

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Tuesday, 30 August 2016

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

AGING, DISABILITY SERVICES

MULTICULTURALISM

CORRECTED PROOF

The Committee met at 9:00

MEMBERS

The Hon. G. Donnelly(Chair)

The Hon. S. Cotsis

Dr M. Faruqi

Mr J. Field

The Hon. P. Green

The Hon. M. Mason-Cox

The Hon. S. Mouselmane

The Hon. B. Taylor

The Hon. Dr P. Phelps

PRESENT

The Hon. J. Ajaka, *Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Multiculturalism*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

The CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2016-17. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respects to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present or those who may be joining us today on the internet. I welcome Minister Ajaka and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Ageing, Disability Services and Multiculturalism. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available.

In accordance with the broadcast guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I also remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence at this hearing. So I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete your evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents at hand. In those circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister Ajaka, I remind you and the officers who are accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, would everyone please turn off their mobile phones or set them to silent for the duration of the hearing.

All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of this Parliament. Mr Coutts-Trotter, from the Department of Family and Community Services, you do not need to be sworn as you were sworn at yesterday morning's hearing.

HELEN MARY ROGERS, Executive Director, Participation and Inclusion Directorate, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER, Secretary, Department and Community Services, on former oath

ROSS GRANVILLE HAWKEY, Director Corporate, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined

HAKAN HARMAN, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, affirmed and examined

JAMES ALAN LONGLEY, Deputy Secretary, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

SAMANTHA TAYLOR, Executive Director, National Disability Insurance Scheme Implementation, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

LEONIE RUTH KING, Executive Director, Service Delivery Programs, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

DENISE DAWSON, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Ageing, Disability Services and Multiculturalism open for examination. The questioning on the portfolio of Ageing and Disability Services will run from 9.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m., and the questioning on the portfolio of Multiculturalism will run from 10.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you are aware that the NSW Ombudsman recently made a submission to the New South Wales upper House inquiry into elder abuse, violence, abuse and neglect?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you or your office read the submission that the Ombudsman made?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I had a good look at the report, which I understand has now been tabled. I acknowledge, Chair, that you also chaired that inquiry. I congratulate the Committee on the excellent work that was done in that inquiry. Elder abuse is a very serious issue. The Government takes it very seriously. We are currently looking closely at the report. The Premier has tasked me to lead on the reply to the report and its recommendations, working with Ministers of the relevant portfolios.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, do you receive the NSW Ombudsman's e-newsletter on disability? It is quarterly.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have seen a number of them when they have been put on my desk. I personally do not receive the emails.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you aware that the NSW Ombudsman includes in the newsletter the number of disability reportable incidents?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That comes to me, yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you receive any notification of the number of disability reportable incidents?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am made aware of them as they come through my office. I am also made aware of them when I meet with department managers.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you made aware of the reportable incidents every month or every week?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I cannot say definitely whether it is every month or every week. I can say that, over a period of three years, I have been made aware of reportable incidents on numerous occasions. I meet regularly with the Deputy Ombudsman, who has carriage of this matter. I met with him only recently. I regularly meet with Official Community Visitors [OCV] as well. They are required under the Act to bring these matters to my attention.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: To be clear, you are aware that the incidents that are reported to the Ombudsman are very serious?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As part of the safeguards that have been put in place, any serious cases of abuse are to be referred to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has the discretion to investigate those matters if he believes they warrant investigation. The Ombudsman is required to report back.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Does he report to you or to the Parliament?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There are reports made to me, and there is the Ombudsman's report that is tabled in Parliament.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you know when the next Ombudsman's report will be tabled?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Would you take that on notice?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am happy to.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are aware that the NSW Ombudsman's website defines disability reportable incidents according to four categories. The first category, employee to client offences, includes sexual offences, sexual misconduct and grooming people with disability. The other categories are client to client offences, a breach of an apprehended violence order, and unexplained serious injury. I assume that you agree that these are very serious offences?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Any form of abuse is something I take very seriously, as does the Government. The Department of Family and Community Services [FACS] has been working with the NSW Ombudsman to improve client safety and wellbeing. This includes establishing a dedicated team to design and implement the recording and management framework for the Ombudsman's Reportable Incidents Scheme. They are also completing a statewide audit of the nutrition and swallowing check list as part of mealtime management for clients at high risk of choking. That is an example of the work being undertaken by the department, working very closely with the Ombudsman.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You said that you have read some of these reports. I am horrified and shocked at some of these allegations in the reports. I want to put on the record that looking after the most vulnerable in our State lies at the heart of what government should be doing. I am sure that you will do the same—I assume you will do the same—but I refer to some of the allegations that the Ombudsman has outlined in his submission. Are you aware of the very serious allegations that residents have been burnt with a cigarette lighter, dragged across the floor causing carpet burns, punched in the face, had food withheld from them, been punched and bitten on two separate occasions, been sexually assaulted and that their genitalia has been touched? Are you aware of those allegations that appear in the report of the Ombudsman to both the Senate inquiry into abuse and neglect and into the elder abuse inquiry?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have said on numerous occasions that I am aware—I do not think you need to keep saying that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are aware of those very serious allegations?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes, I am aware of them. It is for that reason that I am the Minister who brought in the Disability Inclusion Act, which tightened employment screening for Disability Services staff. It is that Act that introduced in legislation the New South Wales Ombudsman's Disability Reportable Incidents Scheme, which is the first and only legislated scheme. Yes, I not only took those matters seriously but I also brought in legislation to cover this.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: We, the Opposition supported you wholeheartedly—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Because you accepted the fact that it was a good Act that I brought in.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, all members accept that it is important to report these very serious allegations of abuse and violence against and neglect of people with disability in government-funded care and in non-government supported care. Will you tell us how many of those disability reportable incidents you are aware of to date?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that question on notice and provide an exact number.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But you have claimed that you have read the disability e-newsletter that comes from the Ombudsman. The May newsletter indicated that there were 878 reportable incidents. Of those, more than 451 are allegations in relation to sexual assault and sexual offences. How many of those incidents have been referred to the police?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a completely different question. I will go back to the first question that I said I would take on notice because I did not have the exact number in my memory and I wanted to make sure that I provided the right number. However, you have just provided the number.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: From May.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I take it that you no longer require that answer.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, I do. We are in August and I want that figure.

The CHAIR: I think the Minister needs to be very clear about the question so he can answer it.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is exactly right. I want to make sure I am answering her questions before the Hon. Sophie Cotsis asks me another question. There are strict obligations of reporting matters to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will investigate those matters, just as the official visitors also investigate and undertake random checks. They are reported to me. Serious matters are also reported to the relevant authorities. That is the Ombudsman's obligation when I meet with him. It is for those reasons that I brought in the Disability Inclusion Act to empower the Ombudsman in legislation to be able to undertake those tasks. It is why we have provided additional funding to the Ombudsman. It is why the Commonwealth and other States see our safeguards as the primary safeguards for people with disability. That is why we are working with the Commonwealth to ensure that these safeguards are also made part and parcel of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Yes, I am well aware of them. Yes, I know they are serious. It is for that reason I took serious action and brought in legislation, empowered the Ombudsman and provided further resources to the Ombudsman.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How many of these incidents have been referred to the police?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that question on notice, unless someone here can answer that question.

