

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 – HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Wednesday, 5 September 2018

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

MULTICULTURALISM, DISABILITY SERVICES

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

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MEMBERS

The Hon. Greg Donnelly (Chair)

The Hon. Paul Green

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

Mr Scot MacDonald

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps

The Hon. Peter Primrose

The Hon. Bronnie Taylor

Ms Dawn Walker

PRESENT

The Hon. Ray Williams, *Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Disability Services*

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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**

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into Budget Estimates 2018-19. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of the land, and pay my respects to elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. I welcome Minister Williams and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Disability Services and Multiculturalism.

Before we commence, I will make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. In accordance with the broadcasting 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 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 might say outside their evidence at the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or others after they complete their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be questions that witnesses could only answer if they had more time or certain documents to hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or the Minister's staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. A transcript of this hearing will be available on the website tomorrow.

To aid the audibility of this hearing, I remind both Committee members and witnesses to speak into the microphones. In addition, several seats have been reserved near the loudspeakers for persons in the public gallery who have hearing difficulties. Finally, I ask everyone to turn their mobile phones 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 Parliament.

PAUL O'REILLY, Executive Director, Inclusion and Early Intervention, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

MICHAEL COUTTS-TROTTER, Secretary, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

ROSS HAWKEY, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined

VICTOR DURANTI, Director, Policy, Settlement & Briefings, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined

MALCOLM HADDON, Acting Director, Community Engagement, Multicultural NSW, affirmed and examined

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

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: A report by the NSW Ombudsman into deaths of people with a disability in residential care was tabled on Friday. Will you now finally accept responsibility for the deaths of the two former Stockton Centre residents?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I thank the member for her question. It is important that I preface all my remarks regarding the Ombudsman's report by saying that of the 497 deaths of people with a disability in residential care—as the Ombudsman pointed out—95 per cent of the deaths were of natural causes. Of the remaining 27 people who passed away, there were varying degrees of illnesses. Indeed, the—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to stop you there. I have read the report; I do not need you to summarise the report. I am asking you specifically about the deaths of the two former Stockton residents.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: The Ombudsman has gone into some detail with regard to all the deaths. As I was saying, I think the overwhelming number of those 27 deaths were the result of choking. There were several deaths—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am not sure whether you heard me. I am not asking you to summarise the report; I am asking you about two specific deaths that were covered in that report—the deaths of the former Stockton residents.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am coming there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have limited time. I am asking you a specific question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As I said, the Ombudsman has gone through it in detail and he has detailed those issues. It is my understanding that—and I will be very cautious about going into specific details of individual cases—the two people who passed away that you referred to passed away in hospital under health care. The recommendations by the Ombudsman following his report refer to matters relating to health. As I have already said, we all have a role to play to do everything we can to prevent deaths. I believe there is a duty of care—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: But you were responsible, were you not?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Excuse me; I will continue my answer. I believe we have a responsibility, as Family and Community Services [FACS] has a responsibility and New South Wales has a responsibility—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That is just waffle.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order: The Minister is trying to answer the question and is being interrupted.

The CHAIR: There is a point of order. I am listening.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Thank you. As I stated as recently as yesterday morning—and am happy to state for the record again—we all play a role with regard to safety, protection and reducing harm for people with a disability—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to stop you there.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, if you want me to answer the question I am happy to do that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is not that we all play a role. Minister, this report found that two profoundly disabled residents of the Stockton Centre died because inadequate arrangements were put in place by your Government. It is not that we all have a role to play; it is that you as the Minister for Disability Services failed to act to prevent those deaths. Will you accept responsibility for those deaths?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, the Ombudsman has made no such comments whatsoever in his report. That is quite incorrect.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have you read the report?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: What I will do is defer to my Secretary to answer in more detail.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I do not need to—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: But I come back to the record again. My understanding is that both of those residents passed away in hospital at the time.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: He has not even read the report.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: We all have a duty of care—

The CHAIR: Minister, I interrupt you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —to play in regard to their health and protection in the future.

The CHAIR: The question that was put to you was very specific.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: And I have answered it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, you have not.

The CHAIR: That is your answer?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Absolutely, and I stand by that answer. But I am more than happy, as I said, to hand over to my Secretary—

The CHAIR: Minister, the question was directed to you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —to provide a bit more detail in relation to those specific cases.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This is not question time in the Legislative Assembly. This is budget estimates and you are expected to answer the questions that you are asked.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: And I have done that for you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The question I am asking you is: Will you accept responsibility for two profoundly disabled, extremely vulnerable residents who died as a result of your Government's inaction?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: And I will come back once again, Mr Chairman, in case the member did not hear my answer. We all have a role to play—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We do not all have a role to play.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —me as the Minister for Disability Services, the Department of Family and Community Services, NSW Health—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is a no.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister for No Disability Services!

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —to do whatever we can to prevent any harm and to reduce the number of preventable deaths, as has been raised by the Ombudsman in his report. We will certainly take on board the recommendations as we always do from the Ombudsman. We have a very good relationship with the Ombudsman and we think he has provided a good report.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to stop you there. We have limited time and I am going to move on. You have now refused to accept responsibility.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I think you have refused to accept my answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you are not responsible for those deaths who is?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As I said to you before, and I am more than happy to come back and repeat the answer, we all have a significant role to play in ensuring that we reduce the number of preventable deaths—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who is this "we" that you talk about?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I talk about my Department of Family and Community Services, and me as the Minister for Disability and NSW Health, as has been referred and recommended by the Ombudsman, who need to take on board the recommendations in the report. We all have a role to play in reducing the number of preventable deaths.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Those people are your Government and as the Minister for Disability Services you should be taking responsibility. If it is not your responsibility whose responsibility is it?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have answered that question, Mr Chairman, but if you would like a bit more detail I am more than happy to hand over to my Secretary.

The CHAIR: No.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If you do not want that detail I am happy to move on.

The CHAIR: It is not a question of me; it is answering the question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have answered the question as succinctly, clearly and honestly as I can.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I put it to you that that was not succinct and it was not clear, and you are not answering the question. Will you apologise to the families of the former Stockton Centre residents who died?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As I have already said, I am deeply saddened and I have extended my condolences to the families of any people with disability who have passed away in residential care. But I would like to hand over to my Secretary—

The CHAIR: Minister—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —to go through in a bit more detail in relation to those cases.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: No. The question was directed to the Minister. If that is the answer, and that is the extent of the answer, that is it I think.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you are here to answer the questions today, not your Secretary. Concerns were raised with you well before these deaths occurred and you ignored them, is that not correct?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, I think you stated in your opening comments that if I was going to refer to particular people who sit around here and work on behalf of our office of both disability services and multiculturalism that I could do that. I am happy to hand over to my Secretary now who will go into more detail for you.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Thank you, Minister.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No. Minister, what concerns were raised with you about the potential for harm to these residents before they passed away? What concerns were raised with you? I am not interested in what your very adept Secretary can answer; I am interested in what you can answer.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Through you, Mr Chairman, my Secretary is able to offer you that advice.

The CHAIR: Minister, we are talking about the death of two people and the question has been directed to you as the Minister. If you do not wish to answer the question—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, I have answered the question for you. We are not talking about two deaths. What we are talking about is a report into the deaths of 497 individual people with disability—

The CHAIR: Minister, that was not the question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —who passed away in residential care, of which 95 per cent of those people, as advised by the Ombudsman, were through natural causes.

The CHAIR: Minister, you have already said that.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: But I am more than happy once again to go back and reconfirm that we all have a role to play.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you are failing to answer the question. I remind you again that this is not question time in the lower House. This is budget estimates in the Legislative Council and we expect you to answer the questions that you are asked.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, I have answered my portion of the question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are being asked questions about two people who died under your watch.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am happy to go into some more detail from my Secretary if you would like.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are failing to answer the questions.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Point of order—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, if you do not want that detail that is up to you.

The CHAIR: It is not a question of me. What is the point of order?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: The Minister has answered the question. The constant interjections and talking over the top are not going to get us anywhere. I ask that everyone respect the process and allow the Minister to answer the question, which he has done.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: To the point of order: I ask the Minister to respect the process and to answer the questions that are being asked here today.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, are you suggesting to me that it is not appropriate to request further detail from the people who work for me?

The CHAIR: The question has been directed to you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If you are making that call I would say that is outside the realms of budget estimates.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you are not a participant in this Committee. You are not allowed to enter into discussions about a point of order.

The CHAIR: I am trying to direct this as best I can. The questions are being directed to you as the Minister.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Exactly, and I am more than happy to add to my answers that I have given through my Secretary. If you do not want that detailed information for the public record—

The CHAIR: Minister, it is not that.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I think that is a failure by you and by the Committee to ask those specific questions for the public record.

The CHAIR: Minister, I consider that quite offensive.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: It is an accurate statement.

The CHAIR: Minister, I consider it quite offensive that you are reflecting on the Chair.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Well if you think that is offensive, I think it is offensive that you are failing to put detailed information—

The CHAIR: Minister, I am chairing this hearing reasonably. The questions are being directed to you. It is not a question of whether I want to hear from the gentlemen; it is not that at all. The questions are being directed to you. If that is the extent of the answers, that is the extent of the answers. We will move on.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, I think—

The CHAIR: Minister, it is not open for discussion. You do not reflect on the Chair in a Legislative Council committee hearing.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, I am happy to take your advice.

