

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 5 - LEGAL AFFAIRS

Friday, 5 November 2021

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SPORT, MULTICULTURALISM, SENIORS AND VETERANS

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The Committee met at 14:00

MEMBERS

The Hon. Robert Borsak (Chair)

The Hon. Lou Amato

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Trevor Khan

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones

The Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA VIDEOLINK

Ms Abigail Boyd

PRESENT

The Hon. Natalie Ward, *Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans*

* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another

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 2021-2022. Before I commence I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present. I welcome Minister Natalie Ward and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans. Before we commence I would like to make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. Today's proceedings are being broadcast live from the Parliament's website and a transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings.

All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that witnesses could only answer if they had more time or with 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. If witnesses wish to hand up documents they should do so through the Committee staff. 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.

With reference to the audibility of the hearing today, we have witnesses in person and via videoconference. I ask Committee members to clearly identify who questions are directed to and I ask everyone appearing remotely to please state their name when they begin speaking. Could everyone please mute their microphones when they are not speaking. Finally, could everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister Ward, 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. I also remind Ms Catherine D'Elia, Acting Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, that you do not need to be sworn as you have been sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing before this Committee.

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JOSEPH LA POSTA, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined

KAREN JONES, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Sport, affirmed and examined

CAROLINE MACKANESS, Director, Office of Veterans Affairs, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

CATHERINE D'ELIA, Acting Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, before the Committee via videoconference, on former oath

SIMON DRAPER, Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

KERRIE MATHER, Chief Executive Officer, Venues NSW, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

TANYA SMYTH, Director, Women NSW, Seniors and Carers, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: We will stop for five minutes. We have audio issues.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Opposition questions.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and officials, for coming this afternoon. Minister, were you aware that Multicultural NSW had ceased communication or advertising public health information on COVID-19 through multicultural media for three months prior to the lockdown?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Mr Moselmane, and thank you all for coming this afternoon. I feel like I am in the fourth grade on a Saturday, so I appreciate your interest in these portfolio areas. Can I just clarify that question, Mr Moselmane, in relation to the date that you are referring to?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Three months prior to the lockdown.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am sorry; I am not trying to argue, I am just saying which lockdown? Do you mean the first lockdown in March 2020?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The last lockdown, the June lockdown.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Delta strain, so this year?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might have to take advice on that, Mr Moselmane, but I am not sure that we do advertising, if you are referring to advertising. If you mean translation services or—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: No, it is communicating with the multilingual media and advertising public health information on COVID-19 three months prior to Delta hit and the lockdown. Why was there no advertising for three months prior to the Delta?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. I can speak to the resources we put into multicultural media, but in relation to the advertising specifically I might ask Mr La Posta, the Chief Executive of Multicultural NSW, to speak to that specifically.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr La Posta?

Mr LA POSTA: Thanks, Mr Moselmane. Through you, Minister, with regard to any purchasing of multicultural media advertising, that is a question best directed to the Department of Customer Service or Minister Dominello.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Let us not confuse it; it is not advertising, it is the communication with regard to public health information. Multicultural NSW did not put out any public health information on COVID-19 in the middle of a pandemic for three months prior to the last lockdown. Why did Multicultural NSW not have public health information in multilingual media? It is a simple question.

Mr LA POSTA: I come back to my earlier point. With regard to external promotion or a media spend in terms of an investment in the media or public health information through multicultural media, that is a matter for the Department of Customer Service. With regard to communicating to multicultural communities, if that is

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what you are talking about, through forums and communication, and I know there was a lot of conversation and conjecture between March and June—is that the term you are referring to, before the Delta outbreak?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am referring to public health information in multilingual media. Why did Multicultural NSW cease for three months—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, I might just jump in there. It is really important that we get the right answer to you, Mr Moselmane, it is an important question. I just need to clarify the date that you are talking about.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Three months prior to the Delta hit. Three months prior to the lockdown.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What date do you assert?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: June.

Mr LA POSTA: Mr Moselmane, I do not mean to be obstructive, but if you are talking about multicultural media, that is a matter for the Department of Customer Service.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Surely, Mr La Posta, your agency prepares the material and then liaises with Customer Service.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I tell you what we do, and Mr La Posta might add to that just to be clear?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I just ask the question: What did Multicultural NSW do in communicating with multicultural communities during those three months prior to the lockdown? There was no advertising of public health information for three months. So there was no communication with the multicultural communities from Multicultural NSW for those three months.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Moselmane, there a couple of things I would like to clarify so I can help as far as possible. We might have to take on notice the specifics of what you are asking about. I had the privilege of becoming Minister for this portfolio on 27 May this year and shortly thereafter we had the Delta strain of COVID arrive. Mr La Posta and I worked very closely together since that time and one of our first priorities was engagement. We recognised early on the critical role of multicultural media; in fact, we put out very quickly support to multicultural media.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You recognised later on the critical role of multicultural media—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, so much so that—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: —but three months before that there was no recognition of the critical role of multicultural media in the middle of a pandemic. I mean, the pandemic did not hit yesterday.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, quite right.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It is now almost two years. So you would have thought that Multicultural NSW would be communicating with multicultural—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think we are in agreement; the role of multicultural media is critically important and from the time that I started in this role Mr La Posta and I spoke, I think, almost every day.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: There was a real failure—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, if you do not mind if I could just finish; it is an important point. When I did start we immediately ensured that we had a series of engagements with the multicultural community through community and religious leaders, non-government organisations and forums, but also specifically with media because we knew we had to get information out in language. If you are talking about prior to that time and the three months prior—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, I hear you and I agree with you, that is the point. I am asking why Multicultural NSW prior to you coming in, Minister, did not communicate with the multicultural community?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: As I was just saying—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But let me move on. Clearly I am not going to get an answer on that one.

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, that is not true, and it is very important I answer that, if I may.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: No, I want to move on. I would like to move on.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is very important that I answer that, Mr Moselmane, because I was not the Minister prior to that time, so it is very important that we are clear about my evidence to this Committee. I was not the Minister during the time so I am able to answer what I am responsible for. But I would say that any advertising during that prior time is clearly within the remit of Minister Dominello and Customer Service and I am happy to take that to him.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So Multicultural NSW has nothing to do with it.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am happy to take that to him in relation to what was done prior to my time.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: During the lockdown, Minister Hazzard tried to blame the people of western Sydney, people with a non-English-speaking background, for the spread of the coronavirus. I quote what he said: "There are other communities and people from other backgrounds who don't seem to think that it is necessary to comply with the law and don't really give great consideration to what they do in terms of its impact on the rest of the community." The reason why I asked the previous question is that in the light of these comments, why did Multicultural NSW choose not to communicate through multi-language media in the previous three months so multicultural communities could be better prepared for health orders? The failure of Multicultural NSW communicating for the previous three months prior to the lockdown meant that multicultural communities were not aware of the health orders, were not aware of various issues, and yet the Government blames multicultural communities for their failure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: A couple of points, Mr Moselmane. I think it is not accurate to surmise in the way that you have the role of Multicultural NSW. I would say it is of critical importance to those communities. I think you are referring to the April to June period—you said the three months prior to June—so if you are referring to April to June I am not sure that we were in lockdown during that time. As soon as we were faced with the Delta virus the health messages were communicated immediately.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, what did you do when—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The other general health messages are always available on Multicultural NSW. There were no health orders at the time you are referring to.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you, Minister. What did you do when the health Minister, Brad Hazzard, accused migrant communities of being responsible for spreading coronavirus in western Sydney?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I do not accept that that is what he said; nonetheless, I have been—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: He said people of other background. It was clear he was blaming people of other background for the spread of coronavirus in western Sydney.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: What I would say, Mr Moselmane, is that the COVID virus, in fact the Delta strain of the COVID virus, does not see ethnicity, it does not see postcode, it does not see—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But the Government did. It used—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Point of order: The Minister is trying to answer a question that has been put by Mr Moselmane and I ask that the interjections from him cease so that the Minister can answer the question.

The CHAIR: Interjections are disorderly. Please proceed.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If I might just clarify, Chair. Mr Moselmane, I think we are in furious agreement about the importance of Multicultural NSW and I think—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But I have moved off that. I am talking about the Minister's statement. I moved off that. We are in critical agreement, I agree. I am now asking questions about the Minister's statement blaming migrants of other backgrounds for the spread of coronavirus in western Sydney. What was your response to the Minister and what did you do about it?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And I am attempting to provide you with a response, Mr Moselmane, if I may. It is of critical importance, which is why I was delighted to have been asked to join the ministry in this role. What I would say is that we were communicating daily with Multicultural NSW communities through peak

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bodies, through religious leaders, community leaders, non-government organisations, and our engagement record shows that very clearly.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Did you put out a statement, a press release remedying that statement from Minister Hazzard, saying you do not support what he said?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have put on the record that I do not necessarily agree with your contextualisation of what he said; nonetheless, that is a question for him. What I can talk to this Committee about is what I did, and what I did was advocate very strongly and work very closely with NSW Health and police throughout the Delta strain. And it is important to know that this Government has allocated a record amount of funding to multicultural communities throughout the Delta pandemic—\$54.7 million says that we recognise the importance of the—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I will come to that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We are here for budget estimates; it is a very important number—it is record funding.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, I will come to that, Minister. You know how our times are limited. I will come to that question. By the time Minister Hazzard made those unfortunate statements in August 2021, there had been 26 versions of the main public health orders in only 45 days—that is, a new version on average every 42 hours. How do you expect multicultural citizens who have limited English to comply with such rapidly changing orders when they have been left without language-specific public health information for three months?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, this is very important and I thank you for your interest in the area because we know at the time we had to partner with communities to ensure we got information out to them in language in every channel and every corner of the community that we could. We did that by partnering with religious and community leaders directly so that they could speak to their communities and also so that they could provide us with the critical feedback that we needed to understand what communities needed on the ground. I thank them for their partnership because we spoke daily one-on-one through direct phone calls between Mr La Posta and I and community and religious leaders, and the Premier at the time also made direct phone calls. We held more than 60 forums with non-government organisations, community and religious leaders—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But you failed, Minister, to use the multicultural media to communicate with multicultural communities for three months.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I do not think that over 60 forums and individual engagements with more than 4,500 people is a failure, Mr Moselmane. I cannot agree with you.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: No, I am talking about the use of multicultural media. I will come to the other stuff later on.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I talk to you about media then?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: No, I want to move on now. You clearly had no idea initially, as you indicated. Western Sydney residents say, according to *The Guardian*, that they are being used as a "scapegoat" and "unfairly branded". The former Premier herself had to apologise for, in one respect, using them as scapegoats. Do you not think that would have incited or at least created unfair criticism against migrant communities across the State?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Moselmane, I think it is very important to understand just how much was done during this time. We partnered with SBS and put \$4 million of funding into the SBS to communicate to our communities. The health information updated daily. The 11 o'clock press conference was translated live in 10 languages—a first for Australia—recognising the importance for those communities, and—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But we just hear earlier that—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Wait a minute, let her answer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is a very important question and I thank you for your interest in it. I would just like to be very clear so the Committee has that information to hand. We also had regular weekly multicultural press briefings at which Dr Jan Fizzell and I—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am interested in those three months. There was a three-month gap of no communication whatsoever with multicultural communities.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That is not correct.

