homeless youth in Victoria. These include new facilities in Melbourne City Mission's new CBD Front yard access point and Hope Street Melton. It also includes the relocation and expansion of the existing Imaroo Youth Refuge from Footscray to Werribee to meet regional demand. These facilities have leveraged the learnings of the report, including Recommendation 3: Enabling young people to input into decision making. By supporting an integrated approach for vulnerable young people with holistic, trauma-informed and healing orientated support, Melbourne City Mission's CBD Frontyard access point is being delivered in line with Recommendation 6: To develop specialist roles and refuges as well as.

The Youth Refuge Redesign work includes developing an implementation plan, service user engagement plan, workforce capability assessment, timeframe and resourcing considerations, as well as discussions with Council to Homeless Persons to include the lived experience of young people experiencing homelessness.

Since 2016-17 the Victorian Government has also invested over \$38 million for critical youth refuge services that are in line with continuous holistic improvement to service delivery and sector

engagement as identified in the report.

In line with report Recommendation 5: to encourage information sharing Homes Victoria is funding the Council to Homeless Persons' new 'Introduction to Youth Refuges' learning module for its Specialist Homelessness Services Learning Program. This module aims to build specialist sector and worker knowledge of how to effectively and sensitively deliver services to youth people in refuges.

## QUESTION [9]

### Sam Hibbins

Funding to LGBTIQ+ related businesses, which organisations were funded? Is there consideration for that funding to be continued?

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Thank you. I have still got a bit of time. Can I ask now about page 26 of the questionnaire. There was \$1.2 million for LGBTI organisations—I think small businesses and other organisations. Are you able to outline which organisations that funding went to?

**Ms PITCHER:** I will just look for the detail, but while I am doing so, the focus on LGBTIQ businesses really was recognising that there were strong impacts happening throughout COVID, and it was recognised that the equality portfolio could make quite a contribution to help those businesses. I have got Acting Deputy Secretary Nicola Young here, who may have the actual organisations—or should we take it on notice? We can take on notice the exact detail. I can go through the types of things that were funded, but if you are after the exact—

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Great. And because obviously that funding ended—I think it was just one year—whether there is any consideration for that funding to be continued.

**Source:** Unverified transcript, page 13

## RESPONSE

The 2020-21 Victorian Budget allocated \$2 million to deliver the LGBTIQ+ Sector Economic Recovery Grants Program. Funding was allocated through two streams of activity.

**Stream 1:** The \$1.2 million Revitalising the LGBTIQ+ Sector Fund provided grants to 25 LGBTIQ+ small businesses, venues, health organisations and services which were impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and provide essential, safe services for LGBTIQ+ communities. The following organisations were funded through the program:

- Minus18 Foundation Inc.
- Joy Melbourne Inc.
- The 86
- Scratch Arts
- Mark Francis G&S Pty Ltd T/A Eagle Leather
- ChillOut Daylesford Inc.
- Laird Hotel
- All The Queens Men
- Palstat Pty Ltd T/A Hares & Hyenas
- Transgender Victoria
- Melbourne Queer Film Festival
- Daylesford Aged Care Services Pty Ltd / Hepburn House
- Pony Club Gym
- LaTrobe Communication Clinic – LaTrobe University
- Preston Neighbourhood House
- Archer Magazine
- 99 SMITH STREET PTY LTD
- Drummond Street Services Inc.
- The Melbourne Gay and Lesbian Chorus
- Iridis Cosmetics
- Pride Cup
- DT's Hotel Pty Ltd
- The Equality Project
- Switchboard (Victoria) Inc.
- Gaytimes Pty Ltd

The LGBTIQ+ Sector Fund was established to address the immediate and significant economic and social impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the Victorian LGBTIQ+ sector. As such, the program was planned for delivery in 2020-21 only.

**Stream 2:** Funding of \$725,000 was allocated to support the planning and delivery of Melbourne Pride, a large-scale event which is a 2018 Victorian Government election commitment.