The CHAIR: Minister, you do not reflect on the Chair and you do not answer back. I am trying to chair this in a reasonable fashion.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: And it is just my opinion.

The CHAIR: Do not interrupt me as I am speaking. This is not the Legislative Assembly. Do you understand that? We will continue with the questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, will you now admit that your Government raced into this transition, ignored advice, failed to provide adequate support and resources and two people have died as a result?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, to the question what I can state for the record is that we have followed on with the transitioning of people from large residential accommodation to group homes that was commenced under the Labor Government. It was commenced by Premier Kristina Keneally under a program, if I remember correctly, known as Stronger Together. It was commenced in 2008. It follows on from a United Nations resolution more than 25 years ago when it was decided that we would all take the positive—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am not concerned with the history of the transition of long-term residential care.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —and proactive role of devolving people with disability from large residential centres into group homes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We are all familiar with the history.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Because we would no longer stand for people with disability being locked away in large residential centres. Now if the Labor Party has moved away from that particular policy—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you did not do this properly.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —I am happy to take that on board but she should make that public.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Two people died. You have mismanaged this process and you will not answer the questions that we are asking this morning.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: You just asked me a question as to whether or not I support the transition of people from large residential centres into group homes—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No.

The CHAIR: Minister, I will ask the member to repeat the question so that you can hear it.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, do you admit that your Government raced into this transition, ignored advice, failed to provide adequate support and services, and two people died as a result?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No. We have continued to follow the processes that were put in place by the Labor Government—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you think that every action was entirely appropriate?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —from large residential to group homes.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: Let the Minister answer the question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: We followed, and continue to follow, the transitioning process of people with disability from large residential centres to group homes, where they are leading a much better quality of life than they did previously.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am not interested in the policy; I am interested in the implementation. You have bungled the implementation and that is what I am asking you about this morning.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: It is inconsistent for the questioner to say "I am not interested in the policy, I am interested in the implementation" and yet at the same time refuse to listen to the response from the departmental Secretary, who is related to the implementation of the policy. You can certainly

have a go at the Minister for a policy problem that you see, but if you want to talk about implementation it is up to the Secretary of the department and he should be heard if he wants to make a statement in that regard.

The CHAIR: On the issue of implementation I think the honourable member is right; that is taking us into an area that the director would have direct knowledge and responsibility of. If you want answers in that respect I think it would be quite appropriate then to hear, if that is where you are going with this.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Chair. I am more than happy to refer to my Secretary.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We accept and acknowledge the significant problems that were identified in the transition of these two people—identified both by our internal review and confirmed by the Ombudsman's review. Just to explain what they were: the adequacy of actions of staff at Stockton to address substantial health risks over time and prior to transition; the adequacy of actions by my agency to ensure an informed and safe transition, including training, support and induction of staff; and staff not identifying critical health changes and seeking timely medical assistance. They are very significant issues.

Working with the Ombudsman, we have put in place a service improvement plan for the Hunter large residential centres; we have introduced a continuous improvement tool that identifies 168 aspects of our practice and procedure that support the safety and wellbeing of people in the centres; and we have, with the Ombudsman, overseen the implementation of those changes. More than 500 people have transitioned safely and successfully from large residential centres to community settings. This was a very significant set of problems that we accept responsibility for. The most senior disability executive directly accountable for this part of our operations has met with and personally apologised to the families and we strongly believe that the best thing we can do in response to this is to implement the changes that we have committed to the Ombudsman.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Mr Coutts-Trotter, I appreciate that. I appreciate the measures and the careful and responsive way that the department has responded. Minister, will you now apologise to the families and will you now accept responsibility in the same way that the department has?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chairman, I have already extended my sincere condolences to the family. The one thing that I would add that my Secretary had not included in his response is that within the Ombudsman's report he quite clearly stated that significant development changes had occurred in the past two years, that is, in the past two years under my watch—of which I am incredibly proud. I will state for the record again that I am incredibly saddened by the passing away of any person with disability, especially, as the Ombudsman has stated, that could have been prevented.

The one thing that I may add to that is that we are dealing here with people with disability who do have significant and complex health needs. They do not enjoy the good health that the people around this table or, indeed, the people in this room enjoy. I think we need to understand that. Is there room for improvement, as the Secretary has quite clearly pointed out, and do I accept that we can make improvements here? Absolutely, and I come back to stating once again that we all have a role to play and I particularly, as the Minister for Disability Services in New South Wales, have an important role to play in that as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you just acknowledged that these were preventable deaths.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: These were preventable deaths, as per the Ombudsman's report.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They were preventable deaths. You just said that they were preventable deaths.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So will you now accept responsibility that it was your inaction that caused these deaths?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No. What I will state once again for the member is that, as the Ombudsman has quite clearly stated, there have been significant development changes in the past two years. We have certainly been more than willing to respond to any request by the Ombudsman to put those changes in place, which have happened over the past two years, which I would certainly hope will reduce the amount of preventable deaths in the future. I would like to get to a perfect position where there are no preventable deaths.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, are you trying to tell the Committee this morning that these deaths did not occur under your watch?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I did not say anything of the sort.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, why will you not accept responsibility when your Government failed these people, these extremely vulnerable people?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have stated time and time again for the record that we have a role to play, that we have put significant changes in place over the last two years and now, following the recommendations of the Ombudsman, we will be more than willing to work again with the Ombudsman to take on board these further recommendations to do whatever we can to minimise the amount of preventable deaths in the future.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who decided to transfer the residents to a group home when it was not a medical model group home?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am happy to hand that over to the Secretary.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: We have to accept operational responsibility for those decisions and we do. We are absolutely intent on learning the important lessons from these two complex, tragic and profoundly discomfiting examples. We have done our very best to act on the insights that we have got from the Ombudsman and that we have got from our own clinical reviews, and, as I say, we have a dramatic improvement in every measure of personal wellbeing, staff adherence to evidence-based procedures—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My time is about to run out, so I just want to ask you one quick question. Will you now acknowledge that you were warned that these deaths could occur if the appropriate care was not in place, and that that was a failure?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not think it is quite as clear as that. I think we acknowledge that our preparation to transitioning these people from Stockton to the community was poorly done. We identified significant problems with it. But the Ombudsman and, indeed, our own clinical review identified that there were longstanding problems inside Stockton.

The CHAIR: Ms Dawn Walker?

Ms DAWN WALKER: I want to start by asking a few questions specifically about home care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. First, did Family and Community Services [FACS] and Ageing, Disability and Home Care [ADHC] provide funding to community health centres to specifically assist with providing services for people with disability in the community?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Specifically on behalf of Home Care?

Ms DAWN WALKER: Yes.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I might refer that to my Secretary to answer in a little bit more detail in regards to the funding that you have spoken about.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would need to check and respond on notice. We have seen the end of the Community Supports Program. There have been some people who were previously receiving very low levels of attendant care and support in their homes—possibly help with mowing the lawn or some cleaning—who are not participants in the NDIS. However, the Government has run a so-called Continuity of Support program for the last couple of years to identify people in that situation and try to provide alternative supports for them, existing programs, a review of the National Disability Insurance Agency's [NDIA's] decision not to allow them to participate in the scheme, or practical help to find other ways to give them the supports they need. In the most recent budget, NSW Health has created a Safe and Supported at Home program that will similarly provide some support to people who are formally receiving some kind of support but are not now participants in the NDIS.

Ms DAWN WALKER: As to services that community health centres were providing, such as community nursing, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, is it your understanding that they will now have to use the NDIS to make up for the shortfall of the services that they were getting from community health centres?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Ageing, Disability and Home Care did provide some funding essentially for health services, but within the scheme of things it was quite limited. But ADHC did step in to fill the gap, if you like. With the creation of the NDIS, the universal health system, particularly the health system here in New South Wales needs to become more disability capable, more inclusive for people with disability, and, as I say, in the transitional period Health has been funded for the Safe and Supported at Home program. That should make available some of the supports you are describing to people who are not participants in the NDIS.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Are you aware of any NDIS participants who are being turned away from community health services because they are now on the NDIS?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would need to check for you, Ms Walker, and respond on notice. Not that I am aware of, but the agency could be.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I am also interested in whether Family and Community Services [FACS] and ADHC are still funding community health services for in-home disability services.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: No. The funding for in-home disability services has all been transferred to the National Disability Insurance Agency. But just because someone is a participant in the NDIS does not mean they do not, as any other citizen, have the right to get access to universal services, including health services.

Ms DAWN WALKER: But specifically the in-home disability service?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: If it was an in-home disability service and someone is a participant in the NDIS, they would have a personalised package funding budget that would enable them to continue to buy those supports. Most of those supports were provided by our home care service, which is now operated by Australian Unity, and since the transfer of our service Australian Unity has increased staff numbers by about 5 per cent and expanded its operations across New South Wales.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I add to that. That is a perfect example of the statements that we made last year, and continue to make, where we believe that with the introduction of the NDIS there will be an increase in employment of up to 28,000 to 30,000 people across New South Wales and the regions that will be the broad beneficiaries of that increase in employment will largely be south-west Sydney and regional and rural New South Wales.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I will move to employment, Minister. Thank you for raising that. I am interested in your recent announcement of jobs for people with disability planned for the New South Wales public sector. Do you have any figures to date on any increase in public sector employees who have identified as having a disability?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am pleased to say that on 4 December 2017, which was International Day of People with Disability, we launched a plan to increase the representation of people with disability employed in the New South Wales public service. The plan is to double the rate of participation from 2.7 per cent to 5.7 per cent by 2027. The proportion of employees with disability in the New South Wales public sector is considerably lower than what we would expect and what I would like, at 2.7 per cent—especially when you consider that and compare that to the private sector, which is around about 8 per cent and growing.