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The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It is correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is not correct, Mr Moselmane, with respect.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order: The member is arguing with the Minister as opposed to allowing her to answer. I ask that the member show at least a modicum of courtesy and allow the Minister to complete her answer before asking the next question.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Moselmane, I might hand to Mr La Posta to give some specifics on the engagement and the advertising because it is important that we should provide that clarity to the Committee.

Mr LA POSTA: Mr Moselmane, I think the first point is our multicultural communities have been extraordinary in terms of how they have tackled COVID since January and February. We had this conversation last year as we watched it spread across through Iran and Italy and then ultimately to Australia in March. We had interpreters at the airport. You know how strong our multicultural communities have been and you know how effective they were, particularly community and religious leaders. In March of this year there was still advertising, and I can give you the specifics on that and take it on notice, but to say that this agency did not engage with multicultural communities between March and June is factually incorrect and I am happy to give you the specifics in terms of any forums that we had because I know personally how invested I was in supporting our sub-continent and South Asian communities as the Delta wave ripped through India. So, to be honest, I do not think it is fair to say that this agency and this Government did not communicate with multicultural communities between March and June.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you.

Mr LA POSTA: And I am happy to give you the specifics of that on notice.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you, Mr La Posta. Mr La Posta or Minister, Dr Sukhmani Guarana, Western Sydney University senior research fellow specialising in migration diversity said, "Instead of jumping on the bandwagon of extra surveillance they should have provided more multilingual services, consulted more closely with community members." Do you not agree with the doctor in that regard? This is a doctor, a specialist, in this area; she clearly identifies that there was a failure in multilingual services during the last coronavirus outbreak.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I might have a look at that, if we may. I am not familiar with that, Mr Moselmane. If we could just see that quote and Mr La Posta might be able to provide an answer to you on that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Take it from me that that is the case. I am quoting exactly what she is saying.

Mr LA POSTA: When was it, Mr Moselmane?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am asking the questions.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I just do not know the provenance; I would like to understand—

Mr LA POSTA: The context is helpful.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: —so I can provide you with a thorough answer. While Mr La Posta is having a look at that I might assist by indicating that our online engagement forums where we engage directly with all of those groups were then supported by the agency holding one-on-one qualitative interviews, between half an hour and an hour regularly, to understand what the community needed and get that feedback, Mr Moselmane. Those interviews provided the agency and ultimately me with direct feedback and a contextualised insight into the community experiences of the pandemic. That was ongoing. That was literally from the weekend after I was sworn in and Mr La Posta and I worked tirelessly to make sure that we were getting into those communities—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, to reinforce—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Let her finish.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I have heard what she said.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I will otherwise take a formal point of order.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, to reinforce the point that there was a failure in communication, members of the Opposition went on social media and spoke in their own languages in order to

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communicate with the community because Multicultural NSW, your department, failed to communicate with them on those very important issues.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I do not accept that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: That is why they had to take it upon themselves to address that issue.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Moselmane, the evidence just simply does not support that assertion. I appreciate members helping to spread the message. We had sporting heroes that spread the message and a number of community and religious leaders who spread the message. But the facts are that we had language support and COVID-19 translations in 61 languages, 2,068 total assignments. The numbers speak for themselves about how much work was done. We had 680 community sentiment interviews one-on-one during that time.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Well, Minister, why then—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That is not doing nothing.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: There is only two minutes left of my 20 minutes.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I do not care.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Exactly, that is right, the Government does not care.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: The Minister is answering the question and she is entitled—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The Government does not care.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I just do not know, Mr Moselmane, how you can see those numbers and make the assertion that you are making. I appreciate that—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: These are based on statements from people.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Point of order—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: She has finished.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: She has not finished. Let her answer the question without arguing with her.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Moselmane, I would just say that Multicultural NSW has led an intensive campaign of community and stakeholder engagement. It was our number one priority and in partnership with NSW Health, with the NSW Police Force, with other agencies they were part of a specific sub-group of Cabinet which dealt with the Delta outbreak and our response to that. I invite Mr La Posta to speak specifically to that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Before you invite him, can I ask you the final question before my time ends: Why then did councillors, such as Councillor Kun Huang from Cumberland, take it upon themselves to organise community groups to speak in various languages—Chinese and others—to address the lack of communication? He said in one of the interviews that he has done with *The Guardian* that he was disappointed that the Government "had not worked out a better communication strategy and this was putting vulnerable people at risk". Members of the community are clearly speaking out that there was a failure in communication from Multicultural NSW during this very critical period.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr Moselmane, I will hand to Mr La Posta, but it is important to understand that since the Delta outbreak a total of \$13.1 million of funding for communications initiatives was secured for multicultural communities. It included emergency communications, multicultural media grants, translations and advertising for vulnerable communities, and \$6 million of this funding was used for targeted multicultural media advertising and translations. I do not think that is nothing. But Mr La Posta might like to speak to that.

Mr LA POSTA: Certainly, Minister, through you: Mr Moselmane, I think there are a couple of things here. Just because they are assertions does not make them accurate assertions, is the first thing. What I will go on the record and say is—and I know this because I come from a non-English-speaking background—that it does take a little bit longer, in terms of government information for non-English-speaking backgrounds, to embed. Mr Moselmane, if I take you back to before 16 June this year, we had a very fatigued and tired community that

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had done an incredible job of navigating COVID up until that point and since then, to be frank, has done an incredible job. I came to this—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The community has, yes.

Mr LA POSTA: Mr Moselmane, I came to this Committee and said that if there was anywhere that COVID could go wrong it is in a State like New South Wales, which has 307 different ancestries, 220 different languages and 146 different religions. This State and every member of this State should be incredibly proud of how we have managed this pandemic in spite of such challenging times, in spite of some of those barriers to language and, yes, I acknowledge that videos and those sorts of things are very, very helpful ways to communicate to people and that it is all well and good to translate a document, but that does not mean that it embeds within the communities—I acknowledge that. But that is why we did one-on-one phone calls with people; that is why we saturated multicultural media outlets through traditional forms like print and radio; that is why we went on organisations like Samoan radio every Monday morning to communicate with them and support them in language to have the material they need. So I do not think it is a respectful or fair assertion to say that this agency did nothing.

It is also important to acknowledge this agency is a part of New South Wales government and that things like advertising and so forth are not the role of Multicultural NSW; whilst we play a collaborative role, they are the role of colleagues at the Department of Customer Service and we have done an incredible amount of work with them to make sure that any barriers to information have been overcome, particularly in the last few months.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, can you provide us a breakdown of the \$31 million—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Just before you go on, I think the bell went.

The CHAIR: I will be the arbiter of that. Do you want to move into the chair?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, but I notice that Ms Abigail Boyd does not quite have the capacity of—

The CHAIR: Ms Boyd has got a lot of capacity, do not worry about that. Ms Boyd, any questions?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you very much, Chair, and for that focal point on my capacity.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I did not finish answering, Abigail.

The CHAIR: That is why I cut him off.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It is lovely to see you, Minister, on the other side of the table.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is lovely to see you, Ms Boyd, albeit on a screen. Hello, thank you for joining the last of the last.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I want to ask you about the Equal Pay for Equal Play campaign which, as you know, is the campaign to meet gender equity—a condition for sporting organisations to receive State government grants funding and tenders, which would include equal prize money and equal opportunity for men and women as well as an actual strategy to increase participation, engagement and ongoing support of women and girls at all levels of competition. You will also know that the upper House recently passed a motion supporting the campaign, which was not opposed by the Government. Do you support the campaign, Minister?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Ms Boyd, and thank you for your interest in this very important area. I state at the outset that prior to being privileged to serve in this role it was pretty clear that I am a very strong supporter of women's participation in sport and a strong advocate for women in sport. So I come to this role with that very clear background. I would say that I am an advocate for women's progress in sport at every level. So my short answer is yes to your question. I was very proud to support your notice of motion and to just not object to it but to support it actively. I thank you for bringing the motion to the House; it was a very good one. It is very important that we support opportunities for women not just on the ground but across the board, through boardrooms, through our officials, our selection committees, our coaches, from just playing on the ground and winning prize money, which is also important, through to every level of participation so that we are getting actual progress across the board. But we are doing a lot in this space. I might just invite Ms Jones to comment on what we are doing in this space because I know you have been interested in it and I appreciate that question.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. What I can say particularly about the petition in relation to equal prize money is that it is certainly an issue that does have deep roots in the broader culture across the sporting landscape, and for us at the Office of Sport we want to take a really holistic approach not just to prize money but how we can actually improve participation of sport for women and girls across the full spectrum—so not just in

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relation to prize money but also looking at how we can encourage more girls to stay in sport post their teenage years; how we can encourage more female leaders in sporting organisations to not only lead organisations but also participate in boardrooms; how we can get more coaches involved in not just community sport but all the way through to the elite level and particularly at an Olympic level; and then also, of course, how we can encourage women and girls to participate in an officiating capacity on the field as well.

But it does actually come to equal prize money. I think we do need to understand that the sporting landscape is quite complex and the issue itself is quite complex as well. When you talk about equal prize money you do have to factor in other issues such as sponsorship deals, such as any sort of enterprise agreements that athletes may have already entered into, or any sort of contractual arrangements that they may have already entered into as well. So whilst at the Office of Sport, and particularly through our Her Sport Her Way strategy, which has been in place now for three years, we want to encourage equality across sport for all women and girls. Equal prize money is absolutely a factor but it is not the only factor.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. Given that you have the ability through the grants process to set a series of eligibility requirements for those grants—I hear what you are saying in relation to sponsorship and equal pay, but presumably there is more that a lot of these sporting organisations could be doing to increase gender equity in the relevant sports—what will you be doing in the grants process to try to at least encourage that behaviour from our sporting organisations?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. It is an excellent question and I appreciate your interest in it because it is something that I have made clear is a key focus for me. I am really appreciative that we have a woman who is our chief executive officer of the Office of Sport—she gets it entirely. We have invested \$162.3 million in initiatives to support women and girls in sport. So it is not just an initiative, it is not just a piece of paper and a strategy; we are putting funding behind that to ensure that those initiatives do support women and girls in sport, and that includes, among other things, our Active Kids vouchers, which are being redeemed by girls to ensure they are participating in sport at that level and assist families with the cost of living to do so.

But also I think you asked about the sporting organisations. Fifty-four million dollars has gone to 91 sporting infrastructure projects, which included a priority focus on providing female-friendly facility design, and that is an important component of ensuring that women who are participating, once we have got them involved, are actually having a good player experience on the ground. To answer your question, we are encouraging those organisations to provide female-friendly facilities and design, and involvement in that. And then we also have \$50 million in the Stronger Communities Fund for projects that enhance female sporting facilities and increase participation; and, of course, to answer your question, \$4.3 million for programs and initiatives to reduce barriers and grow participation for women and girls in sport. I can go on, but I might just ask Ms Jones to add to that specifically.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Just before you do, Ms Jones, I just wanted to narrow the question because that is all very pleasing and it is great but we can always be doing more. You do have the power to change the eligibility requirements in a way that would preclude certain organisations who are not living up to expectations from applying for grants. So will you be looking at the grants eligibility criteria in the various programs and seeing if they can be tightened up in a way that would provide a more tangible incentive for gender equity in sport?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, thank you. I have already done that. I specifically asked, or directed—I say "asked" but apparently it is "directed"—the department to amend the guidelines to ensure that they had to have a policy in place and we did encourage them to let us know about that. But Ms Jones might speak specifically to how we did that.