Funding for this event provided immediate financial support to the LGBTIQ+ sector through the event delivery partner, Midsumma Festival, and is expected to increase business revenue, including for LGBTIQ+ businesses and artists, and employment opportunities in industries impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

## QUESTION [10]

**Bev McArthur**

How many children in Victoria were in out of home care by placement, as at 30 September 2021?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** The growth of children in out-of-home care in Victoria is the fastest in the nation. How many children in Victoria were in out-of-home care by placement as of 30 September? You may want to take it on notice.

**Ms PITCHER:** 30 September?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Yes.

**Ms PITCHER:** In the reporting year?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** In the reporting year.

**Ms PITCHER:** Sure. I think we will need to take that on notice.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** That is fine. Okay, thank you.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 16]

## RESPONSE

At 30 September 2021 there were 8,997 children and young people in out-of-home care.

There were an additional 3,230 children and young people in permanent care.

Number of children in OOHC as at 30 September 2021	
Home-based care	1,568
Kinship care	6,943
Residential care	480
Other	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,997</b>

Number of children in permanent care as at 30 September 2021	
Permanent care	3,230

## QUESTION [11]

### Pauline Richards

What crisis accommodation options were available to women in 2020-21 who experience violence, aside from family violence refuges?

**Ms RICHARDS:** I really did want to get to a final question I have, and I am conscious of the time. What other crisis accommodation options exist for women who experience violence, aside from refuges? I think it is important for us to get some evidence about where we go.

**Ms PITCHER:** Sure. And I am conscious—if the time does not permit us, we can provide some more on notice as well.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 22]

## RESPONSE

Where it is safe and practicable to do so, Specialist Family Violence Services aim to support family violence victims to stay in their own homes. This support is sourced through the allocation of Flexible Support Packages. These packages can be utilised to fund security mechanisms such as CCTV cameras, security doors and safety watches available through the Personal Safety Initiative.

Where alternative accommodation is needed and refuges are not available or suitable, refuge providers activate relationships that they have established with moteliors to provide temporary accommodation for women and their children. Family violence support is provided by the family violence after hours program and outreach teams from the local agencies.

The Victorian Homelessness After Hours service can also provide overnight accommodation in motels for people experiencing family violence with nowhere to stay that night. During COVID lockdowns, there was an increase in the number of motels that made themselves available to accommodate family violence victims due to low occupancy rates.

Most refuge providers across the State also have Crisis Accommodation Properties which are mainly used as step down facilities following a stay in refuge. These can also be used to accommodate family violence victims for whom refuge is not suitable or responding to demand. There are 58 of these properties across Victoria.

Four refuge providers also have nomination rights with 14 transitional housing properties whereby these properties are also available to house women and children needing crisis accommodation options.

## QUESTION [12]

**Nina Taylor**

What initiatives were delivered for priority communities to address the impact of the pandemic, including for women's health services to provide mental health support?

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you. So, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women, I believe the department has delivered a range of initiatives targeting priority communities in response to impacts of the pandemic, and funding has been provided to women's health services to deliver programs to address the acute mental health impacts of COVID on women. What has that money been spent on specifically, and can you report on any outcomes?

**Ms PITCHER:** Some of the money came from our department and some from the Department of Health, so I can probably speak more to the parts that came from our department. We are really focused throughout COVID on that connection—so connection to community, connection to other people, but also connection to people's wellbeing and mental health and other services. So the social connectedness was a really important part of that funding. Happy to provide more—

**Ms TAYLOR:** Good. Thank you.

**Source:** [Unverified transcript, page 29]

## RESPONSE

In 2020-21, Victoria's 12 Women's Health Services each received \$50,000 to support women's mental health, wellbeing and social connectedness in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The funding, totaling \$600,000, formed part of the Victorian Government's \$59.4 million 'Keeping Victorians Connected and Supported – Mental Health and Wellbeing Coronavirus Response Package' announced in April 2020.