Mr LONGLEY: In terms of numbers as the Minister indicated we are more than happy to get back to you. But it is important to recognise that under the Disability Inclusion Act, which introduces the requirement of reportability to the Ombudsman, that does not relieve people of the initial obligation of reporting those incidents which are of the relevant and serious nature to be reported to police or the other relevant authorities. If an incident has occurred regardless of where it occurs and it requires reporting to the police, if it is of a criminal nature or whatever, then it is still obliged to be reported to the police. The Ombudsman's reporting line is an additional reporting line, and it is also a reporting line which looks at those incidents which are, in fact, at below that formal police or other formal reporting line. At least two things can be achieved: one is that the Ombudsman has oversight of a broader range of incidents which might occur and that helps with standards, and second, so that there can be systemic improvements.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I understand, but since December 2014 and now those reported incidents have increased by about 50 to 60 a month. There is a pattern of endemic abuse that is going on at the moment. Minister, what steps are you taking to eliminate violence and abuse?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I think the one thing you have to appreciate is the increase in reportable incidents is due to the action taken by this Government and the Disability Inclusion Act and other requirements that have made it a very strict issue of compliance to report any cases of abuse. The fact that they are being reported shows that the action the Government and I have taken and demonstrates the need. I do not quibble with the fact that more cases are being reported because if they were not reported and acted upon I would be more concerned.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: We are all concerned but what are you doing now? What are you doing as it is 16 or 17 months since the scheme began and from the reporting that is coming in we have these serious incidents, some of which are criminal? Have you called for an internal examination? What steps are you taking?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The steps that I have taken, and continue to take, are to ensure that cases of abuse are reported and dealt with.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have indicated how—the Disability Inclusion Act puts a strict requirement on all parties to report any issues of abuse to the Ombudsman's office.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: What are you doing about it? We know what the Ombudsman is doing.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order: The Minister needs to be allowed to answer the question in full. When the question is repeatedly asked in a different way and he is giving the same answer, I think that the Minister needs to be allowed to finish his answer without being constantly interrupted.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: To the point of order: The Hon. Sophie Cotsis is asking questions and the Minister is going around them. He is not answering them and that is why the member is asking direct questions trying to get the Minister to respond.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: To the point of order: The Minister is clearly answering the question that is being asked; he is just constantly being interrupted.

The CHAIR: It will proceed best if we have a clear question followed by a clear answer. The Minister should be allowed to complete his answer before he is asked a further question.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As I have indicated, I have been asked what action I am taking. The action I took was to introduce the Disability Inclusion Act. The action I am taking is to ensure that the Ombudsman is given sufficient resources and to ensure that reports are being directed to the Ombudsman and to appropriate authorities. The action we are taking is to ensure that appropriate checks are being undertaken. This is what is occurring. The fact that these matters are being reported demonstrates that appropriate action was taken with the Act to ensure that it was a strict requirement for any cases of abuse to be reported.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How many serious allegations have been referred to the police?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I think you have asked that already and I indicated I will take it on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have there been any prosecutions or criminal charges laid?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are you aware if any of the perpetrators who are repeat offenders?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not understand the question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is very clear.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Will you repeat it for me please?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: These are very serious allegations of sexual offences, inappropriately using restrictive practices, locking residents outside for extended periods of time.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I understand that. I just asked you to repeat the question

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Are there repeat offenders? Are there people who are looking after the most vulnerable repeat offenders?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I understand the question now. I will refer that to the department or I will take it on notice.

Mr LONGLEY: We are certainly happy to take that on notice but it is important to recognise that if an incident occurs that requires being reported to police it needs to have been reported to police. The reporting to the Ombudsman is not in substitution of that; it is something that happens at the same time. The Ombudsman's reporting regime covers the whole spectrum including those things which are below the level of reporting to police. Those things which also require reporting to the police have been reported to the police. That would therefore capture repeat offenders. Of course, the police check requirement would also capture the repeat offender issue that you raised.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: With these 878 reportable incidents coming to light have you cancelled any contracts of non-government providers?

Mr LONGLEY: We would be working to analyse the reports from the Ombudsman to see whether they are systemic issues with regard to the provider and then we would review those matters as we look at the renewal of the various supply provision contracts.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But have you?

Mr LONGLEY: I am not aware of any we have cancelled specifically as a result of that because they are typically one-off incidents, or in consultation with the Ombudsman we would look to see whether there are systemic issues with regard to that particular provider. But I am happy to verify that for you subsequently.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You will take that on notice. Are you currently looking at any of these care facilities?

Mr LONGLEY: The role of the Ombudsman in the Disability Inclusion Act is really quite significant here because it means that we have a very good view of the providers. We are able to undertake that analysis of the different providers as we progress and see what if any patterns of incident reporting there might be, or see whether there are systemic issues as distinct from one-off individual incidents.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, now it has come to light today that there are 878 notifications of very serious allegations, serious offences and serious incidents against New South Wales's most vulnerable, as the Minister for Disability Services—the primary advocate for people with disability in this State—what steps are you going to take today to eliminate abuse and violence in these institutional settings?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will continue to take the steps that I commenced taking with the Disability Inclusion Act to ensure that any matters of abuse are reported, any matters of abuse are investigated and that those matters of abuse are dealt with in accordance with that so that those matters that are to be referred to the police are referred to the police and those matters of complaint that arise are investigated and dealt with. That is what I do as the Minister. That is what my department does.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you be seeking a report or an investigation today?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The investigations are being undertaken by the Ombudsman.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: By your department?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can I finish my answer, please? The investigations have been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman undertakes those investigations, prepares those reports and sends them to us. Are you asking that I should now investigate the Ombudsman in the way he conducts his investigations? Is that what you are asking me?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you are transferring disability services to the feds. We need to have confidence that people with disability in New South Wales are not going to be abused, violated and exploited in care. We need assurance from you today that you are taking immediate steps and actions to eliminate violence and abuse against people with disability.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: First of all, I answered the last part of your question already. As far as the NDIS is concerned I am not transferring it to the feds, as you would put it. Our State, as other States, has entered into a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth where the National Disability Insurance Scheme will commence to operate. New South Wales, like all other States, remains an equal shareholder with the Commonwealth.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have a responsibility.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Please let me finish.

The CHAIR: Time has expired. Minister, complete your answer.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We are equal shareholders. We provide, in effect, equal funding. We have an equal role in the way that we deal with the NDIS. The board of the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] is comprised of representatives appointed by the States. We did not simply transfer to the Commonwealth. We are equal partners, equal shareholders. We are currently working with the Commonwealth, as is every other State, to ensure that there is a Commonwealth set of safeguards through the NDIA that will apply. I am proud of the fact that the Commonwealth and all other States are in fact looking at our model as the appropriate model for the safeguards because we are well ahead of everyone else when it comes to safeguards. That is what is occurring.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I understand the Ombudsman's requirements under the Act to report on serious incidents and I understand the obligation on people to report matters they are aware of to the police. I wonder at what point you as Minister reach a threshold at which you or your department inquire as to whether or not those incidents reported to the Ombudsman or by the Ombudsman have been referred to the police or are being investigated by the police?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Let me go back a step if I may. Prior to the Disability Inclusion Act being brought in and prior to ensuring that the legislation required the reportable incidents I had those concerns that you just raised. It is for that reason I brought in the Act. It is for that reason there is a strict requirement to now report to the Ombudsman. It is for that reason we have the Official Community Visitors who in effect—I will use the word—conduct automatic audits and inspections to ensure if anything is not being properly adhered to it is immediately reported to both my office and the Ombudsman. As these issues come up, as these matters are dealt with by the Ombudsman and reported by the Ombudsman and the reports are given to my department we

look at those reports very carefully to see what further action we need to take. That is how it occurs. We have been doing that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You are confident that if a serious incident has occurred and been reported to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman has reported it through its processes you have the steps in place within the department to ensure that person who might be at serious risk right then is protected?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I would like to go on to another element of the Act, specifically the requirement for disability inclusion action plans to be created. Have all the public authorities that were required to have a disability inclusion action plan by 1 December 2015 produced their plans and made them available to the Disability Council and the public?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There are two aspects to the question you asked. There are two different groups. The first group is all of the government departments that were required to have their disability inclusion action plan implemented. That has occurred in each and every department within its time frame. There was one department from memory that needed a bit of additional time due to inquiries it was undertaking. It has now undertaken it. The next group is local councils. Local councils are required to have their disability inclusion action plan by 1 July 2017. We have provided funding to Local Government NSW to assist all councils to ensure that their plans are finalised by 30 June 2017. Having spoken to many of the councils, they are well underway. I should indicate that probably 60 per cent of councils in New South Wales already had a disability inclusion action plan in one form or another but we wanted to ensure that through Local Government NSW the Government was able to assist all councils to do that. They are well on track.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Which department was late in getting its action plan to you?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It was not a matter of being late; they sought additional time because they were waiting on a report. I have now been told by Ms Rogers that it was Education, but they did it shortly within the time in which they were required to.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: In preparing for my questions today I had a bit of difficulty in locating the action plans of some departments. Just to confirm, the justice and transport departments have completed their action plans at this time?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct. If you have any difficulty please contact my office and Ms Rogers will assist you in identifying how to locate them.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: What role does your office or the department play in reviewing those plans and providing any feedback to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Act?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will ask Ms Rogers to add to my answer, but my department was the first department required to prepare its disability inclusion action plan. In fact, it was more of whole-of-government as well as my department. My department then assisted the other departments as and when necessary, and when the plans are lodged they are being reviewed.