Ms JONES: Yes, thank you, Minister. In relation to funding that is provided to sporting organisations, the Minister has comprehensively already gone through the funding that we provide, particularly for infrastructure projects and how, over the last couple of years, in fact, we have given priority through our grant guidelines and through the objectives of those guidelines to sporting facilities particularly that encourage women's and girls' participation. But, on top of that, we also provide organisation support funding, particularly to our State sporting organisations and State sporting organisations for people with a disability. This year, in relation to that funding, the guidelines will be amended to require organisations to demonstrate that they have women-in-sport strategies in place and how they look at promoting more gender equality across their sport.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If I can just add to that, we have also amended the Centres of Excellence guidelines to specifically include that as well. I am absolutely committed, and this Government is committed, to building a stronger sport sector where women and girls do not just participate but they are valued and they are recognised and they have those equal opportunities and choices that allow them to participate. I mean, no

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disrespect to any blokes in the room, but for a long time men have enjoyed being seen as the only sort of sporting content able to be commercialised, and I think there is an enormous opportunity in commercialisation of women's sport. Watch the netball on a Saturday and you will see what I mean.

But that emphasis to date has resulted in a skewed payment scheme across the sporting sector, which I think is ripe for us to remedy. So sports broadcasters and major companies are now seeing the value of women athletes, particularly post the Olympics, and we are seeing major moves towards pay parity in that space. We will continue to invest and support and facilitate progress in the sector toward that aim.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you, Minister. Chair, I am at a disadvantage, I cannot see how much time I have, but perhaps I will leave it there for now and come back in the next round.

The CHAIR: Or you can keep going if you want.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can keep talking until the bell goes.

The CHAIR: No, you have more time if you need it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How much time do I have?

The CHAIR: Another 10 minutes if you want.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay. I want to turn then to the Active Kids vouchers. Could you, Minister, let us know what has been done to specifically help the sector with the burden of administering the Active Kids voucher program?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I am happy to. Can I ask if there is a specific aspect of it that is burdensome?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We had heard that it took a number of providers by surprise when the COVID restrictions were lifted and at the time they were lifted there was a lot of change in the rules and then they were flooded with voucher requests and there was quite a burden on the sector, is what my office is being told. I guess I am interested in whether that has come across your radar and, if so, what is being done to make that process easier.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, thank you. I would be interested to look at those specific examples and take that up, if I may. From our experience I am advised that nothing has changed in the application process or the ability to process those quickly. They are designed to be quick and easy for parents to log on and obtain through Service NSW. I have logged on and redeemed my vouchers. I have not been able to use them, like many parents, but certainly if I can do it I think pretty much anyone can. But it was clear that we had a huge uptake of the vouchers. But I might just ask Ms Jones if she has had any feedback on that.

Ms JONES: No, we have not.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could I just clarify, before you do, Ms Jones, I agree with you, for parents to apply for these vouchers is quite a straightforward process. The problem comes at how the providers themselves can then take that voucher information and apply for it with the Office of Sport.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, thank you. I might ask Ms Jones to take that.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. I would be quite interested to see some of those complaints if you have received them, simply because we have not received those through the Office of Sport. We are always interested in improving our process and particularly our customer experience when it comes to the redemption of Active Kids vouchers. What I can imagine is obviously after a period of lockdown when community sport unfortunately was not occurring, that the sports may then have received an influx of people wanting to redeem their vouchers. I think what we all need to appreciate is that community sporting organisations are often run by volunteers, they are run by mums and dads, and sometimes are not necessarily supported by the best of administrative procedures from their end. If that is the case and if there are specific sports where there are general trends and themes, then the Office of Sport is incredibly interested in working with those sports to improve the experience.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Please let us know. My door is open, I would love to hear how we can make it easier, because those volunteers are doing enough as it is running those clubs and associations and trying to keep them going and I appreciate their experience. I have been close to a grassroots club, I know how much they have to do, so if we can help to make it easier we are there to get those vouchers out the door and get kids playing.

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Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Agreed. We will be in touch. How has the Active Kids vouchers program been evaluated and on what criteria?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I know Ms Jones can speak more to this, but we do have, as you say, an evaluation criteria that is conducted by, happily named, the SPRINTER Group, and they conduct that evaluation—I think that is aptly named. But I will ask Ms Jones to speak to the specifics of how that it is done.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. That is correct. The Office of Sport entered into an arrangement with the SPRINTER Group, which is actually run out of Sydney University, so it is an independent evaluation. The first evaluation report was released earlier on this year and there have been many academic articles also published around that evaluation as well. The upshot of that evaluation was that as a result of Active Kids there has been an increase in the physical activity levels of children; it equates to approximately an extra day. So that is a significant achievement, given how many children actually participate in Active Kids, and we are very pleased to see that the Active Kids voucher is making a difference.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might just add to that, just to clarify on those, for those parents or providers who had vouchers redeemed and were not able to use them due to the lockdown, we have extended those so they can use those again. So if they have gone to the trouble of processing them they will be able to apply again to use those. We were really keen to make sure that that continued to be available and that opportunity was not lost for this year.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. Are you able to tell me whether the data relating to children who are the subject of these Active Kids vouchers is available within Service NSW for any Service NSW employee to access or are there privacy restrictions in place?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Jones might like to speak to that.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. Yes, absolutely there are strict privacy rules around the data that is retained for Active Kids. If you want specifics on that I am happy to take that on notice around what the rules are around access to the data from a privacy perspective.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be very useful. If you could let me know approximately how many employees or what class of employees would have access to that data.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just add to that, sorry, Ms Boyd, these questions are properly directed to Minister Dominello and Service NSW. We are very happy to facilitate getting the questions to him, but I just point out that he runs Service NSW and his agency is responsible for the conduct of the Service NSW app and the information contained on it. But we would be happy to take those questions to him.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you, that would be very useful—in addition to how many employees and what their position description is, or whatever, that gives them access to that data.

Ms JONES: Sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Also whether they have had Working With Children checks, that would be very useful.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The First Lap program, have you got any feedback so far on how that is increasing funding or the quality of regional pools?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, increasing the quality of regional pools?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand that a lot of the regional pools do not get direct funding—and please correct me if that is wrong. They do not get direct grants but many of them are eligible for this First Lap program, which I admit that I have not heard of previously. I was curious as to whether that had been evaluated and whether it was resulting in improvements to the standards of those regional pools.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, it is an excellent question. In relation to the First Lap program we were very keen to get that out, given that those critical years for kids learning those vital water safety skills was something that we prioritised and in fact extended to kindy kids this year and kindy kids next year because they have had that interruption to their potential to have those lessons. So that was a prioritisation of that program at this time. Ms Jones might speak more to this, but it was more about the participation rates than particular areas. I might get her to speak to that specifically.

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Ms JONES: Yes, thank you, Minister. The First Lap program is actually targeting our preschool and our kindergarten children in learn to swim lessons. It is not necessarily infrastructure based; it is more about helping families being able to afford to send their preschool-aged children and their kindergarten children in learn to swim programs.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What other funding is available for regional pools?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There is a range of funds that we have available in regional areas and the regional grants program, the Greater Sydney and regional grants program is specifically to assist with local infrastructure, and I am really pleased that we have been able to continue that. Those centres, some are obviously run with councils or by councils, but they are most welcome to apply as well. So that is the fund that is specifically for regional facilities, and that is why it is called the Regional Sport Facility Fund, to be able to deal with some of those infrastructure issues. There is also the local sports fund, but Karen Jones might like to add to that.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. Yes, there is a range of infrastructure grant programs for which local councils and sporting organisations are eligible, noting that most regional pools are actually owned by local governments or managed by local governments. The Minister is correct, we have the Regional Sport Facility Fund, which is \$50 million over two years—\$25 million on offer this year—of which those organisations could apply for swimming pool facilities. There is also announced in the budget for this year, and soon to be released, the Multi-Sport Community Facility Fund which, again, is to support infrastructure development, whether it be upgrades or new facilities. The only catch to that one is that it has to be multi-sport. But as we know with swimming pools, they are not just for lap swimming; they are also for water polo, diving, synchronised swimming—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yoga.

Ms JONES: Yes, that is right. There is a whole range of other multi-sport that could also benefit from that fund as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We are trying to make a range of funds available wherever we possibly can so that from every level, from those smaller regional facilities through to the larger multi-sport across the board, they are able to access programs at various levels depending on what kinds of upgrades they need.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Chair, those are my sports questions, so back to you.

The CHAIR: Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, I want to ask you about the status of the national accreditation scheme for sport scientists and strength and conditioning coaches. What is the status of the implementation of that scheme in New South Wales?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. That is something I may have to take on notice. I am a big fan of strength and conditioning and do not do enough of it, but I must say that I do not know the current status of that, so I will take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Jones, are you able to throw some light on that?

Ms JONES: Yes. I support the Minister's stance in that we would take that on notice. That question, I am more than happy to coordinate a response from our NSW Institute of Sport for you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you able to tell me whether the accreditation scheme applies to the NSW Institute of Sport?

Ms JONES: That is something I will also take on notice and get an answer to you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you able to tell me then on notice how many of the sport scientists employed at the NSW Institute of Sport meet the accreditation requirements of the Exercise & Sports Science Australia [ESSA] accreditation scheme? Are you also able to take on notice what the compliance arrangements are that apply at the NSW Institute of Sport in ensuring that sports scientists employed there are accredited under the ESSA scheme?

Ms JONES: Absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Given they have just sent a ton of people to the Olympics and Paralympics, I think that is a good question because it is something that they would have been focusing on.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thanks. I might move to the Grassroots Sport Fund. How many organisations out of, I think, an estimated 12,500 eligible clubs and associations accessed the 2020 round? Do you have that information at hand?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I very much hope all of them, and I hope it has been a quick and easy process for them to access it. But we might have to take the specifics of 2020 on notice, given that was before my time. I would be very interested in that as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If you are going to take that on notice, can you take on notice how many applications were made and how many were approved for the 2020?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you able to provide details of the successful applicants regarding sport and location?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, sport and location?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Location.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It was before my time, but absolutely. I will have to take that on notice and get that data.