I recently met with the New South Wales Public Service Commission to receive an update on the policy measures that we had introduced. Since the target was announced a number of early initiatives have already taken place and are in development. There is a new online learning program for public sector staff that will focus on the lived experience of people with disability, which will tackle important issues such as workplace adjustments and discrimination. As I said before, sometimes people who are employing people with a disability can be biased. We need to get past that. The private sector has played a very positive role in that area and we need to improve in the public sector.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Do you have any figures to date—any data?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

Ms DAWN WALKER: To show effectiveness?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

Ms DAWN WALKER: When will that be assessed? When is the first key performance indicator [KPI]?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The Public Service Commission releases, usually in November, annual workforce data that is the information drawn from each agency's systems and we will expect to see that data in November.

Ms DAWN WALKER: In November?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I looked at the I work for NSW website. There is information on categories of workers such as graduates and experienced workers but there does not seem to be anything on assisting job seekers with disability. Is that something you are planning to do?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I think it is improving the processes so that we are certainly not discriminating and that there is no bias in place towards anybody—that people are actually being employed on merit. If you look to people in the disability sector, that is the most important thing: They do not want to be employed primarily because they have a disability; they want to be employed because they have the ability to undertake the role that is at hand. That is where we need to improve our practices. I note that, as of December last year, 180 public sector managers had undertaken training on upholding the rights of people with disability and an additional 240 participants will complete that training throughout this year. As I say, there is a role we need to play at a high level when we are assessing people with disability which will turn that around.

Ms DAWN WALKER: It will be good to see in November what the figures are. Moving now to people with disability in jail, do you have any figures on how many people with disability are currently in jail waiting on NDIS eligibility?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is a really good question. I do not have those figures in front of me, but I did have the opportunity to meet with some people in Red Cross only a few weeks ago who are running a program at this time, primarily in the Hawkesbury area, in regard to people with disability in jails. One point they raised with me—and I have already commenced correspondence with my Federal counterpart—is that there is great difficulty in assessing people who are currently in jail for their eligibility for the NDIS. I make the particular point—and I raised this with the person from Red Cross—that they are primarily focused on those people with mental health issues. As we know, there are now 11,000 to 12,000 people who have become eligible because of their permanent diagnosed state of psychosocial disorder that will now be eligible for the NDIS and currently accessing and receiving support through the NDIS.

The reason I am so focused on that is we know that there is a recurrent returning of people with mental illness into our jail system. If we can provide those specific supports on behalf of their mental health, if they are diagnosed in that way, I think we can drastically reduce the amount of people going to jail and we can improve their quality of life. Ultimately, if they do have that determined permanent state of psychosocial disorder, they will be eligible for the NDIS and that will change their life. It is a great question. There is more work to do. I have certainly taken that on myself to write to my Federal counterpart to see if we can improve assessing people in jails, particularly those with mental health issues.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We have been advised that the New South Wales Government will continue to provide up to \$26 million in transitional advocacy funding supplements for the existing disability advocacies. Of course, that was welcomed. How much of this funding goes towards regional disability advocacy providers? Secondly, given Labor has made a pledge that basically this transitional advocacy funding supplement will be in perpetuity, has the Government reconsidered its position to match that outcome?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Unless the secretary has details in regard to the regions, I do not think we have.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I do not but we can get that breakdown for you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: The additional funding that we provided—\$26 million over two years—is available to all advocates, as you would know. There are some issues there about what the Federal Government has provided. They have provided \$60 million over two years under the National Disability Advocacy Program, which has Commonwealth funding. There is also \$130 million of what we now know as information linkages and capacity building—or ILC funding, as it is known. Many of the advocacy groups are now receiving a range of those supports, a range of that particular funding. In the future what we need to look at is how ultimately the Federal Government—which, as we know, is now responsible for providing disability services on behalf of people with disability in New South Wales who are eligible for the NDIS—funding plays out.

It is quite a significant increase on behalf of what we would term services to support people through further information, building greater capacity in themselves to get out—whether that is volunteering or getting out into the workplace, or undertaking further educational opportunities. I think we need to look a little bit more broadly. I think this is a body of work that perhaps the Commonwealth Government needs to apply. It is certainly something, as I have said before—we play a role as the Minister for Disability ensuring that there are no gaps in services going forward, and that is why we introduced and committed to that \$26 million over two years. I think there is a body of work that will need to continue in the future to completely understand whether that funding is being provided appropriately.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The second question was: Will you be matching the Labor Opposition's position on that matter?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: At this point in time I will come back to what I said before: I think we need to understand more fully what the benefits are or the shortfalls. I do not think there would be any shortfalls.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: So the short answer is no.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Not at this point in time.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The NDIS has become a target for unscrupulous operators taking advantage of limited checks and balances in the system to ensure correct services were being claimed and prices were not overinflated. The latest figures from the Commonwealth Ombudsman show more than 500 allegations of potentially fraudulent payments and financial anomalies were already being assessed. Given each State and Territory has responsibility for oversight of regulation, quality and performance of providers under the NDIS scheme, has the New South Wales Government allocated any funding towards the prevention, detection or prosecution of fraud by these providers against the NDIS, or is this strictly a Commonwealth issue?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Because the process is run under the National Disability Insurance Agency on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, the role is primarily on behalf of the NDIA to go through and ultimately weed out those people, as you have said, and ultimately, by virtue of the figures you have stated, they are doing a pretty good job at the moment.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Regarding the NDIS, how many people are now excluded from the scheme? We have heard that 50,000 were included in the new scheme, but how many are now excluded from the scheme that do not fit the criteria?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I might answer that by virtue of saying there are almost 100,000 people who are currently accessing the NDIS. It would be just under that. That includes nearly 3,000 children who are accessing early childhood and early intervention from the nought to six-year age group, which is very important. When you say, "How many people are excluded?", there are, I think, around about 1.1 million people in New South Wales who are recognised as having a degree of disability. Only those who have—I am going to loosely use my phrase—a determined permanent state of disability which will find them as eligible for the NDIS will see them accessing and receiving supports under the NDIS. As I often say, the large majority—90 per cent—of people with disability in New South Wales, live an active and normal daily life as do we all. If that answers your question, that a million people are missing out on the NDIS—I do not necessarily like to say they are missing out.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is more so those who were accessing services prior to the installation of NDIS and are now excluded because the definitions have moved them outside the system.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: According to the NDIA's actuarial report, as at 31 July this year 19,000 people were found to be ineligible. There were 96,000 found to be eligible and 19,000 people found to be ineligible, including around 4,000 existing New South Wales disability service clients, nearly all of them receiving community care and support.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: They are New South Wales statistics?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I just wanted to clarify that.

The CHAIR: What was the document you are referring to?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: It is an NDIA actuary report. They produce a quarterly report.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Currently autism is the biggest primary disability type for children in the NDIS.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What is the eligibility criteria for autistic children to access the NDIS, given that the continuum is so broad in terms of autistic needs?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: It is a question that is above my pay grade. I am going to ask the secretary.