Ms ROGERS: There are a couple of actions in place to monitor and improve on agencies' disability inclusion actions plans. Firstly, all of the action plans were required to be presented to the Disability Council, the Minister's advisory council on disability issues, and those members of the Disability Council have analysed and provided feedback to agencies on ways in which their action plans may be improved for the future. In addition to that, there is a whole of governance framework set-up around the disability inclusion plan—namely, the Disability Inclusion Plan Implementation Committee, which comprises senior representatives across government and some non-government representatives as well—that has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the broader plan and also ways in which we might be able to find synergies between the different agency plans to work together to improve service across government.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Would the Disability Council have reviewed all the plans?

Ms ROGERS: All of the plans have been reviewed by the Disability Council, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Is that feedback available publicly?

Ms ROGERS: There is a working group within the Disability Council which is looking at that ongoing. I would have to take on notice exactly what is available publicly.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How do you assess the implementation of those plans and how will you report back on that implementation to the Parliament?

Ms ROGERS: It is actually the responsibility of the agencies to report on their own plans within their own internal reporting.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So as Minister will you report back in any coordinated way on the implementation of those plans?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Each department has the obligation to report back, just as my department has an obligation to report back. I take a great interest in the Disability Inclusion Action Plans. I will give you one very good example—the Roads Disability Inclusion Action Plan. The other day I was thrilled to join the Minister for Roads when it was announced that elevators will be constructed at both ends of the Sydney Harbour Bridge to allow the walkway to be accessible to all people with disability. It is actions of this nature. Just prior to that we ensured that access to the Opera House was granted to people with disability—another iconic area. Many areas of work are being undertaken, whether we are talking offices, construction of new properties or accessible playgrounds.

It is a huge requirement in the work of many councils as part of their disability inclusion action plans to ensure that playgrounds are accessible to children with disability. This is a great step forward but very long overdue. Do I believe all the work has been done? Absolutely not, we are only at the commencement. Other departments are now looking at accessible access for wheelchairs and accessible change rooms at beaches. In fact, one of the matters on which I have done some work with Ms Jan Barham is access to beaches. This is a very important issue to her and one on which she has worked closely with me.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, I am sure you appreciate that most of these questions have been provided to me by Ms Jan Barham through her work.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That would not surprise me.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am pleased to be able to ask these questions on her behalf. We had some difficulty accessing the action plan for Justice. I appreciate the comments that you made around access, which is a really important element of the plan, but research shows a disproportionate number of incarcerated people, particularly Aboriginal prisoners, have psychiatric or intellectual disabilities. So the action plan for Justice will be crucial as to how it impacts the lives of those incarcerated people. Can you give me any anecdotes or experiences from your reviews of these plans as to how some of those issues will be dealt with under the action plan for Justice?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take the question on notice. I would rather be very specific for you and prior to sending that reply I will also ensure that we are able to deal with the access issue. I want to ensure that there are no difficulties for either you or Ms Jan Barham or anyone being able to access the plans. I can also indicate that quite a bit of work has been undertaken with my department and the Department of Justice in the Community Justice Program and other programs as to inclusiveness for people with disability and ensuring that appropriate action is taken in that regard. I will take most of your question on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I wish to clarify a couple of things. You talked about 60 per cent of the councils having their plans—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Sorry, I will clarify that. Prior to the Disability Inclusion Act coming in and prior to councils being required to have a disability inclusion action plan by 1 July 2017, as I went around the State and met with councils it was clear that councils already had some form of what we would now call a disability inclusion action plan. It was clear that at least 50 per cent of the councils were already undertaking some extensive work in regards to ensuring that disability inclusion was occurring. One of the best areas I saw were playgrounds for kids with disability and Corrimal was a good example of that prior to its disability inclusion action plan.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The Government is virtually helping councils to put strategies and programs in place to assist local governments in the provision of services for people with disability and their carers?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You have talked about 60 per cent—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I said about 50 per cent to 60 per cent—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In the context of 60 per cent—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Prior to the requirement councils were already doing work in this area. The Act came in and it now requires every council to have a disability inclusion action plan by 1 July 2017.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: And you are saying 60 per cent of those—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Where does the 60 per cent come in?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is what I am trying to explain. Prior to the Act coming in, information received by me showed that about 60 per cent of councils in New South Wales were already working in the area of disability inclusion—even before they were required to, many were already doing it. It was not something that came in and no council had ever considered this issue before. That meant that many councils were already a few steps ahead, if I can put it that way.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My point is that since that time—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Since the Act came in?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: —nearly 50 per cent of councils have been amalgamated. How are you addressing that amalgamation and the—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Very simply. There is a requirement for all councils to have their disability inclusion plan by 1 July 2017, all councils. So if we take the situation of two or three councils having amalgamated and having an administrator, instead of three separate councils having to create three separate disability inclusion action plans, the administrator, working with Local Government NSW, will bring in one disability inclusion action plan by 1 July 2017 for the amalgamated entity.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Is that full cost recovery for those councils or do you expect there to be a shortfall in providing those plans for the Government?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No. The funding was provided to Local Government NSW to assist councils in preparing their plans. There has been no indication to me that councils are concerned that they cannot put their plans together because of some costs. Most councils are being told through their assistance with Local Government NSW that they, in effect, do not need to reinvent the wheel, that Local Government NSW is able to assist them with templates.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In regard to elder abuse and the excellent work of the inquiry, can you indicate how many complaints were handled in the last financial year and what were the more serious parts of those cases?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have got those statistics; they will be handed to me in a moment. Can I just indicate a couple of things?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can I ask you another question while you are waiting for that information?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Certainly.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: There were some really good recommendations from that inquiry. Which ones will you be outworking or have you already started to outwork?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take your first question first. When the unit was first set up I recall within a short time of attending, and I know it sounds a bit ironic, we celebrated the first 1,000 calls that were received. Obviously we were not celebrating 1,000 cases of abuse; what we were celebrating was the fact that 1,000 cases of abuse were immediately notified and actions were taken. To date, we have approximately 5,300 cases that have been reported to us. Sadly, the majority of the cases indicate an immediate family member of the elder person is the person responsible for the abuse. It invariably is a son or daughter—invariably it is the daughter when an older woman is being abused—and the main reason tends to come down to financial abuse.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Recommendations that you are picking up from the inquiry, can you enlighten the Committee on that?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am looking at all of the recommendations. I have read the report carefully and I again say it is an excellent report and I thank all of the committee members and the chair for the great work that was undertaken in relation to that report. All of the recommendations are valid recommendations but, as you would appreciate, it will relate not only to my department but also to the Attorney General and it will relate to other departments. I have been given the lead on this and I would like to deal with all of the recommendations at the same time. If you want to ask me which one interested me the most, it was probably—being an old lawyer—the powers of attorney. I am intrigued by what the committee came out with in relation to powers of attorney; we are looking at it closely. It would be remiss of me to pre-empt the Government's response to that, but I can assure you we will be responding within the time required to respond.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We are looking forward to it. Minister, you would agree that it is important for people to be able to live in and have quality of life in their local communities.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Can you enlighten us how your department is helping those people around Miller's Point who have been displaced from their housing, given the fact that their communities, their friends and their doctors are local?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I think there are three aspects to that. The first aspect, of course, is that this is a matter for Minister Hazzard, for Family and Community Services. I understand that he was here yesterday morning. It is a matter for his agency to take the lead in relation to that. The reply to the second part of your question is that many seniors and older people are sitting on the waiting list and they are desperate for social housing. The third aspect is that when the sale of a Miller's Point property is able to be utilised to purchase three or four other properties it is appropriate that action is taken from a whole-of-government perspective. That is the action that is being taken. I am well aware, and I know Minister Hazzard is able to answer these questions, that appropriate action—all action—is being taken to assist those seniors currently residing in Miller's Point to transition into another home.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Thank you for that. I realise it is another portfolio, but that is not the question that I asked. Are you concerned, as the Minister for Ageing, about the approach to remove people who are ageing in place from their homes? Are you concerned that it will set a dangerous precedent—moving elderly seniors or vulnerable people from their homes, given that their real estate may be attractive to the Government, but that it is not in the interests of those people?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: It is not their place, it is the Government's place—it is government housing.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am satisfied that all action is being taken by Minister Hazzard and by the Secretary, who is sitting on my left, that appropriate assistance and care have been given to assist those seniors to locate, in many cases to a brand new home in a location that they choose. It was important for me as Minister to be made aware that those actions were being taken sensitively and appropriately to ensure that these residents are relocated. I also indicate that I have met with a number of residents who have located to these new homes—and I have visited these new homes—and they thanked the Government for what has occurred. At the same time, many residents who have been sitting on the waiting list for years—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I was not talking about those residents; I was talking about the principle of ageing in place.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am talking about Miller's Point residents who have moved and who have said to me that they love their new home. You have to weigh up the fact that everybody benefits from the sale of one property to purchase four other properties. As long as you take the appropriate action in being sensitive and providing all the assistance—and that is what is occurring—to answer your question I am satisfied.