Ms JONES: We can provide that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about the support for sport organisations? Is it correct to say that up until the recent re-announcement of the 2021 round for the Grassroots Sport Fund that the primary mechanism for providing financial support to sporting clubs was through the COVID-19 business support grants? Is that correct to say that, that was the—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, which year? Are you now still talking about—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: For 2021 now.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: So the most recent recovery package, is that what you are referring to?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The most recent recovery—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The \$25 million?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I understand that that package was only recently announced, in October.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That is correct, 23 October.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Prior to that, I wanted to clarify, was the primary mechanism that the Government was using to support sports clubs the Business Grant program that applied to small business? The generic business support grant, is it correct to say that that was the primary mechanism for providing financial support to sporting clubs?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will ask Ms Jones to speak to that specifically but, yes, sporting clubs could access those funds if they met the eligibility criteria for that fund, as with any fund, and we would encourage them to do so. We have a range, however; that would not be only forum. But I will ask Ms Jones to speak to that.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. In terms of financial support to the sport sector, particularly during the most recent lockdown, the Office of Sport not only provided advice; we also basically provided a 24-hour service to the sporting organisations where they could actually filter through any questions or concerns to us and they would get a response. In terms of financial support, during the lockdown itself, yes, the State sporting organisations could avail themselves of a range of packages that were announced by the New South Wales Government. That includes things like JobSaver, JobSaver for not-for-profits—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Could I just pick you up on that? I just want to get some clarification here. You are talking about State sporting organisations?

Ms JONES: Yes. Sorry, that is probably just my lingo.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I wanted to ask about sports clubs and local clubs.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: You mean grassroots clubs and associations.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Grassroots sport, yes.

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I understand.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The kinds of clubs that the Grassroots Sport Fund is directed at.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Which, as I understand, is not the State sporting associations.

Ms JONES: Yes. Those grassroots sport clubs report through the State sporting organisations, and the State sporting organisations—and I should also qualify by saying the State sporting organisations are for people with disability as well—they are our main stakeholder group that we liaise through to them because, as you have already quoted, there are over 12,500 grassroots sport clubs. So we use the State sporting organisations as the main conduit.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: As the mediator.

Ms JONES: That is correct.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. Those clubs and associations—and I know because I have been involved with a couple of them—are then obviously members, if they choose to be, of those State sporting organisations, and State sporting organisations for people with a disability, they feed through and the funding is annual funding to them and that trickles down as well. But there is also a range of other funding packages available including our Sport Recovery Package, the \$25 million one. There is also the Local Sports grants which are there to assist those clubs and associations with—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is right. That is the one that I mentioned before, is it not, the Grassroots Sport Fund?

Ms JONES: No, there—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No there is another one.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There is another fund, is there?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The Local Sports grants, which every area is entitled to as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, can I just clarify that? Local Sports is not COVID specific, is it? That is just a normal grant?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

Ms JONES: That is recurrent, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Then we also have, if you are talking about those, a separate Surf Club Facility Fund—so the surf clubs have that one in place as well, and then there is a range of, as we say, the Multi-Sport Facility Fund, Centres of Excellence and Greater Cities and Regional Sport Facility funds.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you. Can I draw you back to the specific question which is about the business grants. Is it correct to say that that was the mechanism that you were using to provide financial support to local clubs, not the State—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The primary mechanism for financial support? There is no other package that provided that kind of financial support to local clubs, is there?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will take that on notice, but I would say that there are a range. I am not sure I do agree with it being the only mechanism. I do not think it is fair to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I did not say "only", I said "primary".

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am sorry, primary. A range of funds are available but also it is for those clubs to apply for those support packages. So they may choose to apply for them or choose to apply for another one. It is not for us to direct what is their primary source.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Let me perhaps put another proposition to you. If you are a local sporting club that was encountering financial difficulty, what advice was being provided by the Office of Sport around financial assistance that was available?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will throw to Ms Jones on that specifically. Now that we are reopened, sporting clubs I worked very closely with to hear from them and get their direct feedback about what they wanted

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regarding recovery. The number one thing that they asked for was for us to reopen. So I was very vocal about that because opening their doors, getting their registrations in—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sure. If I could just draw you back, Minister.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, it is a financial contribution—I am trying to get to that. The financial contribution that they told us they wanted was to get participation rates back in and get their registrations in and get their gate takings again from games. In addition to that, we have the \$1,000 per club through the \$25 million and then there are a number of other things that Ms Jones might speak to around Active Kids and other aspects.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. Again, just to touch on grassroots and community clubs, most of those are actually volunteer run and volunteer based; so their employee overhead costs are absolutely minimal. The biggest expense they incur is typically through facility rentals which, again, most of those are through local government, and during the pandemic those fees were waived. In terms of Active Kids, a lot of clubs were concerned that while some families had redeemed their vouchers the clubs would then be asked to return the money, and the New South Wales Government made the decision that no, they could actually keep the redeemed Active Kids vouchers; and we did that last year during the pandemic as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you provide on notice the quantum of Active Kids support that was provided on the basis of that arrangement that you just specified in not requiring them to be returned?

Ms JONES: Absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And can you also provide on notice how many sporting clubs were able to apply for the COVID-19 business grant—how many applied and were successful in relation to—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In 2020?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In 2020, yes, that is right—no, this is for the 2021 period prior to the announcement of the latest support package.

Ms JONES: Yes, sure.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might add just in relation to the Active Kids administration that, again, is through Minister Dominello and Service NSW, but we are very happy to get that information. But I would add in relation to that, that in operating costs for grassroots clubs, during the shutdown they did not really have any operating costs because they were shut. So for that reason there was really just rent, which was waived, and then the \$1,000 injection. So there was not a lot of expenditure being incurred.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Why did you wait until after the reopening to announce a financial support package?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am not sure there was any science to it other than we worked closely in partnership with the community sporting sector and I specifically worked with 15 of the peak bodies to understand from them what they needed and what they wanted—and that was to reopen—and it was part of the broader economic—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Should not the financial support have preceded the reopening though, Minister?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I beg your pardon, I am sorry?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Should not the financial support have preceded the reopening—the return of community sport?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, not according to the sector. What they said to us was they wanted reopening first, as I said earlier, because they wanted the registrations to come through. They wanted certainty around what is left of the season—they obviously lost the winter season and what is left of the summer season they were very keen to kick-off, if I can use that analogy. Things like gate takings are very important on game day, merchandise, being able to get people back on the ground, and those registration fees are really important components of grassroots clubs, as I am sure you are aware. So what they said to me directly in our ongoing engagement was they needed to be able to reopen first for training and then for competition, and we were very active with the Minister for Health to try to push for that to happen as quickly as possible. And then they said that their recovery package is something they would need once they reopened, and the \$1,000 per club cash injection was aimed to do exactly that; and it was also part of the greater recovery package that we put in place. But Ms Jones might want to add something to that.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Actually I have got another question. I have limited time, of course. Can I ask about the return? In the preparatory work for the reopening road map, did the Office of Sport make representations to Health to seek the return of community sport to be reopened at 70 per cent vaccination rate?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That is an excellent question and the answer is emphatically yes.

Ms JONES: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We worked very closely with the organisation. It was something that we were not prepared to let Health kick into the long grass, and that we were very much going to tackle Israel Folau head-on. So we were very keen to get out there. I am amazed that the health Minister continued to take my calls, but we were very active on working with them because we know as they emerged out of the last lockdown that these clubs and associations are very good at managing COVID-safe plans; they did so last time as they emerged and we worked very closely with them. In fact, I have a copy of the letter here where we put together a very clear plan about how we can work together. They have put that to Health and Health agreed.

So that was something we worked very closely with the sector on. I thank those 15 peak bodies who worked so closely with me and all of the State sporting organisations who gave us that feedback about the reopening, as you rightly identify, in relation to training and then through to competition, because we knew that we could not let much more of the season go on without letting those organisations reopen. So part of that plan was reassuring them, knowing that they know their registrants really well, they know their players incredibly well, and you give any of those volunteers a high-vis vest and they are pretty damn good at enforcing a COVID safety plan for the people that they love and adore in their playing community.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thanks, Minister. Can I move on to another question? There seems to be a disparity between the approach to the reopening of gym and dance classes and the standards that apply to nightclubs where there is dancing. Gym and dance classes are still subject to the 20 people limit. What advocacy have you undertaken to remove this irregularity or this inconsistency in the approach that has been taken to the health orders?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. Again, those decisions are made by NSW Health on health advice. Certainly, while I am very keen, and I think the Premier is very keen, to see gyms reopened—I know my husband is as well—they were matters for the health officials to make those decisions because I think they presented—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: My question was about the advocacy that you have undertaken. Have you written to Health about this issue?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, nightclubs—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have you raised it with the health Minister?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Nightclubs are not within my portfolio—as much as I would love them to be.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, but gyms, and presumably dance classes, do fall within your portfolio responsibility. You are supposed to be an advocate for the industry in government. Have you been advocating to the Minister about eliminating this inconsistency?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have not advocated for nightclubs, no, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I turn to another issue? I understand that Parramatta Park currently falls within your remit. Is that correct?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Parramatta Park? What aspect of it? The ownership of it or the conduct of it or the management of it?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The management of Parramatta Park currently. I know that that is obviously subject to some—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No. I am advised that that is Parklands NSW.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Parramatta Park Reserve, Minister for Sport under the admin orders Crown Land Management Act insofar as it relates to the Crown land known as Parramatta Park. It is within your remit, is it not?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will hand to Ms Jones. She has the specifics on this.

Ms JONES: I would actually like the context of your question. If it relates—

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I was going to ask about Wisteria Gardens, which is currently part of the old Cumberland Hospital site. There was an undertaking, as I understand it, in 2017 that it be transferred to the management of the Parramatta Park Trust. I wanted to know what the status of those discussions are.

Ms JONES: The Parramatta Park Trust is something that comes under Greater Sydney Parklands NSW, which is administered by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So what is the extent of the Minister's responsibility in Parramatta Park?

Ms JONES: It is Western Sydney Stadium.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Just the stadium. Is that the only element that you control?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is part of Venues. On the creation of Venues NSW the stadium entities came under the one body and that aspect, the stadium aspect, falls within our remit, or Venues NSW remit, under us.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I expect that that is probably outside your remit then because it does not—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The transfer, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The transfer, okay, that is fine.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But we would be happy to take a question to Minister Stokes if—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is all right. We will put it on notice to the relevant Minister. Can I ask about the application of the National Redress Scheme to sporting organisations? What approach is the New South Wales Government taking to encourage State sporting organisations to sign on to the National Redress Scheme?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. That is an excellent question and I appreciate your interest in it. Having practised in the area, I know the importance of it, particularly in organisations. I might hand to Ms Jones on the specifics of it and how that is being rolled out through those State sporting organisations, but I know it is.

Ms JONES: Thank you, Minister. I do want to acknowledge that there were a number of State sporting organisations in particular where they were actually identified through the National Redress Scheme, and the Office of Sport requires them to sign up to the National Redress Scheme in order to obtain any funding or any recognition.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you for the question, it is important.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I might turn to what is going to happen to the Sydney Olympic Park Qudos Bank Arena. When is that going to be returned to being able to be utilised by sporting organisations?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Around about now, is it not?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has that happened?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Again, I think that falls—understanding it is complex and it should not be, but it is—within the remit of Sydney Olympic Park Authority [SOPA], and that again falls within Minister Stokes' portfolio responsibilities under Planning. But I would very much welcome it being returned.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: All right. How much time have I got? Thirty seconds.

The CHAIR: You can keep going.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I can keep going? Do you want to ask a question while I find my—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, can I ask you questions with regard to Service NSW COVID check for seniors?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, the what? I just did not hear the last part.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Questions within the Seniors portfolio. Are you aware that many older people have reported that during COVID-19 they were unable to do their grocery shopping because the critical retail outlets they shop at do not have working scanners to read the QR code issued by Service NSW?