This funding allowed each Women's Health Service to either upscale existing mental health projects or to develop new mental health initiatives. Each of the 12 Women's Health Services used this funding to expand or deliver initiatives tailored to the needs of their local area or priority cohort. For example:

- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) delivered the Mental Health and Wellbeing Advocacy Project (MHWAP) which aimed to address the drivers of migrant and refugee women's mental ill-health through several initiatives. This included providing expert advice and professional development to key stakeholders on migrant and refugee women's mental health issues as well as scaling up awareness raising about migrant and refugee women's mental health. Through MCWH social media and communication, approximately 4000 women from different demographics were reached. A further 200 women were reached through MCWH's engagement with stakeholders, such as the Women's Mental Health Alliance.
- Gippsland Women's Health used this funding to further develop understanding of the cumulative impact of COVID, bushfires and drought on women in the Gippsland community. Their project included a focus on the gendered impact of disaster and compounding trauma experienced by rural women and women living in remote areas.
- Women's Health Grampians (WHG) delivered the Youth Equality for All program, where two Youth Equality Advocates were recruited to share their lived experience of the impact of COVID on young women's employment and mental health. The Youth Equality Advocates engaged with the CoRE Alliance, the Grampians regional primary prevention partnership made up of over 120 members, through 12 events and training workshops to share their experience. The Youth Equality Advocates also helped WHG co-design a communications campaign focusing on the

impact of COVID on young women's mental health and employment. The campaign included a series of posts and videos, with the launch alone reaching 377 people online and their post on mental health reaching upward of 750 people.

On 5 September 2021, the Victorian Government announced an additional \$600,000 in funding to be allocated to Victoria's 12 Women's Health Services to continue to support delivery of women's mental health projects. Similar to the funding provided in 2020-21, funding is allocated for women's health services to support and promote women's mental health, wellbeing and social connectedness in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. All 12 women's health services will receive an additional \$50,000 as part of this funding.

## QUESTION [13]

### James Newbury

The child protection investigations – the annual report refers to 33,320 in June 2021. Provide substantiated and not substantiated as well as the average timeline taken to check substantiation.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Before I get to my substantive questions, can I just ask a couple of follow-ups from some of the previous issues. The child protection investigations—the annual report refers to 33 320 in June 2021. Do you have metrics on the number active versus complete?

**Ms PITCHER:** In terms of investigations, we probably would not use the language of ‘complete’. That is why I am sort of struggling on that.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay. Active versus whatever word.

**Ms PITCHER:** In terms of there are ones that we have case closure parts, but I guess there are also tiers about that, as was sort of discussed earlier—the tiering of how serious and which level of investigation it goes to.

**Mr NEWBURY:** I understand. I am just after, Ms Toomey, if there is some kind of metric that talks about active versus however you want to phrase it—just active versus the other thing.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Sorry, Mr Newbury, it is really a definitional issue. So investigations are either substantiated or not substantiated.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** It is a phase, if you like, of one where you come through the front door, report to child protection, a determination then is made about—

**Mr NEWBURY:** So perhaps the easier way to say it is things that are not substantiated versus things that are currently being checked to see if they are substantiated.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** There are two outcomes for that, so it is substantiated or not.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Yes, okay. Could I ask for that figure then?

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** We can take that away and provide that figure.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay. Do you have the average time line for—I take it, in terms of metrics, you would have an average time taken to check substantiation?

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Well, I think the phase essentially is what the outcome of that investigation is. So once we undertake an investigation, and there is a period of time where we try and—

**Mr NEWBURY:** I am sure you report the average time.

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** Possibly not in those terms. So it is not something that we report nationally or through any of the mechanisms.

**Mr NEWBURY:** What about internally? It is just you mentioned that there were metrics you do record. What are those metrics? Other than the number of investigations in the annual report, are there any other metrics? You just mentioned metrics. That is the reasoning for my asking.

**Ms TOOMEY:** No. Thank you for the follow-up question, Mr Newbury. I was certainly referencing the metrics as captured in the annual report. We keep operationally a really close eye on time lines taken in relation to moving, particularly, a case from a report through to investigation, through to another intervention—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Could you then perhaps take on notice—

**Ms TOOMEY:** We can certainly have a look at what we can provide you to answer that question, but there are a range of factors that contribute to how long an investigation might take, depending on availability of—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Sure, I understand that, and I am sure in terms of the response you could put both the time line and then the explanation if need be. I am sure there would be no issue with that.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 29-30]

## RESPONSE

The number of child protection investigations reported in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 2020-21 Annual report is a count of investigations *commenced* during the financial year.