The CHAIR: We will now move to the next tranche of questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, I am sure that you have read the Ombudsman's report of reviewable deaths in 2012-13 of people with disability in residential care.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: There were 239 people with disability in residential care that were reviewed: 121 people lived in ADHC, 101 people lived in non-government, 14 people lived in assisted boarding and three lived in private or community housing. In 2014-15 how many people with disability died in residential care?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You are not asking me a question on the report?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No. I have outlined the report. That was 2012-13.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I think it is important when you quote a figure of the deaths that you also indicate that 89 per cent were the result of natural causes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am asking how many deaths in 2014-15.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not have that information to hand. I do not believe anyone in my department does. I am happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I agree. You are right in the figure you gave about natural causes.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: When you talk about such a high figure it is important to indicate that about 90 per cent of them died as a result of natural causes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Absolutely. On page 6 of the Ombudsman's report—and it is a very comprehensive report—the Ombudsman highlighted significant problems over many years. In regard to the reviews of the deaths of people with disability in residential care, the Ombudsman has highlighted significant problems.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Again, we are back to the 2012-13 report?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Yes. He has highlighted significant problems in mainstream health systems. He states that with the interface between disability and health services that adversely affects the health outcomes of people with disability. For example, he has found inadequate support to facilitate access to health services and treatment; substantial gaps in health care planning and coordination; inadequate support in hospital; poor coordination and transfer to care from hospital to home; the need for an improved health response to people with complex needs, including people with intellectual disability and mental illness; challenging behaviour; disability and ageing needs; poor access to community based health care and programs, including chronic disease management and other out-of-hospital programs; and preventative health programs.

Very importantly, he is saying that it is critical that action is taken now, as a matter of priority, to address the situation, to close the gap and improve health outcomes for people with disability in New South Wales, ahead of the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. So, in terms of what he has outlined, the substantial gaps, what steps have you taken to deal with these very important matters in relation to people with disability and health outcomes?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can I indicate that the New South Wales Government departments, including Health and Family and Community Services [FACS], have reviewed the New South Wales Ombudsman's report and have provided detailed responses to each of the recommendations to the New South Wales Ombudsman. I also indicate that in 2015 NSW Health and FACS, working together, developed a joint implementation plan and continue to work together to implement responses to the recommendations. They also continue to work together in relation to any aspects relating to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. So, in response to the report, recommendations have either been completed or remain on track to improve services within accommodation services, health and disability support services. Members from the group within my own department continue to work with disability residential care staff management within FACS districts, to work with the New South Wales Ombudsman, various local inter-agency and cross-agency working groups, and of course local NSW Health counterparts, to continue to develop local relationships to promote initiatives and address issues.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have those recommendations been made public?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The recommendations of the report are public.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: No, your action—what you have just outlined.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As I indicated, the report itself has been made public, as you know. And the work that the department is undertaking in relation to the report—I will take that on notice if they have been made public but I might just ask my management.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: To be honest, I am not sure but we would have no concerns with reporting publicly on our progress.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take it on notice.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are saying that work is currently going on between FACS and Health in relation to—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Work continues to go on between FACS and Health, not only in relation to issues that were raised by the Ombudsman, but also you will appreciate inter-agency work is being undertaken in relation to our transition to the NDIS.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Can you advise the type of work? Can you specify the type of work? the Ombudsman is saying here that, "There are substantial gaps in health care planning and coordination." What work are you doing to reduce those gaps?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will take that on notice, Ms Cotsis.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You have had this report now for a year, and I asked a similar question at last year's budget estimates. I was hoping that you would be able to enlighten the public about the work that

you are doing in relation to the health outcomes of people with disability. The Ombudsman states that, "There is inadequate support to facilitate access to health services and treatment." Can you tell me what you are doing with respect to that matter?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have indicated to you that both agencies have been working very closely to deal with those recommendations, have dealt with many of those recommendations—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: She is asking about you, Minister, she is asking you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Mr Moselmane, you may be surprised but when my department undertakes work, it is undertaking work on my behalf, as the Minister is undertaking work on behalf of the Government. It is also undertaking work in accordance with the policy directions that the Government sets. So I think it is a bit silly to be saying to me, "I am asking you, Minister." I cannot be separated from my department, Mr Moselmane. Ms Cotsis, I have indicated to you that I will take that aspect on notice and I will come back to you.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You will take it on notice, okay. Page three of the report says "deaths associated with choking have increased in recent years". Would you be able, or your officials, to provide us with some information about how you are managing deaths associated with choking?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: There are a number of matters being undertaken. First of all, a dedicated team was put together to design and implement the reporting and management framework for the Ombudsman's report. This is finished, I think. We have completed a statewide audit of the nutrition and swallowing checklist and mealtime management plans for all high choking risk clients. We are improving awareness amongst front-line workers and managers about the importance of safe mealtime management practices, the nutrition and swallowing checklist and the role of staff in risk mitigation. We are also developing a library of choking-related case studies to promote self-awareness of their obligations in relation to these areas.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Thank you. Minister, I received representations, as I am sure you did and I understand the department did, from a number of peak bodies. They are concerned with the transition to the NDIS.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Can you indicate which bodies? It is hard for me to say, "Yes, I have received it" when I do not know which bodies you are referring to.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: There were a number of disability bodies last week that tweeted to you and me.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: You have to be more specific than that, Ms Cotsis. You received notification by tweet and assumed I have received the tweet. We will proceed on that basis.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You were alerted to it as well and it was retweeted by a number of disability bodies. Let me go back. On page 64 of the Reviewable Deaths, it talks about health-related services currently funded by FACS. There are a number of health-related services that are funded by FACS: Chair in Intellectual Disability Mental Health; Chair in Intellectual Disability and Behaviour Support; FACS Clinical Innovation and Governance; and outreach psychiatry clinics. Can you tell me, will those chairs continue to be funded by FACS?

Mr LONGLEY: The Minister has directed that those chairs be funded through to 30 June 2018 to make sure that there is absolute continuity. Then, in terms of the role of those chairs and indeed some of those broader issues you raised, they are a matter of discussion and negotiation between ourselves and the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Federal Government. That forms part of the information linkages element of the NDIS which specifically looks at the broad context within which disability services are provided within the new NDIS and making sure that some of those system-wide resources are available in what is considered to be whatever is the best form there. That has a particular application, obviously, to clients with complex needs, that there are those particular support elements where you have areas of specialisation such as those professorial chairs.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It was the Council for Intellectual Disability and a number of organisations that tweeted you, me, the Ombudsman and FACS. I take those representations very seriously because this is a very serious matter, which I know you understand.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, can I say this: I take advocacy and information incredibly seriously. In fact, it was for that reason that I was the first Minister that I am aware of who, in fact, undertook and guaranteed all advocacy payments to all advocacy groups to 30 June 2018. It created great assistance to the advocates. They were very concerned that they had to reapply every six or 12 months. I wanted them to have peace of mind that they had funding right through to 30 June 2018. The advocates are well aware that they are