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I think we may have—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Maybe Ms Smyth might answer it?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, Ms Smyth is here to assist. I know that with the Senior's Card we have an enormous database which we were able to utilise during that time that you importantly refer to and identify our seniors can get that information out to them. It is part of our engagement and communication with them. I think it was important that we did so. Before I hand over to Ms Smyth I will just say that the Service NSW app and QR codes again falls within Minister Dominello's portfolio. While we do advocate through our Senior's Card and our database, the rollout of those mechanisms at supermarkets does fall within the remit of Service NSW. I would be happy to take the question to Minister Dominello, if that assists.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Does Ms Smyth have anything to add?

Ms SMYTH: We are aware of the issue and we raised it with Service NSW. There has been a lot of promotion about the card to businesses but there is also the option for businesses to use annual reporting when the card has not scanned correctly or they were not able to scan it. They can just do that manually on an iPad that the business owner holds.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Elderly people had issues not only with the QR code but, anecdotally, some were taking photos of the QR code as opposed to scanning. Is that right?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Not just old people.

Ms SMYTH: Yes, that is right, lots of people at the commencement thought that you took a photo of the QR code rather than understanding that the camera scanned it.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Has the code card issue been fixed now by Service NSW?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We will take that to Minister Dominello, if I may, because the rollout of that certainly would be something with which we would be pleased to assist. But all of this, I would say, is within Mr Dominello's portfolio.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Just on that one, do we know the average waiting time for people to receive the card after they have requested it? Do you know how long it took for the elderly to receive the card when it was requested?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you mean from the time they applied for the card?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: They applied for it, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will hand that to Ms Smyth who might be able to assist.

Ms SMYTH: I know that they could be downloaded instantly. Lots of people had family and friends print those out for them, and give those to them, I believe. I will have to take on notice if they were mailed out and how long that took.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, thank you so much. Minister I will move to mandatory minimum building standards and seniors appropriate housing. Is that a matter for you?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I do not think so but I am happy to hear the question and help if I can. Why do you not go ahead and we will decide whether it is.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What input have you had into housing State environment planning policy with regard to seniors appropriate housing?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sure. Ms Smyth might be able to assist with that on seniors housing.

Ms SMYTH: Are you referring to the National Construction Code?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Correct, yes.

Ms SMYTH: It falls outside the Minister's portfolio but she has been made aware of the advocacy within the sector.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might assist just by saying that I have four peak bodies that I engage with regularly. They are very strong advocates for these issues. They would necessarily take those—I am very happy to assist them and also advocate—but they generally take care of that directly. Among those, I am sure that they have advocated. Ms Smyth and I engage with them regularly and we would hear about that. So that is why we are aware of it but we are not responsible for it. But we do pass on their comments about the importance of it going forward.

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The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I ask the question because National Seniors Australia put out a press release describing a big win after a national meeting of the Commonwealth, State and Territory building Ministers agreed to mandatory accessible standards.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, which is fantastic.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But not New South Wales.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We will take that on notice. What is the question?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Why not? If you were involved in discussions I need to understand why New South Wales was not part of the national construction code?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We do engage; I can assure you of that. We do that through those stakeholder bodies. We also have our own Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031—I have brought a copy of it if you would like to have a look at it—to address those problems. While I am not directly responsible for the building code, we have a way in which we talk about living well in age-friendly environments. Specifically, in the strategy we discuss those built environments to be able to support our seniors.

We are working towards increasing our housing options for seniors so that we can address that for older people. Those facilities should, of course, be age appropriate. I have an elderly mother, as many of us do, and I understand the challenges—that it also should be affordable. That is one of the challenges that we have in building. It should be accessible, of course, close to transport, education, recreation and community services so that we can provide all of those facilities around our seniors and those living well to support them to do so. So we do that through the strategy. We try to take a proactive approach to that in New South Wales and have advocated for that. We also have our Communities Plus building program which is delivering 23,000 social housing premises, 500 affordable housing, and 40,000 private dwellings over 10 years to our seniors.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, do you support adopting the new minimum accessibility standard?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I would not oppose it. I have not seen it or had the opportunity to engage but certainly that is exactly what we are doing, yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, certainly your Government has not approved it?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. I think it is really important that we are supporting our seniors. We are doing that not only through the strategy but we also have a \$1.1 billion social and affordable housing fund which has delivered over 3,400 social and affordable housing dwellings throughout New South Wales. That will be rolled out over the next four years. It is important to know that that is being worked on and 40 per cent of those dwellings will be targeted for tenants aged over 55 years. Some of us are not far from that.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will they have new minimum accessibility standards included in that 40 per cent?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I believe so, yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I move to elder abuse issues. How many calls have been taken by Ageing and Disability in New South Wales?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: He is independent. I am happy to take that on notice and get that information. He does have an annual report. I thank him for his work. My understanding, Mr Moselmane, is that—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: When you say "he" to whom are you referring?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The commissioner. I am sorry, I thought you were referring to the commission?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am referring to the Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline. Is it operated by the commissioner?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How many calls were made to the commissioner with regard to disability abuse?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I can find that number for you. Will you clarify in what period?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Sure, it is just a general question.

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If you need the number of calls I would need a period in which to provide them to you. I can give them year on year if that assists.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Within this budget year?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might take that on notice to get the accurate number for you. I would commend to you the annual report. In addition to, of course, the Legislative Council's inquiry into this area, which I commend and support, the commissioner does have details of that. He is required to report that directly so that is there. I appreciate the great work that he has done. Sadly, those numbers seem to be increasing. He and I meet and engage regularly to discuss that and how we might assist. I am appreciative that the understanding and awareness of that helpline is rising, so that people are utilising it, and reporting those incidents so they can get help.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, the latest statistics from the New South Wales Ageing and Disability Commission indicate that 77 per cent of almost 3,000 reports it received in 2020 were about people who were subject to, or at risk of, abuse, neglect and exploitation. They related to older people, most of whom were women. What is your response? What action have you taken to address that?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, that is a terrible indictment on our community—absolutely appalling. As I said, I have an older mum. That is why we put in place an Ageing and Disability Commissioner specifically. I thank Mr Fitzgerald for the work he is doing because it is very important that we have someone specifically who is monitoring this, looking at it and taking action, which he is. He is very proactive. He and I speak very regularly to ensure that those reports are then dealt with. I appreciate the work that he has done and I commend it and his report to the Committee.

The CHAIR: We will take a break for 15 minutes.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We finally have Ms Mackaness connected through the telephone.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, I want to come back to the National Redress Scheme. As I understand it, you advised the Committee that the sign up was conditioned for State sporting organisations. Will you advise what the compliance mechanism is to make sure that that has actually occurred? How does it work? How do you make sure that they have signed up and complied?

Ms JONES: We actually check it, absolutely we do.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have all funded organisations signed up?

Ms JONES: Only those that were required to do so in terms of those that were actually identified through the royal commission process. They were actually listed and named, and those ones are required to do so, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I just wanted to get some clarity on that. I ask now about the UCI Road World Championships. Will you explain what the legacy fund is, Minister?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. This is another of our very exciting projects, and thank you for your interest in it. One of the things I am very proud of is our 10 world cups in 10 years and the large worldwide events, now that we are reopened, that we are attracting to New South Wales. In our commitment to hosting the UCI Road World Championships next year in 2022 part of that is supporting our legacy program for the event which is a \$750,000 fund.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Where will it occur?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, after the 2022 UCI Road World Championships? Usually with these big events you have legacy programs after.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Where is the UCI Road World Championships happening?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In Wollongong.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In the local government area of Wollongong. Is that right?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is a long track. I will have to get details on where it starts and finishes, but it is in Wollongong.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has the track actually been announced?

Ms JONES: Not at this stage; not to my knowledge.

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think we are working with council and the Union Cycliste Internationale [UCI] is working with council on that. It might have been. I will take that on notice. The local organising committee would make those arrangements together with council. I think they are looking at that at the moment. If I may, I might just go back to your first question about the legacy program and clarify that. The Ride Nation pilot program is the legacy program supported by the pilot of AusCycling's Ride Nation in the three years leading into the event. It is an education program. A lot of them are after but, if I understand correctly, this one is beforehand. It is delivered by AusCycling through schools and other organisations to promote participation in cycling. Delivery of that program was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but that will continue to gain momentum in 2022 in the lead-up to the event. I hope that answers your question in that respect.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have there been two rounds?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am sorry, Ms Jones might want to add to that.

Ms JONES: In addition to Ride Nation there are also other legacy partnership programs which I think is perhaps your next question. There have been two rounds so far. In round one there were six successful applicants which had a share of funding. In round two there were eight successful applicants who had a share of funding as well. That legacy program, we have already had two rounds and there is still a third round to come. There is the UCI Bike City designation which is also a part of the legacy. Regions such as Bergen in Norway, a town in The Netherlands and in Yorkshire, England are actually officially named "Bike City" and Wollongong will also achieve that name.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: If I might just add, Mr D'Adam, that is a \$300,000 program over the three years to the grants. We can let you know the details of the grants that have gone out already.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have the details of the grants. I want to understand your role. I assume that the rounds were completed before your appointment as Minister?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Correct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Perhaps Ms Jones could explain to me what role the Minister's office played in the approval of the grants?

Ms JONES: I am happy to take that on notice but typically with legacy programs they are application based. Obviously for legacy programs for a cycling event we are targeting cycling organisations or cycling facilities—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You would hope so—

Ms JONES: You would hope so, particularly since it is cycling legacy that we want to achieve. They are application based. We receive those and they are assessed by a panel which has a variety of experts on them, as well as representatives from the Office of Sport, and also independent from that assessment process recommendations are made.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: To the Minister?

Ms JONES: Those recommendations are then forwarded to the Minister for consideration.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In round one, of the six grants, three were conferred on organisations in the Kiama electorate, two to other areas in the Illawarra and one to the Wollongong electorate. Was there any ministerial involvement in—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: This is not part of my portfolio at this time. I am very happy to take it on notice. It is prior to my time.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is not part of your portfolio?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is still a matter for the office which you oversee, surely, Minister.

Ms JONES: I will take that on notice as well. I do not have all the briefing notes in front of me in relation to that grant program.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There is a concern there, obviously. You would accept that there has been public debate about the disbursements of grants?

Ms JONES: What I will say is when the Office of Sport is assessing grant applications, electorates are not taken into consideration.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Politics does not play any part?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Wollongong is not a Liberal Party seat—

Ms JONES: It is your patch.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, that is the point. Kiama certainly is Liberal, for the moment.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I recognise your citizens—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The status is a bit uncertain but certainly when these grants were made—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Ryan Park would be quite happy to see—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The electorate was represented by the Liberals and they got the majority of the first round of funding. It seems to have gone to the only Liberal electorate in the Wollongong region. Do you think that is unusual?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I be absolutely clear, Mr D'Adam, that we do not—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: It is a lovely place to cycle down there past the blowhole.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am a dreadful cyclist but a very enthusiastic one.

The CHAIR: What blowhole?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: At Kiama, it is just great.