32,152 investigations were *completed* in 2020-21. Of these 16,751 were substantiated and 15,401 were not substantiated.

For investigations that were completed in 2020-21 and resulted in substantiation, the average time to complete the investigation was 31 days.

## QUESTION [14]

**James Newbury**

Was there an increase in contact to the department from residents residing in the towers that were locked down during the locked-down period compared to non-lockdown periods? What data is available, month by month for financial year 2020-21?

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay, moving on to the towers that Mr Limbrick was asking about, I understand justice was looking after some of the operational matters. I presume the department recorded the number of residents that were contacting the department in terms of concerns. You would have case-managed concerns?

**Ms PITCHER:** Yes.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Do you have metrics on that?

**Ms PITCHER:** We can provide you metrics. Are you thinking about a particular time or across the whole financial year?

**Mr NEWBURY:** I am more than happy to take it by month if that is the easiest, rather than specific dates. You know, maybe per month a number of case-managed—I mean, I am careful with the word 'complaint', because it may be other issues as well—concerns, whatever. And I am specifically referring to the towers that were closed. If you would prefer to provide it more generally because, I do not know, for some reason you are not able to extrapolate to that detail, I understand that too.

**Ms PITCHER:** That is fine. I suspect then you are thinking more about concerns due to COVID rather than a concern about a noisy neighbour or—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Oh, yes, yes. I guess my point would be I expect that during the closure period there would have been a spike in complaints—or a spike in concerns, a spike in issues raised, a spike in contact—from residents living there to the department. And I am just wondering what data is available. If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

**Mr RIMMER:** We can definitely take that on notice.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 30]

## RESPONSE

### RESPONSE

Eight housing towers in North Melbourne and Flemington were locked down from 4 July 2020 to 9 July 2020. One housing tower in North Melbourne was locked down from 4 July to 18 July 2020.

Residents of the nine public housing towers have the following ongoing methods for contacting the department:

- contacting their local Housing office
- the department's feedback service, a service which provides clients with the opportunity to provide feedback via a telephone line, email or an online form into the department's Feedback Management System.

Data is collected by the department on the number of contacts via the Feedback Management System. The number of contacts via the Feedback Management System for 2020-2021 for Western Melbourne Area (area covering North Melbourne and Flemington public housing towers) was:

Month	Case Numbers
July 2020	18
August 2020	11

September 2020	10
October 2020	11
November 2020	13
December 2020	13
January 2021	10
February 2021	12
March 2021	15
April 2021	19
May 2021	9
June 2021	13

During periods of financial year 2020-21, in response to the pandemic, residents of the nine public housing towers were also provided with the following options to contact the department:

- a specialised COVID-19 support line for tower residents, that included access to language interpreters and hearing assistance services
- the general COVID-19 information line
- on site health concierges at each tower site, as funded through the High Risk Accommodation Response and employed through CoHealth.

Data was collected for the number of calls received on the COVID-19 support line for tower residents. The COVID-19 support line for tower residents commenced operation on 5 July 2020, and concluded on 9 October 2020, with the following number calls from tower residents received:

Month	Number of calls
July	5105
August	709
September	195
October	53

## QUESTION [15]

**James Newbury**

Provide the number of foster carers who were recruited during the second half of financial year 2020-21.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Terrific. Thank you. And the last follow up was in relation to the 600 which I believe—I am talking about the foster carers. I think it was 596, in terms of the number of foster carers that left the system in the year 2020. Do you have any data on how many came in in the first part—the second half of the financial year in 2020–21—in terms of figures?

**Mr ALISANDRATOS:** I do not have it in front of me for that period of time, but we can take it away.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you.

**Source:** [unverified transcript, page 30]

## RESPONSE

In the second half of FY 2020-21 (that is January to June 2021), 156 foster care households commenced. Note this is not the number of foster carers who were recruited (which is likely higher), but households who took in their first care placement.

**Source:** Internal DFFH unpublished data.

## QUESTION [16]

**James Newbury**

In the 2020–21 Budget there was \$1.4 million allocated to the Migrant Workers Centre. Noting the allocation in the 2020–21 budget, I would like to understand how the funds were allocated.