now discussing issues with the Commonwealth Government, as all States are, at the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] meeting next Friday.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: On that point the concern is post 2018. What happens to the services that Mr Longley outlined will be funded until 2018?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: There is concern from the chairs I have mentioned and the multidisciplinary teams. For example, the range of allied health services in the Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] community support teams in the large residential centres with practice leader positions, speech pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, and two specialist nurse positions to assist with the coordination of the healthcare needs of people with disability, particularly those with complex needs. You can understand the anxiety. We are all receiving questions about what happens to those services and who is going to fund those services post 2018. That is what we want to know.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As indicated by Mr Longley, there are issues to be finalised between the States and the Commonwealth. It is for that reason we continued the funding until 30 June 2018. The information linkages and capacity building [ILC] aspect is still being finalised between all States and the Commonwealth. It is on the agenda again this Friday when all of the State and Commonwealth Ministers meet. The COAG meeting on Friday will be held in Sydney. These aspects, as well as the aspects relating to the Commonwealth safeguards, are still being finalised. They were never meant to be finalised prior to this date. We have been working vigorously with the Commonwealth and with other States and Territories to finalise them. That is what we are doing. Advocate groups and information groups are well aware of this. Advocates have worked tirelessly with us and the Commonwealth to ensure that appropriate measures are in place post 1 July 2018.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: If you do not come up with an agreement by 2018, what happens to these services?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am here for budget estimates based on this year's budget. I do not intend to enter into hypotheticals or assumptions.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: It is not hypothetical.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have made it clear that the Commonwealth, States and all groups are working together in relation to this post 1 July 2018. The primary concern of the advocates that met with me each and every day was whether I will guarantee funding until 30 June 2018. I did more than that; I entered into agreements extending their funding to 30 June 2018. That allows us to meet our obligations in that regard. I will continue to work with the advocates, States, territories and the Commonwealth to look at the information capacity linkages, safeguards and other aspects once the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] is fully implemented. I will ask Sam Taylor to add to that. She is working closely with the Commonwealth and with other States.

Ms TAYLOR: As the Minister suggests, there will be national discussions on quality and safeguards occurring later this week. The issue of the chairs that you refer to is a matter for national discussion; it is not only New South Wales that funds mechanisms like those to inform policy, and the sector generally, in good practice. There is a need nationally to see what those structures will look like within the context of the full scheme. Those discussions, as the Minister suggests, continue to be had at a national level between officials at this point in time.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, it is the eighth week that the NDIS computer system has not been functional and some of the parents with disability have received hefty invoices and been threatened with debt collectors. Have you heard of these situations? Are you receiving reports to your office or department about these situations in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Are you talking about issues with the myplace portal and payments to service providers?

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: That is right.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am aware of the issues relating to the myplace portal. I indicated that I met with Assistant Minister Jane Prentice and Minister Christian Porter in relation to those. I conveyed to them very strongly many of the views that had been conveyed to me by a number of service providers. They have assured me that the portal issues have been rectified and the portal is now proceeding and payments are being made. They assure me that if any service provider is facing financial difficulty as a result of any delay in

payments that service provider is able to apply for emergency funding—I will use that term—and will receive that emergency funding. I am not aware of any matter where a client is being sued or a client is having—I cannot remember the term you used—a debt collector knocking on their door. If you have a specific case of that nature I would be most grateful if you would let my office know immediately.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I will.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am not aware of it. I am surprised that someone contacted you telling you that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you set up a unit in your department or are you taking representations from the community, providers or clients in relation to what is currently happening?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No. First, understand that this is a Commonwealth issue and not a State issue. The providers, I can assure you, have made it clear to me that they were contacting the Commonwealth repeatedly. I have contacted the Commonwealth. I met with both relevant Ministers in relation to the issue. I know the other States have met with the Ministers and spoken to them. I can assure you that come this Friday it will probably be the number one item on the agenda raised by the Minister. We have been assured by both Ministers that the issue has been resolved and that payments are now being made in accordance with the requirements.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, in last year's budget the Government abandoned the payroll tax rebate scheme and announced an employment enablement strategy.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Correct.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How many people with disability received funding packages under the employment enablement strategy in 2014-15?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: While I wait for that figure, can I indicate to you I had a good look at what had occurred with the Payroll Tax Scheme. My view is it was sadly not working. It was not changing the mindset of employers to hire people with disability. I am pleased to report that the feedback I am getting with the Employment Enablement Strategy, as a result of the allocated \$6 million over three years, has been incredibly positive. Under the strategy more than 200 employment enabling packages have been allocated and will be provided over a 12-month period. I have had organisations such as NOVA Employment contact me to tell me that payroll tax scheme was not successful and did not assist them in any way, but the Employment Enablement Strategy has worked for them from day one and they have been able to place employees under that strategy. I do not have an exact figure to date. I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The 200 packages over three years have been allocated, but you do not have a number for how many people or businesses received packages under the strategy in the last financial year?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: As of today I do not. I will take it on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If we could have that information for the last financial year and I am interested to know how many of those 200 packages you would expect to allocate in this financial year. Do you have an idea of the breakdown between what has happened previously and how that is breaking up?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That breakdown does exist. I will provide it to you.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Would you also provide, either now or on notice, information on how many applications have been received to date?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will provide that information.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Do you know how long it is taking from point of application through to a decision on allocation?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I do not have the exact information, but I will provide it on notice. Within three weeks of the announcement I was contacted by NOVA Employment to congratulate us on the move. It is one of the organisations that have done tremendous work in this area. It was very unhappy with the Payroll Tax Scheme but is incredibly happy with the new scheme.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The scheme has been in place for a little while. You said that you did not think the previous scheme was changing the mindset of employers. Do you think the new package has changed the mindset? If so, I wonder why you do not have clear information on how many of these packages have been rolled out.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Let us look at this. Consider the change of mindset by employers. The Transition to Work program has been an incredibly successful way of employing people, especially students with disability. I recall the figure of 3,000 to date. We had hoped that the payroll tax scheme would be a positive add-on. Sadly, it was not. From speaking to employers it was clear to me that it had not changed their mindset. It did not assist them. We then commenced the Employment Enabling Strategy, and from day one a number of organisations like NOVA told me that they were able to make it work with employers. They were able to convince employers. As a result, that strategy is proceeding. I do not have an exact figure. I attended the graduation of a number of NOVA clients who graduated under Transition to Work. I have been told that a number will graduate under this strategy. I would like to be specific with the figure, so I will provide it on notice.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You seem to think it is successful, and organisations see it as a good model. Would you be prepared to expand it?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Barham has talked to me extensively about employing people with disability. I believe that not enough work is being done for people with disability. The agency is carefully examining the strategies to ensure that a greater number of people with disability find employment. A main focus of the Disability Inclusion Act and the disability inclusion action plans is to employ people with disability. I have held roundtables with large employer organisations and recruitment organisations such as NOVA to work on changing the mindset of employers. Those who employ people with disability tell me that, without fail, they are their best, hardest working and most loyal employees. That is the message we need to promote to change the mindset of employers who do not employ people with disability because they feel that it is too burdensome. They have the wrong view. That is the work that we have been undertaking.

Employing people with disability is my number one priority. When I met with my Disability Council I communicated that to them. The question I always ask is: "Are we employing people with disability?" The number one priority for the Secretary of my department is to look at a government approach to employing people with disability. We cannot tell only the corporate and non-government sector to do it; we should lead by example. I believe we can do a lot more, and that is what we are doing now.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thanks, Minister. On notice, it would be wonderful if you could provide a breakdown of the metropolitan versus non-metropolitan take-up of the scheme.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes. Could I just add some information. I know Ms Barham would love to know this. We are finalising a marketing campaign to promote the employment of people with disability in small to medium businesses. That will be launched later this year. We are also participating in the Australian Network on Disability internship program, called Stepping Into, for university students with disability. These are the actions we are taking. Each one will, hopefully, make a difference. No one step is sufficient.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Part of the strategy includes building the capacity of businesses to employ people with disability. Would you confirm how much funding was allocated for business capacity building in the 2014-15 year? I am happy for you to take that on notice. Would you speak to how that funding is being allocated? How do businesses apply for that, or how do you look for opportunities to build capacity within businesses?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: This year my department and a number of its partners gained a commitment from eight employers in high-growth industries to participate in the employer capacity building component of our enabling strategy. This strategy is designed to assist people with disability, but as Minister for Ageing I also oversee a lot of work that is being done with the large corporates to employ people aged over 60. The same mindset needs to be changed in both areas.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: This question goes to your previous comment about the public sector's performance in employing people with disability. My understanding is that it is getting worse, not better. The State of the Sector 2014 report shows the estimated representation of employees with a disability had dropped from around 5 per cent in 2006 to 3.1 per cent in 2014. What steps have you taken to ensure that government is a model employer in providing opportunity and access for people with disability?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I was surprised that you had not asked me that question. That is why I said that I had instructed my department to lead by example. I was not happy when I saw those figures. I want to ensure that there is no repeat of that. My view is that my department needs to lead by example, as does the rest of the Government. We cannot ask the corporate and non-government sectors to employ people with disability if we are not leading by example. My department is, at my request, working with the Public Service Commission on a package of measures to provide a more systemic approach to disability recruitment. That includes education managers, developing accessible capability based assessments and increasing the number of people

with disability who make it to interview stage. One of the first obstacles is that people do not even get an interview. I want to ensure that that changes. I want to create a sector-wide talent pool of prospective employees. A person with disability may come for an interview and may not be suitable for our department but may be brilliant in another department. Why have we not created a pool of employees? That is what we are doing now, so that we can assist other departments.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Thank you, Minister.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, how many individuals or families are accessing services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The starting point has to be those who accessed it during the three-year trial period. Close to 9,000 accessed it during the trial in the Hunter. The figure for the Nepean and Blue Mountains is projected to reach 2,000 by 30 June 2018. At the moment it is—