The CHAIR: You are the Minister.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: To that point, I am happy to take that on board but, in terms of a diagnosis of a person with any form of disability, I am not making that determination as a Minister and you would understand and appreciate the fact that I am not qualified to make that determination.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: While that is being sought, I will ask a second question about that. In my area there are people in the situation where they have had the care prior to the NDIS, but now that there are certain criteria that those kids need to meet certain providers with certain qualifications it takes those kids out of the area to meet those specialists. Are you aware of cases like that?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have met with a body of people who represent not only their own children but people who have children with varying degrees of autism.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: These kids used to see someone local and now, because of the NDIS, they require a specific provider with a specific ability to service a specific client, and these kids now have to make their way out of a regional area to see an accredited provider. Are you concerned about that type of thing happening?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am certainly concerned if there are people eligible for the NDIS who cannot access services in their local area. I would say at this point in time that it is a work in progress. We are seeing new providers come in almost on a weekly basis because of the amount of people. I suppose this was a focus of the emphasis of getting people into the NDIS as soon as we could because ultimately then you could get clear line of sight—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My concern is that the further you get from the epicentre of Sydney the more difficult that is, and the last thing you want to do is take these very vulnerable kids large distances for a provider because the local provider suddenly does not qualify through the NDIS. That is of great concern to me.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: And with the tyranny of distance there has always been issues in accessing services across our broad regional and rural areas. I take onboard the importance of being able to ensure those—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am not talking about having a hospital on every corner—let me make that clear. I am talking about medical professionals that do exist in their community that somehow have been disqualified from doing the job they did prior to the NDIS.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am not aware of that, but I am happy to take that onboard.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: If there is any specific example you would like to provide us outside this discussion, we would pursue it with the NDIA.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will forward something to you.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: At a headline level the number of registered NDIS providers has risen in New South Wales from 4,300 a year ago to 8,485 this year.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My point, Mr Coutts-Trotter, is: What was it before that? Did every GP have that ability?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The Commonwealth of course funded directly some services for children with autism. To your earlier question, Mr Green, the benefit of the NDIS is that you do not have to establish a diagnosis; it is a functional assessment. I am happy to get information from the NDIA about how they are doing that in relation to children on the autism spectrum. This will see a doubling of the funding available for supports. The system we are replacing was a rationed system. The NDIS will massively increase the availability and choice available to parents and families, including in regional areas. If there are examples of previous providers who for some reason are not able to register as providers with the NDIA, we are more than happy to pick that up and pursue it with the agency.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, you recently tried to defund all disability advocacy services; will you rule out any attempt to do that in the future?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Quite to the contrary. Through you, Chair, we just funded advocacy support services to the tune of \$26 million over the next two years. I come back again to my previous answers on that; there is a significant increase in funding supports for advocacy services. As I have said before, the Commonwealth Government is now providing disability services for those eligible for the NDIS in New South Wales, funding to the tune of \$60 million through the National Disability Advocacy Program.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Do you deny seeking to defund those organisations?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, what we originally said and what we stand by is that every cent of our disability funding, some \$3.2 billion, has been directed to the National Disability Insurance Agency on behalf of the NDIS. That included—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Did you seek to defund those organisations?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That included funding that was previously provided to advocacy support services. It should be noted that people with an NDIS plan in place can specifically seek those particular advocacy support services through their individual plans.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are oxygen bottles covered by the NDIS?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I would need to take advice on that.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you, Mr Coutts-Trotter. While you are doing that, can you provide a list of all NDIS-exempt services that were previously provided, such as oxygen bottles, that are no longer provided? You referred, for instance, to the safe and supported at home program. However, now that disability has been privatised in New South Wales, clearly some services are no longer covered by the NDIS. Serious concern has been expressed by community organisations about those services, including oxygen bottles. Can you clarify that by providing on notice a list of the services that are no longer covered by the NDIS?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Would it be helpful also to identify what options there are in our own service systems if that is the case? In other words, I could identify the other health programs that may be options.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That would be very useful. Can you also include some dollar amounts?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I will see what I can do.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That would be very valuable. I am also looking at things like funding for particular types of services, for example, medical cleaning services for people in group homes who need them. Minister, can you discuss how medical cleaners are now funded in New South Wales?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I cannot specifically. I imagine they are a component of the support provided to people with disability in group homes. I am happy to take that question on notice. If you have any specific instances of shortfalls in services or any documentation, or if you have had any representations, I would be happy to receive that information so that I can address those issues more directly.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you for that response. Obviously individuals have particular needs, and services such as specialist cleaners were previously funded. You have indicated that you are prepared to take that question on notice. Please do so, but I would like to zero in on that issue.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will go a little further in regard to the supports and services provided in group homes. When we devolve large residential centres and place people with disability into group homes, we go through significant engagement with their families to flesh out what they believe their loved ones need to ensure we are providing those services through the contracts that we award on their behalf.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: When you say "we", who do you mean?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Family and Community Services.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How many staff are engaged in that activity?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: That is a good question, and I am happy to take it on notice. As you know, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of disability-specific staff in our agencies.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Everyone in the community is very well aware of that.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I point out that, of the 11,000 people who have left us, all but 186 have moved either to non-government organisations—about 10,000—or to other government agencies. We have seen 186 voluntary redundancies out of 11,000 staff. That is an extraordinary achievement.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is exactly right. A large number of well-qualified people are in the sector providing those services to people with disability as they have done for many years, and they should be commended for doing so.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are any nurses funded under the NDIS?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: How many in New South Wales?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: I am happy to get that figure. However, in response to the question of whether the NDIS funds medical models of support, clearly it does and it has.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Such as Summer Hill?

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you wrote six letters on behalf of a Mr Garry Bugeja—whom you say you do not know—about him obtaining free water licences from the Government. How many letters of support have you written on behalf of Kym Flowers, a 34-year-old woman with cerebral palsy who has been stuck living in Sutherland Hospital for five months because she has nowhere else to go?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will address that question in two ways. If you come back to the original question of why I represented a farmer constituent in my area, it is because I feel very proud to stand up and support all of my constituents. I wrote those particular letters about the water licence on behalf of Mr Bugeja because from 2007 until 2010 the Labor Government had—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How do you pronounce his name?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: This needs to be put in context, given that you have raised it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I simply want to clarify the pronunciation of his name.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I believe it is pronounced "Boojaya".

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You understand that is how it is pronounced?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you know him before you started writing those letters?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, not before he walked into my office.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Has he donated to your campaigns?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: He has never donated to your campaigns?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No. I think his words were that he had never given me a cup of coffee, and I stand by that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: He has never donated to your campaigns? He has never attended a fundraiser?

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: While this might be interesting, estimates committee hearings relate to a Minister's portfolio. The Minister's role as an ordinary member of Parliament, as a Legislative Assemblyman, does not fall within those bounds.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To the point of order: Given that the Minister has privatised all the services in New South Wales and that he keeps referring to the NDIS as providing them, presumably the only thing he has left is to proclaim that he is an advocate. We are exploring how, other than for people who want their water licences fixed up by him and the Government, he is acting as an advocate for people with disability. That is not what they are telling us.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Further to the point of order: The Hon. Courtney Houssos asked a very clever question that involved two parts and sought to create an appearance of the Minister's behaviour. The second half of the question would be totally legitimate: Did you make a representation on behalf of the person in Sutherland Hospital? However, if she adds the kicker at the front, he has every right to address that kicker.

The CHAIR: The Minister said he would answer the question in two parts. He has commenced doing that and there has been an exchange about his response to the first part of the question. I will allow the Minister to continue to answer the first part of the question, but that will delay him getting to the second part.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will put this in context and I will be very brief. Between 2007 and 2010 the Labor Government announced an amnesty period during which farmers in the Hawkesbury area could seek a free water licence. Mr Bugeja approached me in 2011 and said that, unlike his neighbours, he had never been notified

that he could apply for his water licence during the amnesty. He requested that I write letters on his behalf seeking a water licence, and I have done that. As of today, he has still not received a water licence, which I think is a little unfair because his neighbours have. That is the answer to the first part of the question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Given that response, I would like to ask a follow-up question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, that is the answer only to the first part of the question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The Ombudsman's report—a different report from the one we were discussing previously—entitled "Water Compliance and Enforcement"—

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The key part of the question should have been the second one, which was about representations being made on behalf of the person in Sutherland Hospital. We cannot move into a situation where we simply cross-examine Ministers on the basis of their representations of various electorates.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: To the point of order: I acknowledge the point of order, but the Minister has provided an answer and I wish to interrogate part of it.

The CHAIR: I will listen carefully to further exchanges, but we need to come to the second part of the original question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Which is important. While I never discuss individual cases publicly, I have undertaken to make representations on that person's behalf.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not just make public representations, Minister. The Ombudsman found it was not in the public interest and the investigation was politically interfered with.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Sorry, Mr Chairman, I was dealing with the second part of the question about the representations I believe were raised on behalf of Ms Flowers. I have already undertaken to do representations—I had undertaken to do representations when I was requested by the family.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am asking you about your representations to Mr Bugeja.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: You have come back to the first part of the question.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Point of order: The question is out of order in relation to the budget estimates hearing process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: To the point of order: The Minister clearly began answering this question. The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps could have asked for it to be ruled out of order then. He did not. He opened the line of questioning; I would like to interrogate.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Further to the point of order: I chose not to because I believed that the Minister would ultimately get to the second half of the question, which is the relevant one for the budget estimates hearings process. The Hon. Courtney Houssos is now returning to a part of the question that is demonstrably out of order to the examination of the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister. I ask the Chairman to rule the question out of order so that we can move on to other questions.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: It is not the Legislative Assembly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Further to the point of order: It is the first time that the Minister has shown any real knowledge of a policy area. I would like to interrogate that. He has started talking about the six letters he has provided to some guy he says he has never met before.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: To the point of order—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But he will not advocate on behalf of disabled people of this State.

The Hon. Dr PETER PHELPS: Further to the point of order—

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: In fairness to the people asking questions, they are chewing up their time. Chair, I thought you were very clear earlier in the hearing when you said this is not the Legislative Assembly. We are not going down the path of non-portfolio matters so we should return to what we are meant to be doing here.

The CHAIR: We must focus on the matters before this particular hearing, which is the portfolio responsibilities for Disability Services and Multiculturalism. I do not know whether the question can be asked another way but it is exploring an area that is certainly on the boundaries of what we are examining this morning.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I respect your ruling, Mr Chair. We will move on.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: The member makes a good point in respect of my advocacy on behalf of people with disability. We have written representations on behalf of the person she raised. We make representations on behalf of any person who presents themselves to my office, whether that comes via members of Parliament of various political persuasions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But not as stridently as someone who wants a free water licence?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Or when I am the member of a constituent's area ultimately in my capacity as a member for my respective electorate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: He is not your constituent anymore.