The Hon. TAYLOR MARTIN: There are two there; a small one and a big one.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: Will you let the Minister finish?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I was just trying to picture you on a bike, Mr Khan.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: You would be amazed.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In my time if there are concerns in relation to any grants, I would be very interested to hear them, Mr D'Adam. If you are referring to grants before my time I am obviously not able to comment on those. But what can I say—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You can give us an undertaking that you are investigating, can you not?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I was trying to finish my sentence, if I may? Ms Jones has thorough and robust processes in place to deal with all grants projects. We have given you an assurance today and I can underline that they are not divided by electorate in any sense. You can see that. They are sometimes divided by local government areas, for example, in the COVID crisis response. But certainly for these legacy grants they are going to the BMX Club, the Shoalhaven cycling prospectus, the City Council, the Cycle Club, the council of Kiama—not the local member—for the pumptrack, for use there, and Cycling New South Wales.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Obviously the Government is attuned to integrity issues at the moment. I ask about the processes within the Office of Sport around the assessment of business cases. Can you give us some details about what processes are applied in assessing business cases?

Ms JONES: Yes, through the Minister. The Office of Sport, when we do receive applications with business cases, we go through those businesses cases, as you would expect. We have a look at them. We have a look for project detail. We have a look at QS reports. We have a look at project delivery schedules and we weigh all of those up and then provide other recommendations for advice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you prepare a benefit cost ratio?

Ms JONES: No, we do not. That is not our role.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Who does that?

Ms JONES: The cost benefit ratio [CBR] is submitted by the applicant, and it should be in line with Treasury guidelines.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Have you approved any projects through the Office of Sport with a cost benefit ratio of less than one?

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Ms JONES: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It might assist if we had a time period just for reasonableness.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sure. Let us go back to, say, 2019.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: If you applied a CBR of one in many sporting events in country areas, you would have everything in Sydney and nothing in the bush.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Correct.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, I will continue with three questions relating to elder abuse. Since 1 July 2019—I know you were not the Minister—how many allegations of elder abuse have been reported each year to the Ageing and Disability Commission?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Mr Moselmane. This is an important issue. Given we have an Ageing and Disability Commissioner in place, I think your question is properly directed to him. I will take that on notice and direct it to him.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you. I have a follow-up question. How many successful prosecutions have been undertaken in New South Wales for elder abuse related crimes?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Again, I will take that to him. I ask for a time period again for reasonableness?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: This is from 1 July 2019.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Well before my time but, yes, I will take that to the commissioner.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I understand, Minister. It is well before your time. I refer to Multicultural NSW and to COVID-19 funding grants. Multicultural NSW COVID-19 funding to community based organisations—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is difficult to hear you. Would you please speak up?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I ask questions relating to the new COVID-19 funding grants. What is the total sum of funding from Multicultural NSW to all of those recipient groups? I am talking about community based organisations and charities.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The overall funding COVID support was \$54.7 million—record funding to the community to respond to the Delta outbreak. I might hand to Mr La Posta for the details of the breakdown on that.

Mr LA POSTA: Mr Moselmane, this has been four times that we have gone back to ERC for funding which started in June when the pandemic started to really break out. We have got a COVID response grant which supported 152 grass-root organisations. Then we provided some emergency relief and non-government organisation support to help asylum seekers—not a State government responsibility but I am very grateful for the State Government to invest and to step into this space to help those people because, as a lot of us know, they were facing a lot of destitution. I am very grateful for that investment. That supported six organisations.

And then there was some emergency relief and non-government organisation support for a broader temporary visa category—again, not the State Government's responsibility, it is a Commonwealth responsibility, but we are very grateful that the State invested \$5.5 million to support 14 non-government organisations to help in that space. It comes back to your theme earlier: it was really important that we continued to sustain and help the multicultural media agencies. A lot of them had lost significant levels of advertising revenue and those things from other sources. So critical publications like the *Greek Herald*, the *Chinese Daily* and so many of our small radio stations throughout western Sydney and all of those things, the Government stepped in to help them. I am very grateful for the Minister's leadership in that space and continued engagement. We were able to support 74 organisations.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Was that 74 media organisations?

Mr LA POSTA: Yes. Through non-government organisation partnerships, particularly in the 12 local government areas of concern, we were able to support 99 non-government organisations to help in that space with things like food relief, emergency accommodation, emergency supplies—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mental health—

Mr LA POSTA: Mental health, yes. Then we had a—

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The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr La Posta, can you take it on notice and provide a breakdown of how much was given to those 74 media outlets and the other organisations that you are referring to?

Mr LA POSTA: Yes, certainly. I will be here a while.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Not now, of course.

Mr LA POSTA: The essence is there are 636 community non-government organisations, not-for-profit organisations that have received funding since 16 June, I believe, up until this point across eight different grant programs. I am happy to give you all of that on notice.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How was the funding determined? What criteria did you use?

Mr LA POSTA: They are all different criteria. Some of it was very specific and nuanced to grant programs—so community organisations being able to apply between \$10,000 and \$30,000 to help them. A really good example is a lot of the food relief in places like Addison Road that the Minister very recently visited to be able to prepare food meals for people to be able to go out to western Sydney. Wonderful organisations like Lighthouse Community Services in Canterbury-Bankstown, some of our wonderful Sikh associations—Turbans 4 Australia's Amar Singh—and those sorts of incredible grassroots organisations that were able to sustain and continue their investment but, most importantly, their support to communities.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will add to that as it is really important. I thank the team at Multicultural NSW which worked so closely with the organisations so that we could understand directly what they needed to get that assistance out. We heard very early on that temporary visa holders and asylum seekers were particularly vulnerable. So we specifically targeted that group. As Mr La Posta pointed out, it is not actually our remit but we did it nonetheless because we heard from communities that we needed to support that quickly. We also supported grassroots community organisations because we know that they know their communities best. So this was not the type of response that was a one-size-fits-all—it was where those community organisations told us what they needed. In many cases, that was simply food hampers and to be able to get masks and personal protective equipment out to people, to be able to give information and get people to medical appointments.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So there was no specific criteria to be met?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, there is always criteria with every grant program, of course. But what we tried to do was to work with those communities quickly and directly to understand what they needed so that it was not just a blank cheque. It was to help them do what they do best. In the emergency relief we had the non-government organisations but we also worked with the councils directly and those in the former local government areas of concern. We worked with them closely and got to them as much as we could. Some of those grassroots community organisations—literally 152 of them—included Muslim Women Australia, the Hindu Council, and the Auburn Small Communities Association. In the empowering and supporting local communities group that first round provided \$30,000 to 194 organisations and the second round opened and provided for the Indian Crisis and Support Agency, Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre, the Assyrian National Council and Domestic Violence West. We were really making sure we were getting into each of those niche groups to provide targeted nuanced and tailored support to those communities.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will you provide us with a list of organisations and how much money they received? What criteria did you use to allocate those funds?

Mr LA POSTA: Through you, Minister: All of the grant criteria is on our website. We are talking about significantly different grants. In terms of what we are allowed to provide you, I am happy to take that on notice and give you whatever that information is.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I would appreciate that.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just to be clear on the criteria, Mr Moselmane, they are advertised on the Multicultural NSW website. They are very clear.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Just to be sure, was it \$50.7 million?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is \$54.7 million.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How much of that has been spent?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will have to take that on notice, but I hope all of it.

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Mr LA POSTA: Yes, it is an excellent question, Mr Moselmane. I am happy to take the specifics on notice but if you said roughly between 75 per cent to 80 per cent. I think it is really important for this group. It is one of the reasons that I was so passionate before, so I apologise, Mr Moselmane, for my passion but you know it only comes from a good place. But the pandemic is not over. Right now we have got interpreters in places like Albury. We have got some challenges in areas like Kempsey and Moree and those sorts of places. So it is critical that we can sustain this energy. It is not just because it is not in western Sydney that it is not a problem. Right now we are working with groups right on the ground to support the Congolese community in places like Albury making sure there are translators, interpreters and all the services they need. Yes, as an estimate I would say it is between 75 and 80 per cent but I will take it on notice and give you the specifics.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr La Posta makes a good point that it is ongoing. The work has not finished and that those programs are available. Literally flying out those two interpreters this week to respond to those is an ongoing task for us of which we are very mindful.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Of the 75 per cent to 80 per cent that has been spent, will you take on notice how much of it was spent in the 12 local government areas of concern?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: We will do what we can to get that response to you. There was also a specific grant for those 12 former local government areas of concern. That was also its own grant program. It might be that some of those organisations were in those local government areas. I am just flagging that we will get to you the information that we can but it might be difficult to break those down because there was that one program that targeted the specific local government areas but also some of those grassroots organisations were within them.

Mr LA POSTA: Mr Moselmane, it would be fair to say that the majority of funding went to those 12 local government areas. The reason was because that is where the majority of cases were sadly. When I asked my team for a breakdown across the local government areas it was really pleasing to see that there was a distribution across all of the 12 local government areas. I am pleased to say though that Fairfield, Liverpool, Canterbury-Bankstown were the three highest and that is because they were locked down the longest.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think it was \$13 million on the local government areas specific fund to get to them.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can you guarantee that the COVID-19 support funds will not impact future funding that would ordinarily be available through Multicultural NSW?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, could you repeat the first part of your question?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The money that has already been spent will not be taken out of the general funding that would usually go to Multicultural NSW.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I will have to take that on notice. I am not sure I can comment on future expenditure. It is not the intent, but I would have to take that on notice, given that it is all new funding.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: She is not the Treasurer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No, and it is also new funding, Mr Moselmane.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: No, but obviously as the Minister she will fight to make sure that Multicultural NSW receives funding.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am sure she will fight as hard she can but she is not the Treasurer.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I be clear though, in Multicultural NSW I think finally the rest of New South Wales realises and appreciates the importance of this agency and how hard it has worked. The 2020-21 overall budget for Multicultural NSW was in the vicinity of \$38.1 million. In 2021-22 the overall budget is \$106.5 million so you can see the very stark increase in the overall budget for Multicultural NSW which has been prioritised under this Government. That is an increase of \$68.4 million. I think those numbers speak clearly as to our intention and the great work that has been done by the agency. I thank everybody there for the incredible work that they did. I know it was a 24/7 job. Having the agency in place with those close ties to the community was incredibly important so we could get that out quickly.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: My next question relates to New South Wales police and Multicultural NSW. How closely did Multicultural NSW and New South Wales police work together on engagement with multicultural communities during the lockdown?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It was pleasing for me that I could hold a weekly multicultural media press conference and engage, in addition to the specific forums that we held, with non-government organisations,

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community leaders and religious leaders. In addition to our daily dialogue with those organisations, I was assisted by Assistant Commissioner Tony Cooke. He is responsible for the area, in addition to South Western Sydney Local Health District and Dr Jan Fizzell. We held that engagement regularly and they attended each of those forums to directly answer questions from the community.

We had a questions and answers session at each of those where they could ask live questions. Tony Cooke answered them and I was available. We held those consistently throughout the time and we have worked very closely with police physically in the area. I just want to thank their multicultural liaison officers who also went out with police on the ground to ensure that we were really engaging with the community. They were well equipped as they did the job that they do, which is fantastic. They were well equipped to go out with police on the ground and assist also.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr La Posta, I ask a question, which you may have to take on notice, relating to regional advisory councils. What role do they play in Multicultural NSW? Are they funded?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Do you mean through the board? I might ask Mr La Posta.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You have got regional New South Wales?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, I know. They have been through the board.