Ms TAYLOR: It is 1,800.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: It is even higher than I thought. To date, it is 1,800 in the Nepean and Blue Mountains. In the first quarter of the rollout from 1 July we anticipated a figure.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The initial estimate was 15,000.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The initial estimate within the first quarter is 15,000.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What is the total anticipated amount over the next 12 months in this financial year?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: In 2016-17, it is expected that 43,000 participants will transition into the NDIS. I indicate that of the 43,000, 36,000 will be existing New South Wales clients who are receiving funding and approximately 7,000 will be new participants who had not previously received funding but will receive funding under the NDIS. A further 60,000 will transition in the second year, 2017-18, of which 36,000 will be existing clients and 25,000 will be new participants. By 2018, we will reach a level of approximately 115,000 clients. The capacity will continue to grow and it is anticipated that as time goes on we will ultimately reach about 140,000 clients.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What are the teething problems of the initial roll-out and what is the Government doing about those concerns? How is it addressing them?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Many of the teething problems were well identified in the three-year trial period. There were two aspects in the three-year trial period we could not identify. The first was the CALD communities; there were basically less than 1 per cent from CALD communities. The second was the zero to eights for early intervention. Again the numbers were too small in the trial period and that is why we went to Nepean-Blue Mountains. The teething problems we identified in the Nepean-Blue Mountains roll-out helped us. What other teething problems? The first one would be myplace, which was clearly a teething problem for the NDIS and one that had to be rectified and dealt with. A number of issues have still not been finalised and were never meant to be finalised. We have talked about information linkages and capacity building (ILC), safeguards and other areas and they are still the areas that need to be identified and dealt with through COAG, with the States coming together. Again it is on the agenda for this Friday, and will continue to be on the agenda.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Are there any anticipated fatal flaws coming our way?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The worst flaw was the issue of myplace. We have made it clear to the Commonwealth it should not have occurred and it needed to be rectified very quickly and we have been told it has been. That did not assist the providers.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In relation to the main causes of death of people in Disability Services, 7 per cent of the people died due to external unnatural causes, mainly choking on food. Are you doing anything to address that 7 per cent? Will you clarify what you do?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I went through the number of steps that have been taken. We established a dedicated team to design and implement a reporting and management framework for the Ombudsman because it was important to ensure that they were properly reported. We completed a statewide audit of nutrition and swallowing checklist and mealtime management plans for all high-risk choking clients. We have improved awareness among front-line workers and managers about the importance of safe mealtime management practices, nutrition and swallowing checks, and the role of staff in risk mitigation. We are developing a library of choking related case studies to promote self-awareness of their obligations and what needs to be undertaken. We have worked on those matters and continue to work on them. I have visited hundreds of group homes and

have spoken to front-line staff, in particular those responsible for meal management in both non-government and government facilities. They are well aware of issues relating to choking and do tremendous work to assist their clients in that area.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What are the statistics in New South Wales of young persons with disability in nursing homes? What is the Government doing to ensure that adequate age-specific nursing homes are available for young persons with a disability, in particular?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: When I first became a Minister just over three years ago I became well aware of this matter and it came to my attention through an organisation known as Youngcare. It is doing brilliant work trying to set up homes for young people. The Government, through the Younger People in Residential Aged Care Program now provides approximately 120 age-appropriate supported accommodation places for younger people. I have no doubt that we still have quite a way to go. I am proud that the work undertaken first by Minister Constance and continued by me in this area has resulted in a large number of group homes being built, both government and non-government, including organisations like Youngcare.

Another aspect that will assist enormously is the NDIS because young people, for the first time when they enter their plans, those who require supported accommodation will have a component known as the user cost of capital, that will allow them to use that part of the component to meet their accommodation expenses and needs. There is a good incentive for non-government organisations to build further accommodation, knowing full well that the young people who move into that accommodation will have their user cost of capital in their component and will be able to meet what I call the rental component of their package.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Does the Government evaluate what sort of Aged Care beds it will need with an ageing population growth?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Are we now moving to Ageing?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In particular, the supply of beds in aged care, low care, high care as well as beds available for respite care well into the future. I am not talking about now.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The entire issue of aged care accommodation is a Commonwealth issue. Although I am Minister for Ageing, I do not have any responsibility or jurisdiction in relation to Aged Care. My jurisdiction, if I can use that term, is to ensure that our seniors are living an active, healthy and inclusive life.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will you update the Committee on the effectiveness of the Companion Card in New South Wales? What feedback are you receiving on that card?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The feedback on both the Companion and the Seniors Cards has been excellent. As you know, the Companion Card is a national scheme and it sets the guidelines within which the New South Wales scheme operates. It is issued to a person with significant and lifelong disability and provides for a free ticket for the cardholders companion. I am aware that the New South Wales Government funded National Disability Services \$1.3 million for the Companion Card in 2015-16. As at 30 June more than 2,400 organisations in New South Wales had signed up as affiliates to the Companion Card. Like the Seniors Card, my remit is to increase those numbers, and we have continually increased them over the past three years and I am very pleased to do that. The Companion Card is very strongly supported. As of 30 June 2016 there were more than 27,000 Companion Card holders and 1.43 million Seniors Card holders.

The CHAIR: That concludes the time set aside for dealing with the Ageing and Disability Services portfolios.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short Adjournment)

HAKAN HARMAN, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, on former affirmation

ROSS GRANVILLE HAWKEY, Director Corporate, Multicultural NSW, on former oath

The CHAIR: The Committee will now examine the portfolio area of Multiculturalism.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: How many complaints does Multicultural NSW receive a week in relation to racial, religious or ethnic attacks or abuse? How many do you receive?

Mr HARMAN: We do not have a register recording complaints being received. Two years ago we did set up a helpline and I can get statistics on that particular helpline.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You do not keep track or keep a record of racial abuse or attacks? Do you monitor what happens in the media in relation to racial ethnic attacks?

Mr HARMAN: We will get daily updates on what is happening in the media around racial vilification and attacks, yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Is there a reason why you do not take complaints?

Mr HARMAN: Our agency is structured so that we have a systemic view of reporting on the state of community relations in New South Wales. That takes place through a policy framework, which is the Multicultural Policies and Services Program. That is an assessment of each agency's performance in adhering to the multicultural principles. In our review annually which takes place as an assessment of the state of community relations that is a report that looks at the significant events over the prior year. That report is tabled through our Minister to Parliament each year.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, from what you have heard are you concerned that there is not a register or a complaints line that people can call at Multicultural NSW?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, because I think you have to remember that our agency is not the agency primarily responsible in relation to racial attacks and discrimination. The agencies responsible for that and where these questions should be directed are the New South Wales police, the Anti-Discrimination Board and the Australian Human Rights Commission. They are the relevant agencies that deal with these issues so that when a complaint is received it is not only recorded but, as you would appreciate, those agencies are also responsible for acting on those complaints and those issues.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Migrant people know that Multicultural NSW is responsible for their issues. The first thing that comes to mind is to ring Multicultural NSW. Would it not make good sense to have a register?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, because what would happen is this: If Multicultural NSW receives a serious complaint relating to racial vilification or a serious complaint relating to abuse or physical abuse or abuse of any nature based on that the immediate advice given to that person is to contact the relevant agency. If the relevant agency is the police the advice is given to contact the police. They will then deal with it, they then record it. There is no basis for us to duplicate an area that is not our responsibility. We deal with those issues that are our responsibility.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Multicultural NSW is your responsibility. A register would give you an understanding of the suffering or the issues of concern to communities, which would then enable you to create policy. Why not create a register?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My responsibility as the Minister for Multiculturalism—my jurisdiction, if you want to use that word—comes from the relevant Act, the Multicultural NSW Act. That is the relevant Act. That Act sets out my responsibility and the responsibilities of Multicultural NSW. It sets out the responsibilities of the Multicultural NSW Board. That is what happens. It sets out the responsibilities of the Regional Advisory Councils [RACs]. That is what the Act provides. Matters relating to discrimination as you have raised, et cetera, come within the Acts relevant to the Attorney General. She deals with those matters. You cannot ask me to duplicate the work of the Attorney General.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Do you know what numbers the agencies have on vilification or racial—

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The other agencies?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, those agencies that you referred to.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is a question you should direct to those agencies.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But you are referring to them. Do you not have a responsibility to know how many of those cases are or are not being dealt with?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My responsibility is in accordance with my Act. The Attorney General, the New South Wales police, the Anti-Discrimination Board and the Australian Human Rights Commission have responsibilities in relation to theirs.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Are you washing your hands of this area?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order: The Minister has explained that these questions are outside this portfolio and should be referred to other agencies. Accusations are now flying across the table. It is out of order.