The CHAIR: Order! In respect of the details of those letters, have you written more than one letter?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am happy to get that detail and provide it on notice, but I have certainly made representations on behalf of that person. I state for the record, Mr Chairman, which is important, in the six months that that particular person was under the care of the disability organisation, they spent all but three weeks in hospital because of their health conditions. I do not want to go into specific cases, but it is important to note that the organisation that was providing the support to that family had made dozens and dozens of personal contacts with the family. That individual was in hospital for all but three weeks and I understand that the organisation never received one cent of funding for the plan. It never sought to seek one cent of funding for the plan that was in place because of the time that was spent in hospital as opposed to being in residential care that they initially sought. It is important to make that comment for the public record.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, I note that residents of the Summer Hill centre, in the same way as Stockton families, are expressing the same concerns that we discussed and that is the issue about whether the same level of care that they have been receiving will continue to be provided. For example, Summer Hill residents have indicated, and I think we have already touched on this, that NDIS plans do not cover their day-to-day health needs. Is that correct?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, I do not believe that is correct. I am happy to get specific details on the care that you talk about, but what I can say in regard to the clinical services and the allied health care on behalf of the residents of Summer Hill is that that particular contract was awarded to the Benevolent Society last year and that carer has certainly been in place and has been appropriate. In regard to the ongoing care and support and daily services for those people in Summer Hill, that will now be provided by Achieve. In regard to the individual processes or healthcare supports that you speak about, I am happy to ask the secretary to give you a little bit more detail.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: On the advice I have, I understand that domestic assistance, personal care, transport, those supported living services continue to be provided and are funded as well as medical support, tube feeding, oxygen injections, day programs, diversion activities, community access, social support, leisure, recreation and education. There was a recent decision of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal that confirmed our strong view that where someone's functional limits means that they need medical care in order to manage their health and wellbeing, that is an appropriate and necessary support funded through the NDIS. That was the finding of the tribunal in a recent case of a woman with disability who has type 1 diabetes. The question was: Should the scheme fund a registered nurse to enable that woman to manage her diabetes? The agency had initially said no. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal decided that the agency's decision was wrong and that that was quite appropriate.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, there is a number of families here today from the Summer Hill centre—the Addeley family, Cannon family and the Jackson family. Can you guarantee to them that the same level of care that is currently being provided will be provided to their loved ones when the Summer Hill centre is privatised?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: What I can say—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: It is a simple question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: It is a simple answer. What I can say is that in all of the contracts that we have awarded to the non-government sector to provide services on behalf of people with disability, we have at all times—the point needs to be made that these are not multinational companies, these are not large corporations; these are people who have provided significant disability support to people with disability in New South Wales for, in some cases, over half a century such as the Benevolent Society—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I appreciate what you are saying, Minister. Will the same level of care be provided? That is the answer they are seeking from you today. Can you say to them, "Yes, it will be provided"?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have met with many of those families and, as I have said through the process of engagement with FACS, we need to understand exactly what their needs are, and I believe that we will continue to provide the services that are required on behalf of those clients at Summer Hill.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Will they continue to receive the same level of services that are being provided?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is my great hope, absolutely.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No, not hope; I am not asking for hope. You are the Minister. I am not seeking to be rude on this point; it is an important issue for those families.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is the intention of putting the appropriate providers in place so they can provide those services.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Can you assure them—yes or no?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: To the best of my ability, yes, I can.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Minister, I take you to earlier this year and the hard-fought campaign on behalf of advocacy services in New South Wales. I acknowledge the work of the Stand By Me campaign because it lobbied very hard and was somewhat successful. You have reversed your decision not to fund disability advocacy services past 30 June 2018, which was the original decision. It has successfully been able to secure funding to 2020. I am interested in your views on the importance of advocacy organisations for people with disability who are trying to negotiate the NDIS system, in particular. Do you see that they play an important role for people with disabilities who are trying to negotiate a very new system?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Thank you for the question. I think I can best answer that in this way. People who are eligible for the NDIS, as I have said before, become the greatest advocates—they and their families become the greatest advocates on behalf of their needs. They know better than anybody the services and the supports that they require to lead the best possible quality of life.

Ms DAWN WALKER: With all due respect, having spoken to people with disabilities that is true but they look for additional support through advocacy agencies. These are agencies some of which have been in the community for 30 years, so they are very highly regarded and they provide an essential service for people with disabilities. As we have seen through the campaign, they are not prepared to see that go.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Coming back to where I was with the question, if there is a specific support that is being provided to them by an advocacy service, that can be adapted into their NDIS plan. The question then goes back to the person with disability and their family. If they believe that that service and support is so profound and necessary on behalf of their needs, they can factor that back into their NDIS plan. However, because of the strong financial position of the New South Wales Government, through our strong economic management we are in a position where we have been able to fund advocacy services going forward for the next two years to the tune of \$26 million. There is also funding, as I have said before this morning, under the Commonwealth Government, which is now responsible for all people eligible for the NDIS.

There is funding under the National Disability Advocacy Program to the tune of some \$60 million over the next two years which could well and truly be ongoing. There is also \$130 million under information, linkages and capacity building [ILC], which I suggest would provide people with disability with the supports that they need whether to be able to embrace educational opportunities or employment opportunities. There is an enormous amount of funding and there is a lot of crossover at this point in time. But coming back to the initial question and the point of your question, if there is a specific support that a person with disability needs, that can be factored into their NDIS plan.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Would the NDIS assist a disabled person who is having problems with public transport access and needed someone to advocate on their behalf? Would the NDIS cover that?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: There are specific supports on behalf of people with disability and there is available funding for people through their NDIS plans for public transport.

Ms DAWN WALKER: The NDIS obviously is not going to advocate for that person if they have a particular issue accessing public transport in their area, for example. Where would they go?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If I take that in the context of advocacy, if there is a particular person with disability who has been provided with those supports from an advocacy group before and they can demonstrate that those supports are so necessary to them, they can have that adapted into their plan.

Ms DAWN WALKER: I think you misunderstand the situation. This is where a person with a disability has a particular issue utilising public transport. They need someone to assist them to make a complaint or support them if they have experienced discrimination or exploitation. Who is going to do that?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I could go to our other very good program known as Ability Links which we fund to the tune of just over \$40 million each and every year and where there are just over 340 individual people known as Linkers who work together not only on behalf of people who are eligible for the NDIS but more broadly on behalf of the other million-odd people who are outside the NDIS, helping them with their day-to-day needs, helping them to access public transport, education and employment. That has proved to be an overwhelming success. That is why we have continued with the program. That is one example.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Do you see a future for disability advocacy services beyond 2020? Are you intending to extend the funding?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I come back to the question that was made before. I think there is a lot of crossover in terms of the government funding, remembering that the Government now has full responsibility under the National Disability Insurance Agency for people eligible for the NDIS in New South Wales. On top of that, as I have said before, there is some \$60 million of advocacy funding under the National Disability Advocacy Program and some \$130 million for the information, linkages and capacity building funding. With all of those funding models in place plus, as I have said before, the wonderful Ability Linkers that we have across New South Wales, I think people with disability are well served. So at this point in time we are happy to watch over the next two years and see how that progresses. If there are any further funding shortfalls or gaps that we see, then ultimately we would certainly look to review that.

Ms DAWN WALKER: We will be watching too because, as you know, there is a great concern in the community about advocacy services, which takes me to the other advocate, really, which is the New South Wales disability ombudsman. Can you ensure that the New South Wales Government will maintain funding and support for the Ombudsman and in particular its Official Community Visitors program to ensure the safety of vulnerable members residing in large residential centres and group homes?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am going to make a short comment while the Secretary is rustling through his papers. As we move to the Commonwealth model there will be changes going forward. Currently the protections and safeguards for all people with disability remain in place. We have certainly strengthened those, as a government, with the reportable incidents scheme under the national disability Act of 2014, but the model will change and be strengthened with the protections and safeguards and the Commonwealth commissioner who is now in place. But I might ask our Secretary to go through that in a little more finite detail.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Explicitly in relation to the Official Community Visitors program, there is yet to be a policy decision nationally about the role of Official Community Visitors within the quality and safeguarding framework. Our view, for what it is worth, as a department is that the Official Community Visitors do a fantastic job. But in a national policy sense the question is yet to be determined.

Ms DAWN WALKER: What about the actual position of Ombudsman? Are you committed to that? Perhaps I will ask the Minister. Are we looking at continuing to have a New South Wales disability ombudsman?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Ultimately there are some changes going forward as we get to the commissioner. Mr Secretary, you may have the breakdown.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: The NDIS commission takes over a range of critical functions currently performed by the disability ombudsman. Some of those are yet to fully transition to the NDIS commissioner. For example, the reportable incidents function will move nationally but the Ombudsman will continue to have jurisdiction over a range of critical areas. Any allegations of abuse or neglect of people with disability in community settings will remain the responsibility of the NSW Ombudsman. The Ombudsman continues to have jurisdiction over reviewable deaths of people in assisted boarding houses. For as long as we continue to operate

residential centres in the Hunter and elsewhere, the Ombudsman will continue to have legislative oversight of that.

The other new development of course is the NSW Law Reform Commission recently presented a proposal to establish a New South Wales public guardian, which is a role that is in place in the oversight framework in Victoria. The Government is yet to respond to the Law Reform Commission's proposal, but we have significant changes at a national level through the quality and safeguards framework and a proposal for a new role, the guardian, at a State level. Inevitably the functions of the Ombudsman have to adjust to be complementary inside that framework. Some things are clear and decided; some things are yet to be decided.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, the NDIS funds early intervention supports that improve a child's functional capacity or prevent deterioration of functioning. This includes early intervention, allied health or other therapies such as speech therapy or physiotherapy. How much funding goes towards this area? How do you make parents aware of such support when they are not usually using those systems because their children may not be as heavily affected as the usual NDIS situation, and what are the eligibility requirements and process that apply? For instance, how does a parent who simply needs help with speech therapy find out about the help that is available when they are struggling with the cost of living and a mortgage?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I ask the honourable member to come back to the basics of the NDIS. Eligibility of the child would ultimately be determined for a NDIS plan and once that determination is made then that family would be able to access funding through the NDIS to have the child receive support with speech therapy. I think early childhood and early intervention is just one of the greatest outcomes through the NDIS. As you know, and everyone in this room knows, if we provide early supports to children it will make a difference to whether or not they can enter mainstream school. We are seeing a significant increase in the number of children with autism and disability entering mainstream school, which is great for a more inclusive society.