**Mr NEWBURY:** I agree, and I hope you take my comments in the way they were intended into the future. I have got a couple of questions on multicultural affairs. In the 2020–21 budget there was \$1.4 million allocated to the Migrant Workers Centre. In February of this year the Auditor looked into the issues in relation to the Migrant Workers Centre and found that Trades Hall had, and I am quoting:  
... admitted to misusing some of the DPC grant moneys it received for political campaigning activities at state and federal elections. It is apparent that both DPC's and—  
the Migrant Workers Centre's—  
... compliance monitoring failed to detect this.

Noting the allocation in the 2020–21 budget, I would like to understand how the funds were allocated.

**Ms PITCHER:** Sure. I think it is a good question, and certainly the VAGO report that you refer to is something that I and the department are very familiar with and I think provides us some lessons. So we are very keen as a department to ensure that we manage grant funding in a best practice and probity-focused way, and certainly the VAGO report confirms that there was misused grant funding of—I think I have the number—\$17 883. I understand that money was returned to the department by the Migrant Workers Centre in February 2021, so this acquitted the Auditor-General's first recommendation.

We are very much focused on the Auditor-General's second recommendation, which was that the department undertake a review of our grant practices. So we have undertaken that review, and we identified some gaps in policy guidance, some inefficiencies in our platform and our outdated grant management platform—and really a bit of a challenge around grant management practice amongst staff, so training new staff. So taking on the good lessons that we learnt through that review, we have had a range of recommendations which we have identified to improve the practice within the department, and this is including the development of a Department of Families, Fairness and Housing specified grant management framework. And you will appreciate Fairer Victoria has come and joined different parts of the department to come together, so what we also saw was that there were very different grant practices just across the various different portfolios. So being able to bring together I guess the expertise and the lessons that we have learned both from this VAGO report but also the lessons that we have had across portfolios, including grants in the family sector, means that we have got that opportunity to have a really good focus for 2022 that means that we implement all of those findings.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Is that review you have done able to be provided to the committee?

**Ms PITCHER:** I can look into that. I believe it was an internal report, but I think it will be available. So I will take that on notice, to provide that.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you.

**Source:** [Unverified transcript, page 33]

## RESPONSE

The VAGO Assurance Review into Grants to the Migrant Workers Centre recommended that the Department require all grant recipients certify that they have used funds for their intended purpose when reporting on performance and requesting payments.

To address VAGO's recommendation, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing undertook an internal review of grant management practices. Implementation of the internal review is ongoing.

The review is an internal document to inform the Department's ongoing grants management work and has not been publicly released.

## QUESTION [17]

**James Newbury**

\$1.4m Budget allocation – provide detail on what the money was used for.

**Mr NEWBURY:** I do note the second recommendation of VAGO was that:

... all grant recipients ... certify that they have used the funds for their intended purpose ...

In relation to the funding in the 2020–21 budget is that finding being adhered to?

**Ms PITCHER:** Yes, it is. And in fact—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Tracked?

**Ms PITCHER:** Tracked, and with our review we have actually gone further even than the framework required. So we had fully transitioned to the model before 30 June, and we are going to continue to get to the best practice.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Would you mind just taking on notice—that \$1.4 million—what the money was used for? Just take that on notice, if you do not mind?

**Ms PITCHER:** Which \$1.4 million?

**Mr NEWBURY:** The budget allocation we have been referring to.

**Source:** [Unverified Transcript, page 34]

## RESPONSE

The 2020-21 Victorian Budget allocated \$1.42 million towards the work of the Migrant Workers Centre (the Centre), of which the Centre received \$1.349 million, reflective of the Department's five per cent administrative costs. Funding supported the Centre's delivery of key programs and services, including:

- Multicultural Safety Ambassadors program
- referrals and support for migrant workers experiencing workplace difficulties
- culturally appropriate community education sessions about workplace rights and safety targeted at CALD community members
- research and partnerships with organisations to contribute to strengthening of safeguards for migrant workers in Victoria
- planning for a conference examining issues relevant to migrant workers
- development and distribution of information and resources on workplace safety and rights to equip migrant communities with knowledge that enables them to secure safe and appropriate work.