The CHAIR: We have limited time. We best proceed on the basis of putting a clear question to the Minister, allowing it to be answered and following it with the next one.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, a register has been set up called the Islamophobia Register. Have you heard of that register?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have read about it in newspapers, Ms Cotsis, as I am sure you have as well.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are aware that there have been 280 reports to that register, which is a register of people being abused, discriminated against, spat on and marginalised. Have you or your department made contact with that group to find out how you can assist and what your department can do to help? What steps have you taken?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I meet with so many stakeholders. I have met with so many different Islamic—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Point of order: The question was specifically about a particular register, not any other area.

The CHAIR: The Minister is entitled to answer the question asked. We need to focus on the answer. The Minister may proceed.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Like the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane and the Hon. Sophie Cotsis, I met with so many different Islamic groups. One of the difficulties in meeting with Islamic groups—and I was interested to read in today's paper that they themselves identify the difficulties—is that there are so many different Islamic groups, whether you are talking Shiite, Assindi, Alawis, and they need to be dealt with. I meet with them consistently. They are well aware that I am a great supporter of harmony and inclusiveness in our State. I take great pride in the fabulous work undertaken by Multicultural NSW in ensuring that we maintain a harmonious, inclusive State and that appropriate action is taken for all members of our community, not only our Islamic community but all members of the 125-plus different religious faiths in New South Wales, for various funding arrangements, whether we are talking funding under Multicultural NSW, to ensure that harmony is maintained. That is what we work on and that is my remit as Minister for Multiculturalism under the Act.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Minister, you have not met with the people responsible for this register?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am not aware of meeting the people responsible for this register. I may have met with quite a number of people on the register who are part of other stakeholder groups but I cannot answer that.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Some of the statements and reports that have been made are very concerning about verbal abuse. I will share an extract for everyone.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: Is there a question or is the member just reciting what the citer said?

The CHAIR: The member will proceed with her question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I am very concerned about these attacks.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: That is a statement.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: I will read from the text of one of the incidents, "He then added, 'And they should have a separate lift for these creatures with scarves on their heads.' Since my children were with me

I gestured at them and said something along the lines of, 'That is really not very polite.' We exited the lift and he screamed at me, 'Get out of here. We don't want your kind here.'" Will you now take steps to speak to those responsible who have set up this register and find out how Multicultural NSW can help? This is particularly affecting many women from Muslim communities.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, as I said to you before, I met with numerous groups and in particular women's groups—for example, Maha Abdo and the incredible work that she and her organisation undertake. I meet with them and assist them with funding. I, like you, find any attack on any person based on their religion, ethnic origin or colour of their skin absolutely abhorrent.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Will you meet with this group?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Please let me finish. You have asked me a really important question.

The CHAIR: The Minister will proceed.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I take appropriate action. I believe that someone in my office has spoken to this organisation but I am happy to meet with them. My door is open. If they request a meeting with me, I meet with them. I do not reject a meeting with a good organisation that wants to come to my attention. The question is: Have they asked to meet with me? If they have, I can assure you that I will meet with them but I am more than happy to have a look at this when I get back to my office and find out what connections they have had with my office.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Thank you. Recently 24 ethnic organisations came together to urge the New South Wales Government to overhaul race-hate legislation in order to outlaw incitement to violence.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: This community gathering happened here at Parliament House on 10 August and there were 35 leaders of these organisations.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, you can take it that I saw the photo as you did and I know who was there.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Mr Chair, I just wanted to save her some time.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Have you met with this coalition, Keep NSW Safe?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am aware of quite a number of the people in that photograph who are part of that organisation. I have met with them on a number of occasions. They know me well and I know them well. But the issue that I believe you are raising is an issue for the Attorney General.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: You are Minister for Multiculturalism and these are your constituents?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Under the Multicultural Act—

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: These community groups are your constituents.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: And they were meeting in relation to a matter regarding the Anti-Discrimination Act. The Attorney General is responsible for that Act. If I understand it correctly, they met and the Attorney General hosted the meeting; she was the parliamentarian who hosted that meeting. The Attorney General is undertaking extensive consultation in this area. She hosted this meeting so I would see that meeting as part of that consultation and, as I understand it, what was discussed was then conveyed to the Attorney General, not to me.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: As the Minister for Multiculturalism these community organisations are your constituents. What steps are you taking to raise their concerns in relation to the ineffectiveness of section 20D?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, they met with the Attorney General as their host.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But what about you?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Ms Cotsis, they went back and reported to the Attorney General and not to this day have they come to me or reported to me or even told me what they were discussing. So I do not quite understand how I am supposed to act on something when they are dealing with the Attorney General.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: Do you agree that the New South Wales law needs to be strengthened to protect against racial vilification?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I indicate to you, Ms Cotsis, that this is an area where there has been a parliamentary report and the Attorney General is looking at that parliamentary report. This is an area where the Attorney General is seeking wide consultation with many groups, including the group to which you refer. This is an area where the Attorney General will come back and report. There are those in that consultation process who are reporting directly to the Attorney General. This group that you want me to comment on has not told me what they discussed on the day; they went back to the Attorney General.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But I am asking you.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have just answered your question.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: But I am asking you what representations have you made in relation to these race-hate laws? Do you agree that they need to be strengthened? You are the Minister for Multiculturalism.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order: We are getting the same thing trying to be asked in a different way.

The Hon. SOPHIE COTSIS: He is washing his hands of his constituents.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: I am taking a point of order.

The CHAIR: Please complete the point of order.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: The Minister has clearly answered the question on numerous occasions. Asking it in different ways is out of order.

The CHAIR: There is no point of order. A member is entitled to articulate a question in a variety of ways if she or he wishes to do so. Minister, do you have any further points or comments you wish to add to the answer?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: No, thank you.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, if you might indulge me for a couple of minutes, I wish to read out some comments that were made on the Stop the Buchanan Mosque—Kurri Kurri Facebook site. I ask these questions because they are relevant to the Government's countering violent extremism program, which I understand that Multicultural NSW has formulated.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The COMPACT grants; we were a part of it.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: These are the comments:

How long do they really think that mosque is going to last here anyway? They haven't seen terror yet lol.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Who is making these comments?

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: These comments were on the Facebook page of the Stop Buchanan Mosque—Kurri Kurri. They continue:

Sounds like the council chambers might need a bomb.

I bet a packet of matches and a litre or two of petrol it dont last long.

Minister, does the countering violent extremism program include this type of right-wing extremism and violence and how to address that?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Yes, it does. The program for violent extremism is based on any form of violent extremism. It is not violent extremism of extreme Right only or extreme Left only. Any form of violent extremism is unacceptable. If I recollect, one of the 14 successful applicants was based on right-wing extremism, and that applicant was All Together Now.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: What is being done? Has anything been done under that program?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The situation is that after extensive consultations throughout the State it became very evident that what I believed was needed was very much an early intervention in the community to prevent any form of violent extremism and to counter violent extremism. I had a fund of about \$4 million. It clearly was not sufficient and I was very pleased when the Premier doubled it to \$8 million.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Sorry to interrupt but is a program underway at the moment to counter this right-wing extremism?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The question contains argument. The assertion that it is right-wing extremism has not been adduced with any proof whatsoever. It could just as easily be extreme left-wing secularism that is opposed to these religious institutions. I ask you to direct the member not to include argument. You could certainly say it might be anti-Islamic extremism, but to suggest that it is right-wing extremism completely denies the long history of left-wing anti-clericalism.