I also think from my knowledge of early childhood intervention over the past two years that great supports are offered to families. As you know, it is an anxious time for family when they have a child with disability. Early childhood intervention, while primarily providing those supports to children also provides great support to families as it calms them down. They are advised that they can remain in their job and they are advised of the supports that are available for their child. I say that that support needs to be provided as early as possible.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My point is how do parents find out about the support? A lot of parents would not be aware that they can get assistance for speech therapy, for example. One of my children had speech therapy, not through this system but I know as a parent it was about \$75 a week, which adds up over time. It lifts your child up to the bar of every other child in the class to have an even start at school. How do we advise these families about the support? Is that through the preschool? How do we tell them that there is assistance through the NDIS for speech therapy or physiotherapy?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I stress once again, it is if the child has been deemed eligible for the NDIS. So I suppose it comes back to an early determination of the degree of disability of the child.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is my point. Most of these kids would not be in that situation where they would be noted to be in the NDIS category but there is an initiative to help them in the area of speech therapy. That is what I am concerned about? How do we let the parents know that they actually qualify for this assistance?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: It is a very important question. I will ask the Secretary to respond.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: To your question about the funding, I am advised the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] is proposing to invest about \$136 million over three years in targeted early intervention services for children. There is a range of early childhood early intervention providers in New South Wales. I am happy to provide you with details of those. NDIA Local Area Coordinators would know about these organisations and the services they offer. New South Wales has run three, soon-to-be four rounds of public information campaigns to try to make sure people know about how to approach the NDIA, where to go to get what supports.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: With all due respect, I am saying that the preschool staff member who sees a child struggling with their speech would be the ideal person on the front line to advise the parent about what is available and then those services you are talking about, I am sure, follow from there.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes. The point I was going to make is we met with our Commonwealth colleagues and other jurisdictions to say that there has to be a coordinated information campaign between States and the NDIA with a particular focus on people who do not yet get, in a sense, fair access to the scheme—that is, Aboriginal people, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] and also parents with very young

children. It is identified as a priority group in the community who need to know more about what supports are available.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, I am aware that Multicultural NSW runs religious leaders' forums about three times a year to hear perspectives of faith leaders on topical issues important to their communities. What feedback have you received from the leaders regarding religious freedoms? My office has received strong indications people are concerned with their religious freedoms. What is Multicultural NSW doing to ensure the religious freedoms of people are upheld?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I meet with those religious leaders. It is a great opportunity to listen about those particular issues. I do not know whether they have raised those matters in the specific detail that you have suggested. I can say that the amendment in the NSW Crimes Act has been greatly appreciated, as I think you would also respect and support. It is a good opportunity to be able to liaise with those religious leaders. To have an open discussion about any issues of concern to those leaders is good. Last year an issue that was raised was the Australian meat advertisement which caused some offence to people of the Indian community. We are happy to take on board any of those particular issues and do what we can. I come back to what I always state, we run some very good programs through our compact partners and alliances to continue to promote harmony across our communities. My door will always be open to listen to any religious leaders of any denomination.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My question was whether you have heard about a growing angst about the religious freedom of people being protected in New South Wales?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, I do not think they have raised that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Have you heard that? It is strange that I have heard it in circles in which we have both—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Yes, I think probably all leaders would say there is not freedom of speech in relation to their religion but they have not necessarily raised that as a collective voice. I would hope that they certainly have that freedom of speech.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Given cultural diversity is less apparent in regional and rural New South Wales, how do regional advisory councils work with local government associations to promote specialised support services for new arrivals in need of greater assistance, given the current conversation of decentralisation and moving immigrants to our regional areas? What does that look like? What are your concerns, fears or hopes are for those situations?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I can say they work very, very well. There are terrific partnerships with our migrant resource centres and local government. One great thing about rural and regional areas and local government is that they seek out and work together with those partnerships. In relation to cultural diversity not being as apparent in rural and regional areas, I could not disagree more, having travelled around and dealt with many festivals. For example, the Tamworth local government area has a population of approximately 60,000 in which 69 different nationalities are represented. They have the great Fiesta La Peel that is attended by 5,000 or 6,000 people. About five six years ago an Indian family told the council it would love to run a cultural festival. In order to illustrate how far we have come in just a short space of time, the comment that was made then was "Who are we going to try to bring to this town?" These people said, "We are just going to have a festival with the diversity of people who live here".

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is great. In Fairfield there are about 10,000 people from the Assyrian community and Mayor Frank Carbone is deeply concerned about the resources to help those people assimilate. Will you comment on what the Government is doing to ensure that those people are getting every opportunity to thrive?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mayor Carbone is a great advocate for his area and he is also a good friend. I have spent a large proportion of my time in the Fairfield area. I have met with many of those refugee families and their children. One of the proud visits that I paid last year was to Fairfield High School, with both the captains—the boy and girl captains of that particular school are both refugee children—to hear their wonderful stories. But to come back to the resources, there are significant supports in place. Professor Peter Shergold is our Coordinator General with regard to the refugee program on behalf of the primarily Syrian and Iraqi refugees who are going to that particular area. There are significant supports. I am happy to get you some more details on the funding that we provide.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Could you, on what you are doing out there? That would be helpful.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If I can have one jibe at Mayor Carbone, some of the resources that go to that area may not necessarily be right in the Fairfield local government area. People from local government—as I certainly am—would say that they always talk about their patch. Some of those supports and services come from the adjoining areas. So sometimes he does not necessarily recognise some of that important funding that is there, and it is quite significant.

The CHAIR: Minister, can I suggest that we put the rest of your answer on notice just because we have completed that time slot and we now need to do the last cycle of questioning. If that is okay, it can be placed on notice.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is all right.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, did Mr Bugeja ever attend the charity ball you organised?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the wake of the appalling comments by Senator Fraser Anning in the Federal Parliament in his inaugural speech, did you condemn his use of the phrase "final solution"?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I must say that this year some of the most appalling comments that I have heard have come out of the mouth of the New South Wales Labor member Luke Foley. I think the "white flight" comments that he made were absolutely and utterly appalling.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will stop you there. I asked you a specific question about a senator in the Australian Parliament.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I think those words were condemned, and quite rightly so, and I think that any divisive comments—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But did you condemn them?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am trying to think. I would have to check whether or not we posted—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You would have to check!

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —on social media a condemnation of those. I have a feeling that I did. I must say that when you have the leader of the Labor Party in New South Wales—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You would have to check whether you condemned some of the most disgraceful words ever to be spoken—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —that is suggesting that people in their areas may be leaving because of the nationality of their neighbours, I think is just sickening and appalling, and very hurtful.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Point of order—

The CHAIR: The editorialising is very—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: They have been some of the most racist and divisive comments that I have heard this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Listen here, I am not going to be lectured to or verbally by a Minister who refuses to condemn—

The CHAIR: Order! The Minister will come to order. A point of order has been taken.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: I have raised a point of order: Let the Minister answer the question and not be interjected on.

The CHAIR: I think he has answered the question in part. I am just trying to work out when the answer is going to end. Are there any other points of order to be taken?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I would like to take a point of order. With all due respect to the Chair, the Minister is able to give the answer as he sees fit, and if we do not like it we can cut and move on, or rephrase the question.

The CHAIR: That is right.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You did ask for another point of order, so I gave it to you!

The CHAIR: Please continue with this line of questioning or take a further line of questioning, whatever the member wishes to do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, my question was very simple: Did you condemn Fraser Anning?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I would have to go back and check.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, did you condemn Lauren Southern when she toured Australia in July—when she visited the suburb of Lakemba promoting her extremist white supremacist views?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I do not remember that time. I certainly—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not remember her visit?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, I do not. The reason is that, as I have stated previously, I like to work very positively and proactively on behalf of our cultural diversity. I respect every person in our community regardless of their race, religion or the colour of their skin.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am just going to stop you there. These trips were highly publicised.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am not going to waste my time or a breath in my body—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You don't remember them?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —talking about people who make divisive comments. I work proactively—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is not true, Minister. You wait until there is a political opportunity for you. There are high-profile individuals who are promoting division within the community and you are failing to condemn them. You say that you do not know whether you condemned Senator Fraser Anning. You do not even remember Lauren Southern coming. During her visit she required a police presence. Do you know if she used the user-pays system for that police presence?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I do not know.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you make any investigations?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No, I do not remember the visit.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My honourable colleague informs me that it cost \$60,000 to the New South Wales taxpayer and you did not think to—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: No, she paid it.

The CHAIR: Please! We just had a question presented and an answer given. That is the way this works.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am happy to take the question on notice. I am unaware of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, should you have condemned her?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am certainly appalled by anybody who makes divisive comments on behalf of our community of New South Wales—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So why won't you condemn her?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —and, as I said before, one of the most divisive comments has been made by Luke Foley, the Labor member of the New South Wales Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to stop you there. Why won't you condemn her?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Member, I condemn anybody who is making divisive comments—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is not the case.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: —who seek to upset the harmony of our community across New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I put it to you that that is not the case. What about Milo Yiannopoulos, when he visited last year?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I do not remember that, either.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not remember?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not remember!