Mr LA POSTA: Thanks, Mr Moselmane. To be fair, I was hoping in the first half of last year, and the back half of last year to have a whole new plan together for our regional advisory councils so that I could get the Minister to announce it, but we have been reasonably busy navigating COVID. What that meant was that we maintained our existing regional advisory council network which is across the 12 different regional areas of New South Wales. Up until we made those forums virtual, we certainly paid people for their time. They are appointed officials onto those regional advisory councils. It is a mix of community leaders from those various different regions, and also the local police area commander, the local health director and all different players that can then make sure that government and the multicultural communities from those regions are connected.

The regional advisory councils, whilst they have not been physical for the past 18 months, they have been virtual. We have been seeking their counsel and advice on matters pertaining to COVID particularly, for obvious reasons, but then also any challenges around social cohesion or other issues that they may have faced. In more recent times, particularly with the very sad story in terms of what has happened in Afghanistan and a number of those Afghans now moving to New South Wales, we have relied heavily on those networks in Sydney but also in places like Newcastle, Wollongong and in the Wagga Wagga and Albury region as well.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I might just add to that, Mr Moselmane. Thank you for the question because it is a really important part of our engagement. I appreciate your recognition of and interest in it because that gives us an opportunity to engage in those communities across New South Wales on issues directly affecting them and cultural diversity in their area. We aim to enhance social cohesion and be a voice for community harmony through those groups. It is a very specific task they have and they do it very well. They build that interface harmony and the forum that they provide is critical to us to be able to understand and get that feedback on the ground. I thank Multicultural NSW because prior to COVID over the past four years it has held more than 200 regional advisory council meetings and engaged more than 250 regional advisory council members. I acknowledge and thank each of those members.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is Griffith one of those 200?

Mr LA POSTA: It is a part of the Riverina. Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Narrandera and Leeton—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The reason I ask is that Murray is my duty electorate. In any event when I go with the President of the Multicultural Council of Griffith—

Mr LA POSTA: Carmel?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, Carmel La Rocca. She complains that she has written many times to Multicultural NSW. I will read you what she said: "We have highlighted these many issues with Multicultural NSW several times. However, nothing has come of it to date." She is pretty active citizen—

Mr LA POSTA: She is, certainly.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: She has been the President of the Multicultural Council of Griffith Inc. since the 1990s. It receives very little help and Griffith has a growing multicultural community. She uses her own office as a community space. Is it not time for Multicultural NSW and the Government to address that shortage, given the growth of multicultural communities in the Riverina area?

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Mr LA POSTA: There are multicultural communities growing right across the State. I would love for every one of our communities to have an office or a designated location.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can you speak to the Minister?

Mr LA POSTA: Can I speak to the Minister? Absolutely, I think I have pestered the Minister beyond belief in the last four months, and I am not sure how she has had time to do anything other than talk to me and help with multicultural communities. I am very grateful to Ms Jones and my other colleagues, probably, for their patience. Mr Moselmane, I echo your sentiments about Carmel La Rocca. She is a wonderful advocate for that community and the Riverina community. I think that there is absolute merit to creating community hubs and physical spaces for these various different organisations to survive and ultimately thrive. I think it is important to distinguish the difference between the Ethnic Communities Council [ECC] of which, say, Wagga has an Ethnic Communities Council, because they are part of obviously the federated model through the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia [FECCA] and then the ECC New South Wales and then the local organisations and the role of our agency at Multicultural NSW.

I can assure you that I have spoken to Carmel La Rocca recently. My staff have just texted me and also assured me that they have spoken to Carmel La Rocca very recently. The Minister mentioned Jan Fizzell the other day. There was a forum only a couple of weeks ago where she was asking specific questions around the nuancing for the mobility of fruit pickers and others in the regions to be able to still continue to do their work with some challenges around isolation and access to pay, JobKeeper and JobSeeker and these things as well. I echo your sentiments; she is a very respected leader. I am also happy to take away from this meeting a focus and, potentially as soon as I can, a visit down to Griffith.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How much of the \$106 million that Multicultural NSW has will be spent on multicultural communities in regional areas?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: In what context? Over what time?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How much will be spent? Has anything been spent?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That is the annual budget for the agency.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, has anything been spent in the past six months in regional New South Wales?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. We will take that on notice and get the specifics to you. In relation to those specific concerns, I will loop back on that. None of them have been raised with me but I am very happy to deal with those specifically and to give you that assurance.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: As Mr La Posta said, there is a real growth of multicultural communities right across the State.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, and we encourage that, definitely.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: We hope that more of that money is spent there as well. Minister, this may not be in your area but on Tuesday 7 November 2021, following a parliamentary inquiry, the New South Wales Government announced that it will outlaw religious discrimination and amend the Anti-Discrimination Act by making discrimination on the grounds of religion unlawful, but it will wait until the Morrison Government introduces and passes a new religious discrimination bill before deciding to change the laws. Why the delay?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. It is an important issue and I know and appreciate your interest in it. Are you referring to Mr Lynch's anti-discrimination bill? Is that correct?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am aware that it was introduced. Obviously it is a matter for the Attorney General but, as the Minister responsible for the Multicultural NSW Act, I am very proud that for 40 years the New South Wales Parliament has recognised that the people of New South Wales are of different religious backgrounds who are free to profess, practice and maintain their own religious heritage within the context of the rule of law and a democratic framework, which is extremely important. While respecting and making provision for religious diversity, multiculturalism works only if we share a unified commitment to the common values and things that bind us together as Australians.

We have the most harmonious multicultural community and we are world leading in that respect. We can see it in this room; it is wonderful. But the proposed amendment relates to anti-discrimination laws. So far as it refers to those specifically, I will refer that to the Attorney General because his agency, Anti-Discrimination NSW,

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is responsible for that. I am aware that at the moment religion is currently not a ground for complaint under the New South Wales anti-vilification laws and it has been raised as a possible gap in our protections for faith communities.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, the reason I raise it is that not only is it of significant concern to people who have been under the hammer because their religious background has been abused; islamophobia tells you the significance of the abuse that they have suffered. This particular issue has been through an expert panel report which approved it three years ago. This is further delay. A new government might come in, may be in another six months or a year, and that will further delay the adoption of this very important amendment to the law. Why not adopt it, given its significance and across-the-board support by the Government, the Opposition and the crossbench? Why not adopt it when there is absolute support for it?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you. I will say a number of things in relation to that because it is important. Of course, we have the Anti-Discrimination Board in New South Wales and it receives and handles complaints regarding racial discrimination and vilification. Questions about complaints relating to that or to specific legislation should be referred to the Attorney General. I am happy to refer those to him but I would say that it is not within my remit. This Government introduced religion as a ground under the amendment to section 93Z of the Crimes Act—for which we were both in the Chamber—which replaced that serious racial vilification provision in the Anti-Discrimination Act and provided stronger protections, which we were all supportive of, for making it a criminal offence to publicly threaten or incite violence on the basis of religion. We are very proud of that going through. That was introduced following a concerted effort, you might recall, by the Keep NSW Safe coalition. I thank them for their extraordinary work in that space.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will you commit to speaking to the Attorney General to try to bring it forward rather than wait for the Morrison Government to adopt it, which it might never do?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: It is not my area. I am happy to speak to the Attorney General about it but you should direct your questions to him probably.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, I turn to veterans issues. Was the New South Wales Government consulted by the Commonwealth in relation to the terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You were consulted?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. In fact, Ms Mackaness might like to speak more to that because I think that was prior to my time. Certainly we were one of the leading States to sign up to it. Ms Mackaness might like to speak more to the consultation process that occurred. Certainly we led the call for that commission to happen.

Ms MACKANESS: Thank you for the question. Yes, the New South Wales Government was consulted. There was broad consultation on the terms of reference. There are a number of forums that we participate in. The Minister is part of the ministerial wellbeing taskforce. The NSW Office for Veteran's Affairs is part of the Commonwealth, State and Territory committee. We have established a whole-of-government working group. We have written to the Crown Solicitor's office to instruct them to support the New South Wales Government in any responses to the royal commission. We have been invited to participate as part of the Commonwealth Attorneys-General group that will be working together to support the royal commission. Above everything, we are very committed to working together to build on the work that the New South Wales Government has done with its Veterans Strategy and all the important things we have put in place in New South Wales to support veterans.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I have a copy of that here. Thank you for your interest Mr D'Adam. It is important. We did lead the call for that. In response to that consultation it was important that we establish that. One of the first things that we did was that letters patent were issued first up.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: New South Wales made a submission in relation to the terms of reference. A written proposition was put to the Commonwealth about the terms of reference.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: That would have been prior to my time but I am happy to take that on notice or Ms Mackaness may be able to answer that for you now.

Ms MACKANESS: Yes we did do a response in support of the draft terms of reference. They were shared internally with key stakeholders and the New South Wales Government. We were generally in support of

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those terms of reference. Yes, the New South Wales Government has endorsed and issued letters patent for New South Wales to perhaps debate in the royal commission.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What is the status of preparation of New South Wales' submission to the royal commission?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I may have to take that on notice. It is in process; it is not finalised, to the best of my knowledge. I will take that on notice. My understanding is that as at now it is in process.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Does the New South Wales Government have any data on the number of veteran suicides in New South Wales?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, Ms Mackaness might like to speak to that specifically.

Ms MACKANESS: The data that is collected on veteran suicide has been collected at a national level. The Commonwealth had commissioned the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to look at the data and has confirmed recently that between 2001 and 2019, sadly, there were 1,062 confirmed suicide deaths amongst former Defence Force personnel. Unfortunately, there were a further 211 amongst serving personnel. That data is across the whole of Australia. We do not yet have that data specifically broken down to States and Territories. We are working very closely with the Commonwealth and with the Coroner's office to ensure that we are actively now looking at State data as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, do you think the support for the mental health of veterans is adequate in New South Wales? Is there more that could be done?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr D'Adam I place on record my sincere condolences for all the families. A single suicide is a tragedy and it is extremely important that we wrap around those communities and prevent that happening. We can always do more. There is a dedicated mental health Minister. I can say to you that we take this seriously within my remit and will continue to do so because it is extremely important that we make sure we are putting in place everything we can as a government to support that. We do that in a number of ways through the agency and our strategy which is the first of its kind. It is specifically there to direct and address some of those issues.

We also have a number of wellbeing centres on their way, and one in place at Nowra, in addition to Concord Repatriation Hospital. We have a number of opportunities to improve on those. We always can but we do have a number in place as at this time, and I am always happy to be an advocate for more, given our push for the royal commission, to understand better but also to ensure that we are putting as much as we possibly can around those who have served their country for us, to do the very best we can. I am very keen to take that up. I am very proud of the work of Invictus Australia that wraps around our former veterans. In the area of mental health there is \$130 million to provide support and mental health services, on top of the \$2.6 billion in the budget for mental health.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is the New South Wales figure, is it?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, the New South Wales budget for mental health for 2021-22 is \$2.6 billion. That is the largest investment in the State's history into mental health so we are very proud to be a component part of that. But obviously it is the Premier's priority as well, the Towards Zero Suicides Premier's priority, that aims to reduce the number of suicides. Our framework for this, Mr D'Adam, is not just by portfolio or silo; it is a whole-of-government framework which sets out our priorities for our suicide prevention initiatives across government to address those priorities in the strategic framework and to reduce that rate. I am very proud of our Veterans Strategy, which prioritises the mental health of our veterans. Our approach, working across government, is to ensure that the needs of New South Wales veterans are duly considered in all of our mental health initiatives.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I turn to the Veterans Employment Program. Ms Mackaness might be able to answer this one. How many staff full-time equivalent are dedicated to overseeing the Veterans Employment Program?