The CHAIR: The member knows that that is not a point of order; it is a debating point. I ask the Minister to respond.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I understand you said that there was something underway.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I am happy to answer this question. All Together Now was one of the successful applicants and—this is all on record—it has received funding of \$750,000 over four years. It advances racial equality by preventing racism through education. It is Australia's only national charity dedicated to erasing all forms of racism. Its role is to provide tools and information so that people better understand what racism is. All Together Now's vision is for an Australia that is committed to ending racism and it deals extensively with working directly with young people at risk of engaging in far-right extremism. It is an organisation run by a brilliant woman by the name of Priscilla Brice. She also sits on the Premier's Expert Advisory Council on CVE. If you want to check further, Google COMPACT—all her details are there.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, earlier this month the Australian Capital Territory added religion to the Anti-Discrimination Act, thereby providing protection to people experiencing serious vilification for simply practising their religion. I understand that you have responded that this is part of the Attorney General's responsibility, but I would like your view, given that you are the Minister for Multiculturalism. Would you support doing the same in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My view is the same as the Attorney General's. A parliamentary report has been prepared, parliamentary recommendations have come out. As a result, the Attorney General is undertaking extensive community consultation. I meet people as well who express their views to me, but I would want to, like the Attorney General, await the conclusion of that community consultation before an opinion is expressed. I have an open mind and I like to see what those opinions are and to deal with those opinions. There are those in the community who feel that the Act does not go far enough and that it should go further. I understand that. There are those in the community who feel that the Act goes too far.

It is no different to section 18C with the Commonwealth: there are those that believe it does not go far enough and there are those that are pushing that it go even less. So it is important for me as Minister for Multiculturalism, with my agency, to continue the good work that we are doing to enhance harmony with all communities. That is our remit. I will await the Attorney General's conclusion from her consultation, I will await that report coming in, and then I will look at it.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: The consultation that you just mentioned, is that particularly on adding religion into the Act or is it a much broader consultation?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The Attorney General is undertaking consultation as a result of the parliamentary inquiry and the recommendations that have come out of the parliamentary inquiry.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Could you confirm that that parliamentary inquiry made no recommendations on religion; it was based more on race?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: These are questions that really should be asked of the Attorney General. I know you have limited time, but I refer you to the Attorney General.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I do have limited time, but I think as Minister for Multiculturalism you should have a response.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have answered the question.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: As far as I understand, the Government is funding the Community Cohesion Ambassadors program, but there does not appear to be any public information about this—I could not find any. Could you tell me who these ambassadors are and what are their roles?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I have some information in relation to that. With the Community Cohesion Ambassadors program, an organisation has been engaged to form one subcomponent of the ambassadors program. It is to expand its youth mentoring program, which will provide a direct engagement pathway for an estimated 500 children in targeted areas. An announcement of the signing is being developed and will be made shortly. A list of suggested ambassadors has been developed and a final suggested engagement model is to be also announced shortly.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: So there will be a public announcement of the ambassadors?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Absolutely. I will run the list by you, if you like.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Given the recent polarisation in Australian society surrounding multiculturalism, what steps is the New South Wales Government taking to ensure community cohesion, and particularly how does the Government engage on those opposite ends of the spectrum—for instance, left extremism—and have there been any issues with far-left extremism or Christianophobia?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Again, we talk about Countering Violent Extremism. It was clear that substantial work was needed to be undertaken; there was no doubt about that. It was for that reason the Premier charged me with carefully examining it. I did not want to go off and just work with the agency and prepare a program because I think, sadly, in the past programs have been developed and, in fact, there was no reporting back on what happened with those programs, what the results of those programs were and how effective they were. Spending close to four months meeting with various groups—religious groups from all sides, non-religious groups and ethnic groups—it became very evident to me that we needed to look at an early intervention resilience model, if I can call it that. Clearly, the police were doing their work, clearly law enforcement was doing its work and the courts were doing their work.

We needed to ensure that we looked at early intervention. It was for that reason, after extensive time and with the assistance of Macquarie University and Multicultural NSW, we developed the Community in Partnership, Taking Action [COMPACT] grants. We had 14 successful applicants—we do not have time to go through them but you can easily discover who they are. The idea is to bring a grassroots, mum and dad approach with particular emphasis on the mothers, with Maha Abdo and her program with the United Muslim Women's Association, to bring them in and to ensure that is dealt with appropriately.

That is one aspect of it. The other aspect of it is that Multicultural NSW is charged with continuing all action necessary to maintain our harmonious community. The grants programs have a big impact in relation to this. Communities apply for different grants for programs aimed at maintaining a harmonious culture within our different communities. It has been very effective and I could talk about it all day if you wanted me to but I know your time is limited.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Could you elucidate further in terms of the initiatives in multicultural integration into rural communities?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: One of the biggest aspects of it—it is legislated in the Act—are the Regional Advisory Councils [RACs]. Each of the directors on the board of Multicultural NSW chairs a particular RAC in a different region. As a result of that, the RACs comprise not only senior government officials in Education and Police etc, but senior community members in different ethnic communities. I have visited most of them now.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How many regions?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: We have 12 RACs in 12 different regions. I can easily send you those regions later. All of the leading community members in different ethnic communities meet with the senior bureaucrats, if I can use that term, whether they are Police, Education or Justice, and work together to identify the relevant issues in their area. More importantly, I made it very clear to each of them that I do not want them to come to me with the issues but with what they consider to be solutions to those issues.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The New South Wales Government in this year's budget committed \$146 million over four years to assist the integration of Syrian refugees in New South Wales. The Christian Democratic Party welcomes this announcement. Will the Minister advise us how this money is to be allocated and spent in order to achieve this objective, what types of programs and support will be offered and how refugees will access these services?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I will give you the figures in a moment. As you know, New South Wales will take the largest number of refugees and we all welcome that. We wanted to ensure that there was a whole-of-government approach and that is why Professor Peter Shergold was appointed as the Coordinator-General, to ensure coordination by all departments, assisted by Multicultural NSW but at the same time working with Family and Community Services, my department, Health, Justice, et cetera.

The breakdown of the budget is as follows: \$93 million to improve education outcomes for school-aged refugees; \$32 million to extend and enhance specialist refugee health services; \$8.4 million to support a range of programs, including community hubs, a school liaison program, an employment triage model, and youth peer mentoring; \$4 million to support Legal Aid services to Syrian refugees through Justice; \$3.9 million to support initial private rental assistance towards securing long-term accommodation; \$2.2 million to support out-of-home

care services for any unaccompanied humanitarian minors; \$1.7 million towards an enhanced family assistance and expanded Families in Cultural Transition programs—I am not sure if that all adds up. But if there is any shortfall, I will take it on notice. I will let you do the maths.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How will the refugees access these opportunities?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The major work of the Coordinator-General—and I have met with him now on three occasions—is to determine and to assist with access, information, assistance and follow-on. What we and the Premier did not want to see was a situation of providing initial assistance without going back to see if further assistance is required. That is what is being put together and implemented by the Coordinator-General.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Are you confident that that connectivity will happen in rural and regional areas, if the refugees are in Tamworth, Broken Hill or Wagga Wagga, for example?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Absolutely. I do not know if you have had the opportunity to meet with Professor Peter Shergold. I strongly recommend that you do. A one-hour meeting with him leaves one with the greatest confidence that he knows exactly what he is doing and that he will make it work.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will let your office organise that with my office.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I would be happy to do that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Perhaps a Committee briefing would be good on that matter. Minister, can you update the Committee on the role of the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network's [MYAN] effectiveness in promoting multicultural diversity in young people?

Mr HARMAN: If I have interpreted that correctly, MYAN is an independent organisation undertaking what I consider to be outstanding work in engagement with multicultural youth. We know of them, we work with them, they participate in a lot of our activities, and from time to time there may be some grants they would have accessed from our grants program as well.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I recommend that you contact Ali Faraj who is on that committee. He is actively involved with the AFL Giants and does incredible liaison work.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I go for the Swans, Minister and the Giants second.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for attending today and for providing us with the opportunity to question you in the portfolio area that you have responsibility for.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Thank you, Chair, and I thank all the Committee members for their courtesy in the way this was done and the opportunity to be here today with my team.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.