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am very busy attending the many cultural festivals to promote harmony and peace across our communities, honourable member. I do not tend to sit at home and watch and wait for these divisive comments to come out. I prefer to work very positively with our communities, and I greatly appreciate and am greatly honoured by the role that I play on behalf of multiculturalism in New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not open a newspaper while you are doing that?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I prefer not to.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who is advising you on these matters?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: My advice comes, as I have said, by way of a very positive and proactive role that we play in supporting our cultural diversity and supporting our many cultural festivals. I am happy to go through and give you a list of those cultural festivals that I attend to every weekend.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am well aware of the many cultural festivals.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Sometimes Labor members turn up and sometimes they do not.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I do not need you to list those and use my limited time. I am going to ask you about the time in May 2018, when hand-written anti-Asian signs were plastered around the city of Ryde. Did you condemn those?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Yes, I did, via social media. I remember that because I think I supported that by way of the condemnation that was made by the very good member for Ryde and Minister Victor Dominello.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, will you now take the opportunity to condemn some of the other high profile individuals who have come here promoting white supremacist views?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Yes. I am more than happy to do that, but I might also say that I also find it offensive when people like Shaoquett Moselmane refuse entry to a Labor multicultural event on behalf of a member of the Jewish member.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am not here to be lectured by you. I will not be lectured by you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: These are things that seek to divide our community.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You spent last year's budget estimates running around failing to condemn a single individual. Have you now advocated to the Liberal Party that you should not have a preference deal with One Nation?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: You will have to take that up with the Liberal Party. It makes decisions—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are the Minister for Multiculturalism; why don't you take it up with your own party?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: What I will continue to do, as I have said before, is very proudly support our cultural diversity which, unfortunately, I am not seeing supported by the Labor Party.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How are you supporting cultural diversity if you are not trying to—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: By condemning the comments by the Labor member Luke Foley, when he talked about "white flight". That is one thing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So what you are saying is that you wait until there is a political opportunity to act. There are high profile individuals who are coming to Sydney and promoting their extremist views, and you will not get up and condemn them until there is a political opportunity for you.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: When I see leaders in New South Wales in an area that I directly represent making such abhorrent, appalling and racist comments as "white flight" and refusing entry to Jewish members of the community to Labor multicultural events.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am going to stop you there, because that is not the case.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am happy to call that out.

The CHAIR: Minister, I would like to jump in and re-ask this question, just to make it abundantly clear. I thought I heard your answer. Did I hear you correctly when you said that you were not aware of the visit to Australia—and particularly to Sydney—of Mr Milo Yiannopoulos last year?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I may have seen that written in the newspaper somewhere, but I did not take any further notice, no.

The CHAIR: So you think that you read something in the paper last year about him.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I think I may have seen something mentioned about his visit.

The CHAIR: Did you ask for any briefing about the gentleman from any of your officers?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As I said before, I spend my time positively and proactively promoting the harmony across our communities, not seeking to give any oxygen whatsoever to the people who seek to divide our communities.

The CHAIR: Okay. With respect to Lauren Southern, did I hear you correctly? Did you say that you were not aware that she had visited here?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I do not remember that name. I do not recall that name.

The CHAIR: So you are not aware of her visit.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: No.

The CHAIR: So you therefore did not seek any advice from any of your officers about what this individual—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: We were busy at cultural festivals and supporting the harmony of our communities.

The CHAIR: That is fine.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many research papers has Multicultural NSW commissioned in the past 12 months?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Were any research papers commissioned?

Mr HAWKEY: We work on specific initiatives so rather than research papers we work to activities related to social cohesion. For example, we issued a lot of work around our COMPACT program to create new programs.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So no research papers have been commissioned in the last 12 months?

Mr HAWKEY: We have engaged external organisations to provide us with research. For example, we have the COMPACT program where we engage an organisation to give us a comprehensive evaluation program. That organisation provided us that research to enable us to ensure that the program could be measured effectively.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So one research project?

Mr HAWKEY: That is just one that I mentioned, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Would you like to take that on notice and tell me how many research papers you have commissioned?

Mr HAWKEY: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, how many policy officers do you have employed at Multicultural NSW?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Any questions in regard to staffing for Multicultural NSW I will happily defer to the Acting CEO.

Mr HAWKEY: All our staff are always put in our annual report, which is published in October.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, how many activities other than events are undertaken by Multicultural NSW?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If you were going to define that by the amount of support that we give to cultural festivals, the amount of support that we provide to the Harmony Dinner, to our multicultural media and marketing awards, it would run into the hundreds. I am happy to give you a very, very detailed appraisal, but I think that is publicly available anyway.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think you misunderstood the question, Minister. My question was activities other than events.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Activities other than events?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You seem a little bit confused.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: What type of activities?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Any kind of engagement on policy. Have you put forward any Cabinet minutes of multiculturalism that do not involve events?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I do not think so.

Mr HAWKEY: We have the COMPACT program, which is the community partnership program, working with other partners in government.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Well, that is true.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am happy for you to take that one on notice.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Yes, we might take that one on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let us come back to this question about these high-profile visitors. Minister, you are saying that you never received any advice or contacted Multicultural NSW and your advisers never contacted you to say these high-profile individuals were coming to Australia?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will come back to the statement that I made before. We see our role as a very positive and engaging role, supporting our cultural diversity through bringing the broader community together. I would certainly like to ensure that both Multicultural NSW, myself and my office, continue to play a positive role and do not in one way get distracted by some people who would seek to divide our communities. That is why we are the most successful multicultural nation in the world.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am asking: Did any of your advisers provide you with advice that these people were coming to Australia; that as the Minister for Multiculturalism you should be aware of it, you should be aware of their views and condemning them? Did any of your advisers, did Multicultural NSW or anyone come to you, because clearly you are not opening the newspaper to see it?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will take it on notice and check for you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Thank you, Minister. You have a chief of staff, two senior advisers, a media adviser, a private secretary and an assistant adviser, and according to the Department of Premier and Cabinet the total cost of you and your office is around \$1.48 million annually. That is right, is it not?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I believe if you have been given that information—I think that includes the office, vehicles and staff—it sounds like it may be correct if it has come from the Office of Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Given that you will not take responsibility for the deaths of two people with disabilities, despite the Ombudsman finding the Government responsible—you no longer have a department because you have privatised all of the State's disability services—you do not believe you have any role in fixing the current crisis in the disability sector, you have failed to give parents of the Summer Hill centre any comfort that their children will survive the privatisation of their service, and you are happy to strongly advocate for

someone you claim to not even know to get three water licences, but you have not advocated for people with disability who actually need your help. Minister, why do you still have a job? Are you not really the Minister for no Disability Services?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Oh, gee, well, I am very, very, busy for a Minister that has no responsibilities. But can I say to you—

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I am pleased you have acknowledged that you have no formal responsibilities.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I take the greatest privilege in being the Minister for Disability Services in New South Wales who was able to complete the scheme agreement and transition to a full NDIS. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that has tidied up the appalling mess that was left to us by the previous Labor Government whereby we now have no debt and through that conscientious and good economic management we have been able to provide \$3.2 billion to the NDIS each and every year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I will stop you there and ask you: How many full-time disability services employees do you have responsibility for?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will take that on notice.

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: Chair, the Minister is trying to answer one member's question and another member is interjecting.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I am happy for that to take place.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am interested in how many full-time equivalent disability services employees you have responsibility for, how many you had as at 1 July 2017, how many you had as at 31 December 2017 and how many you had as at 5 September 2018 and what number you expect that to be in a year's time.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: We will take all of that on notice and provide you with some detailed information.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You do not know?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not know how many disability services employees you have here today?

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: He said he would take it on notice.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You do not even know that.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If you want some very, very detailed advice, we are more than happy to provide that to you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: That is why we call you with your entourage.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Which will clearly not be coming from you.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: You do not even know that.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Minister, I come back to advocacy services because, as you know, it is a really important issue in the community, as I have outlined. I know you are very well aware of the very important campaign, Stand By Me. You mentioned in one of your answers that some of the advocacy services will be part of the NDIS, but I think we have ascertained that many of the advocacy services will not be part of the NDIS, such as advocating for people with disability who are having issues in the community and need someone to help them navigate those issues, advocate on their behalf and look after their interests. If the Government is not prepared to fund advocacy services going forward after 2020, how does the Government see that it is able to maintain its commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Disability Inclusion Act and the New South Wales community services Act, which all point to the importance of people having access to advocacy—someone who can stand with them and help them navigate the issues that come up every day for people with disabilities that is not going to be covered by the NDIS?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I thank the honourable member for the question. Just coming back to the part of the question regarding the UN Rights of Persons with Disabilities, I do not think anybody has fulfilled their obligations better than what this New South Wales Government has done on behalf of people with disability. We

were the first State to sign up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme in 2012. We were the very first State to reach full transition in 2018. We are now seeing almost 100,000 people accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme, some \$3.2 billion that is committed each and every year from the New South Wales Government to that scheme, which is being matched by the Federal Government. It is worthwhile noting at this point in time that since the introduction of the NDIS, the benefits flowing to people with disability in New South Wales under the NDIS have now reached \$4 billion and growing. That is seeing a significant investment on behalf of people with disability from both the State and Federal governments.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Do you acknowledge the concern in the community for the imminent loss of advocacy services if you are not able to commit to funding past 2020?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I will answer that question this way: No, I do not see the concern in the community for the loss of advocacy services. The community is not stating to me that there is a loss of advocacy services.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Minister, you have just been through a very well organised—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: You mentioned the community; you just mentioned the broader community.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Well, I am sorry. I can tell you that the community is very concerned. The Stand By Me campaign has been very successful and has had incredible support from communities. I know from organisations on the North Coast such as DAISI, which has been on the front line for nearly 30 years, that the community is very concerned about the possibility that they could lose that service.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As we said before, through our strong financial management we were able to fund advocacy services for the next two years to the tune of \$26 million in total.

Ms DAWN WALKER: What is going to happen after 2020? That is what people need to know now.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have answered this question many times this morning. The Commonwealth Government now has responsibility under the National Disability Insurance Agency for those people eligible for the NDIS. The Commonwealth Government currently has in place \$60 million over two years under the National Disability Advocacy Program. The Commonwealth Government also has in place \$130 million through information linkages and capacity building on behalf of people with disability.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Are you confident that those services are going to replicate the disability advocacy services that people have had in their communities for decades? Are you confident that every single service that disability advocacy services currently provide will be replicated by those other funding pools?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am confident that there is an extraordinary increase in the funding that is now applicable to those types of services. I also come back to the point—and this is important—that if the family of a person with disability can point to a service that is absolutely vital to them having the best possible quality of life and if that person is an advocate providing a service that particular service can be adapted into their NDIS plan. I would suggest to you that with that, with the Commonwealth Government, with the \$26 million we have matched and with the Ability Linkers who are out there with another \$40 million a year providing wonderful services to all people with disability in New South Wales I think we have got all bases covered. Am I absolutely confident and can I guarantee it? I do not think anyone could do that. At this point in time we have put the processes in place because we have our financials intact in New South Wales. We will continue to review those particular processes.

Ms DAWN WALKER: The services might be there but we are looking down the barrel of losing someone to advocate and help people to access those services.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If the services are there what are they advocating for?

Ms DAWN WALKER: You know issues occur. People with disability can come up against issues when they are trying to negotiate the best option for them.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If that is so important—

Ms DAWN WALKER: They need someone by their side, and that is what disability advocacy services have provided for decades. You are now saying—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am not saying—

Ms DAWN WALKER: —that you are not going to continue funding those.

The CHAIR: Allow the Minister to answer the question.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As I have quite succinctly pointed out, there are supported services in place and there is significant funding. The money for services is four and five times the amount that was ever provided under the New South Wales Government. But I say again, if there is an important person in the life of a person with disability who they believe plays a significant role and provides the supports that they need, those particular supports and services can be adapted within their plan. It cannot be any simpler than that.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Yes, it can be. It can be that they can go to an organisation that they trust and that has provided a service in their community for decades and they can be helped to navigate the best possible outcome for themselves on a whole range of issues that can occur. That is a much better system.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Many of those advocacy organisations now receive Commonwealth funding, they currently receive State funding and they have the ability for their services to be adapted into a plan—all bases covered.

Ms DAWN WALKER: They are telling us that they are looking down the barrel of having to close.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Nothing could be further from the truth.

Ms DAWN WALKER: Those funding pools are obviously not enough to keep those services going.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I might come back to the \$6 million with which we funded advocacy services from 2012 to 2018 to help get them prepared for the change to the NDIS. I think this Government has gone above and beyond in its support for all disability services. As I say, I think we have got all bases covered at the moment. Do we rest on our laurels in this New South Wales Government? We certainly do not. We look to the future and we will review all matters. Whether they are recommendations made by the Ombudsman about preventable deaths or about disability supports and services for all people across New South Wales, we will always have an open-door policy.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How does your department ensure that new immigrants to New South Wales have adequate information, training and tools to recognise slavery, trafficking and labour exploitation?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am going to refer that. I thought you were going to ask me about general supports for migrants and refugees but you have gone into a specific area that I cannot answer. If we do not have it, I will take it on notice and get an answer for you.

Mr HAWKEY: We certainly work closely with the Commonwealth as all decisions about individual refugees are made at a Federal level and then through the refugee resettlement program and then Peter Shergold as our coordinator-general. But specifically around those areas we would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I cannot believe you are giving me that answer given the fact that it is a hotspot of issues. If anyone is going to be exploited they are going to be refugees and immigrants. Are you telling me that you do not know what your department is doing about that? You are trying to say the Feds have got it, so it is in their hands.

Mr HAWKEY: When the refugees have been settled into the areas we will then work closely with the programs that have been put in place by—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: But you do not know what those programs are.

Mr HAWKEY: We know that there is the \$22 million program for—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: No, you do not know what those programs are.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: We can advise you.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I know you can take it on notice. It is just shocking that you do not know, given that exploitation is a hotspot issue in immigration.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I take on board the seriousness of your question, I absolutely do. In regard to that specific area—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am just surprised that it has such a low priority that you have not committed to memory at least—

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I would not necessarily say that it has a low priority but I am more than happy to take it on board and find what resources are in place at both the State and Federal levels, particularly under our coordinator-general.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am not interested in the Federal level. My jurisdiction is the people of New South Wales and those immigrants settling here.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Agreed. But taking on board at the moment the significant—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We should be leading the pack on what is happening in government.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: We have a program in place at the moment where we have shared responsibilities for refugees in the Fairfield area.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I understand all that.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is why I say it may cross over into the Federal level.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am not asking you about the Federal level. This is our responsibility, your portfolio and your department. Take those questions on notice, if you can. I would be interested to see what we are doing to assist people to not fall into those situations. The Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion, known as the SMI, measures the concept of social cohesion in terms of belonging, worth and participation, acceptance and rejection, and social justice equity. Overall, there has been a decline in social cohesion since 2009. Why do you think there has been a decline in social cohesion and what is your department doing to counteract such a decline?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I would be very sad if there is a decline in social cohesion.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I suggest you read the Scanlon-Monash index.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: If that is the case I must say that it is very disappointing. There is one thing that I really commend the people of this State for at every opportunity. Many people around this room would have heard me say that one of our greatest strengths is the fact that we are the most cohesive nation on earth whilst being the most culturally diverse. We have a program in place known as COMPACT, which is an abbreviated term for the community, in partnership, taking action. We deal primarily with 30 partners in that program. It may be with Father Chris Riley's Youth Off the Streets, the police citizens youth clubs, the National Rugby League, the Australian Football League, Sydney Youth Connect or many other partners. We have engaged with 20,000 young people over the past two years alone that we see as being at risk of jeopardising our social cohesion.

We also support cultural festivals, as I have said before. I will attend a cultural festival where there may well be 10,000 to 40,000 people—especially when you get over to Mayor Carbone's area of Fairfield. Some 50,000 people may attend the Vietnamese Tet Festival over a weekend. Several Eid festivals and the Moon Festival take place in that particular area. There are many festivals. I think we work to bring the broader community together to break down any religious and cultural barriers that may be there. I am disappointed if there has been a breakdown in social cohesion. I am not necessarily seeing that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I normally ask a question about young people with a disability who are living in nursing homes. Mr Longley responded on your behalf stating that the Government had a specialist disability accommodation funding stream with the NDIS specifically targeted at young disabled persons. Is this still the case? How many people with a disability remain in inappropriate aged care nursing homes? How much funding has been allocated to specialist accommodation and how many young disabled persons are housed in the NDIS specialised accommodation?

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Currently there are 2,200 young people residing in residential aged care. The numbers are still too high. The pleasing aspect of that is that it is improving by virtue of the NDIS, which is now providing significant funding for supported disability accommodation and accommodation in general across the board. That is growing as we speak, which is good. With regard to specific details about other accommodations, I defer to the Secretary.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: For some further detail, the National Disability Insurance Agency's own data shows that of the people under the age of 65 inappropriately accommodated, 65 per cent of them are aged between 55 to 65 years old. But 4 per cent are under 44 and, quite disturbingly, 3 NDIS participants in those settings are under the age of 24. The point the NDIA makes is that the actuarial assessment is that there will be approximately 29,000 people nationally who need supported accommodation, but its assessment of the availability of places for supported accommodation nationally is around 15,700. The ration system the NDIS is replacing leaves us with a position where only 56 per cent of the needed supported accommodation places are available. The NDIA concedes that the framework to deliver the supported disability accommodation prices and support took quite a while to get up and running. It is in place now and we know it is working. Hopefully we will now

begin to see a rapid and substantial increase in the supply of supported disability accommodation, which will make it possible for the people who should not be in aged care to move.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Hopefully next year I can be here and ask that same question again. We will see how we go after March.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: To add to that, we are seeing a 5 to 6 per cent increase in available accommodation at this point in time.

Mr COUTTS-TROTTER: Yes, we are.

The CHAIR: Thank you all for coming along this morning and for making yourselves available for this hearing.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Mr Chair, I would like to make a concluding remark with regard to our interactions earlier. I apologise for any offence; it certainly was not my intention. Under the circumstances of that very serious report, you will agree that the question did require a detailed answer. But I certainly did not infer any disrespect to you as the Chair.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that very much, Minister. Thank you. The Committee has resolved that answers to questions taken on notice are to be returned within 21 days. There is a small number of questions and the secretariat will liaise with your office. There may be some further questions that arise after Committee members read the transcript of today's proceedings. The secretariat will be in contact with you once that has been assembled. Once again, thank you very much for coming along.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.