Ms MACKANESS: In the NSW Office for Veterans Affairs we have 12 staff and those staff work very diligently to join the dots by always, say, working with the Commonwealth, working with local government, working with ex-service organisations. A large part of our role through the Veterans Strategy has been to communicate to the veterans community about the services and programs that the New South Wales Government offers.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Mackaness, can I bring you back to the question, which was specifically about the Veterans Employment Program? How many staff are dedicated to managing that program?

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Ms MACKANESS: Again, that is a fantastic program and I am really proud that we won for a second time the Prime Minister's award.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Mackaness, I was not asking about the merits of the program. Can you please address the question?

Ms MACKANESS: There are only two staff in our office that look after that program, but it is a multiplier effect. So, in effect, we have the whole of the public service that is supporting this program.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Two staff.

Ms MACKANESS: We now have measures in place. The Public Service Commission has a question for every applicant into New South Wales government that includes whether you have been former Defence Force personnel. So we are collecting data actively. That then gets picked up in the People Matter Employee Survey [PMES], which tracks veterans staying in the public service, how long they are staying, where they are moving, their satisfaction. We are developing mentoring programs in different parts of government. Different areas of the government have established networking and support programs for veterans. And at the heart of all of this is the Anzac Memorial, which employs a cohort of veterans that welcome a whole lot of different activities from the community and from New South Wales government.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you, Ms Mackaness. I might move on.

Ms MACKANESS: So I think I am happy in saying that while we only have two staff, we have currently over 300 champions across New South Wales government to support veterans finding employment in the New South Wales government.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: That was an excellent answer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: She certainly covered a lot of territory beyond the original question.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Mr D'Adam, if I could just add to that the target and effectiveness of that program. That program aimed to employ 1,000 veterans in the public service by 2023. We have smashed that target and, in fact, doubled it; we have 2,000 employed through that program. So I think those two staff have been extremely effective and I want to thank them for the work that they have done, because we have also won awards with that. As at November, there have been over 2,000 veterans and it was the first of its kind in Australia, and other States have copied that program, happily. It also won the Public Sector Excellence in Supporting Veteran Employment category in the 2021 Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Awards. So I think that speaks to the effectiveness of those two staff.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you, Minister. How many veterans are there in New South Wales?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: At the moment—I do have that number—2,000 employed. I will just find that exactly for you. As at today, 200,000.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And how do you arrive at that figure?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: There are approximately 1,200 that are serving Australian Defence Force that separate each year, that transition into civilian life, and that is according to the advice that I have, including that the census results, which this year happily included a category for veterans, but we get that further data from them. So the data is based on the ABS information. Ms Mackaness, you might like to speak to whether we can update that for you.

Ms MACKANESS: Thank you, Minister. Yes, we know that around 1,200 ADFs exit into New South Wales each year and we have mapped and tracked as best we can by postcode where they exit into. We are looking forward to the census data because for the first time it will give us a much clearer picture of where our veterans live across New South Wales, although we do know that there are clusters of veterans that do end up living near defence bases. So Nowra was chosen as the location for the first Commonwealth-funded Veteran Wellbeing Centre because there is a large population of veterans that live in that region. We do not have all the data yet.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Does New South Wales maintain—

Ms MACKANESS: There is a new data group that has been established through the Commonwealth, State and committee working group across the nation to look at how we can better inform action through the data that we all collect. That is an active new group that is looking at better data to support our veterans.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: New South Wales does not maintain its own database of veterans, is that correct?

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Ms Mackaness might speak to what we do in that space, but it is obviously a Commonwealth issue. What we do as best we can through the Office of Veterans Affairs is use that census data to allow us to target better the programs that we have in place and our support services. But Ms Mackaness, you might like to add to that.

Ms MACKANESS: Yes, thank you, Minister. We are collecting all sorts of data. I think it is fair to say that this area of work by States and Territories really only gained momentum during the Centenary of ANZAC. So prior to establishing the Veterans Employment Program we actually had no data on the landscape of veterans living in New South Wales and no data on veterans employed in New South Wales government. So we have come an awfully long way. There are various sources of data at the moment: there is a Commonwealth-State agreement for health services provided to veterans, and historically even the Department of Veterans Affairs would not have data for all former defence personnel because largely veterans went into new fields and occupations and they were only captured if they then needed the support of DVA.

So historically there is a very large gap in data that exists for veterans, but it is improving all the time and part of the data group is to share what we have done and gather more data. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is in that group; so the data that they have been working on across the nation, they are looking at de-aggregating and giving us better data for each of the States and Territories as well. So we are actively working in this space.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, what initiatives is the New South Wales Government taking to monitor the number of veterans who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you, Mr D'Adam, that is an excellent question and one that is very important. We are committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our veterans in New South Wales; that is why we created the strategy, to ensure that we were supporting our veteran community in doing that. We know that we need to make life easier for our veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness due to having served, and the access to the services that they need. We help people into safe and stable housing and connect them with a range of support services to help prevent former defence personnel and their families ending up in a situation of being homeless.

In this respect we provide a range of services including Link2home, which has a specific Link2home veterans program; and the ex-service information and referral service, and that could include a range of services, not just homelessness; the Rent Choice Veterans, which is particularly targeted again at our veterans, and that provides private rental subsidies for eligible veterans and provides access to affordable housing in the private rental market. They are information and referral services; they are supporting those individuals, they are contactable 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and we connect them to specialist housing services. One of the range of Rent Choice products that we offer funds a housing project officer at RSL DefenceCare, which is now part of RSL LifeCare, to carry out that intake and referral service coordination and case management responsibilities. Importantly, we have expanded the eligibility criteria to ensure that more veterans can utilise the service. In July this year RSL LifeCare advised that they have assisted 35 households through the Rent Choice Veterans program in the calendar year to date. But, Ms Mackaness, you might like to add to that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, I was just checking my phone; I thought I was going to run out of time.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I just wondered if Ms Mackaness had anything to add to that if I have missed anything on the programs.

Ms MACKANESS: No, Minister. We work very closely with the ex-service organisations and I think one of the key things that we have done is build awareness of the work that the New South Wales Government is doing. For example, we have built a portal on the Service NSW website, which is a veterans page which points people to the services that we provide and then we communicate all of this information regularly through our own newsletters and through RSL War Widows and Legacy. All the ex-service organisations share our information about how to find our services.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just add to that, Mr D'Adam, very quickly? I know it is over time, but it is important to fill that out because I want to call out the Nowra Veteran Wellbeing Centre, which is doing a phenomenal job and we are looking to expand those in partnership with the Federal Government because providing those centres is extremely important and we are looking to support those going forward. Also, one of the beautiful things about my portfolios is that sometimes they dance together and we have a great synergy and with sport and veteran sport we are able to provide some of those opportunities through Veteran Sport Australia to assist other transition of our veterans and pathways forward through that and Invictus.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to turn to the strategy. It seems like a bit of a strange document; it does not have any measures or any actions. Where is the action plan and why is it not published?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: The action plan is here. I can provide you with a copy if you like.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It does not appear to be on the website. Has the action plan been published on the website?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am happy to give you my copy, but Ms Mackaness can speak to that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thanks, that would be great.

Ms MACKANESS: Thank you. Sorry, I am struggling; it is very hard to hear. I think the question was about the action plan. We are tracking all 57 actions very closely with our whole-of-government partners. We meet monthly with the Parliamentary Secretary and I have also been updating the Minister when I meet with the Minister on key actions in the strategy. Of course, some have sadly been impacted by COVID, but mostly we have been able to, where it has not been possible within the time frame, then move those actions back. The strategy is reportable also into Parliament and we will be doing a report to the Minister at the two-year mark into Parliament. I am looking at Catherine D'Elia because I also report regularly into the secretary's board on progress of the strategy and action plan.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I say, Mr D'Adam, it is available on the website.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: On the website?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes, if you look under Veterans Action Plan it is the first item. If you google "Veterans Action Plan".

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Okay. That is it for me in terms of questions.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: Is that it?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is it, yes.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Sorry, may I just, through you, Mr Chair, provide some answers to some earlier questions to assist the Committee? Sorry, Mr Khan, I apologise, but we do have some answers for the Committee. In relation to the NSW Institute of Sport [NSWIS], you asked about the strength and conditioning program. I might get Ms Jones to provide that update, if you do not mind.

Ms JONES: I will go to that one first. Thank you, Minister. I have actually received this advice from the NSW Institute of Sport. It is a requirement for all NSW Institute of Sport strength and conditioning staff to be accredited by the Australian Strength and Conditioning Association. A number of staff do have Exercise & Sports Science Australia accreditation, however, it is not compulsory. This aligns with the requirements of the Australian Institute of Sport.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you just clarify, the requirement is only for the strength and conditioning accreditation?

Ms JONES: Correct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Why is that?

Ms JONES: If that is a question I will have to take it on notice.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I think those staff also have Exercise & Sports Science Australia accreditation, which should cover-off more broadly than just the strength and conditioning. Those guys will make you work hard no matter what you do. Can I just give an answer to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Before you proceed on to that I just want to clarify again, the sports scientists are not required to have accreditation?

Ms JONES: The only answer I have so far is in relation to the strength and conditioning staff.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Which was in response to your question, which we took on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I will ask again: Why are sports scientists not covered, given that the Australian Sports Commission commitment is for a national accreditation scheme to apply to both sports scientists and strength and conditioning?

Ms JONES: We will follow up on that second part of that question for you.

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The Hon. NATALIE WARD: But I am advised that this does align with the requirements of the Australian Institute of Sport. But we are happy to provide that further information, if you like.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Just in relation to the UCI cycling 2022, you asked about legacy grants. I just wanted to clarify that they were not approved by a Minister; they were approved by the local organising committee, those grants prior to my time.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Right, okay.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: And I just wanted to clarify—sorry, Mr Moselmane, did you want to go ahead?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I have a number of questions, but I will ask one. I know Trevor wants to go home.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am not going home. The plane has gone.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: In regard to the Reducing Social Isolation for Seniors Grant Program, in 2021 the New South Wales Government awarded \$600,000 in funding for projects to reduce social isolation for seniors. You can take this on notice—

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: No. This is a Dixer, Mr Moselmane.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can you provide us with a breakdown on what funding those organisations received and how much each of those organisations were allocated?

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Yes. It is a fantastic program and we have continued it this year. In fact, I asked to bring it forward this year, given the COVID pandemic; it was not due to be rolled out again until next year. The \$600,000 Reducing Social Isolation for Seniors Grant Program was launched in February 2021 and I think it is something that we can be very proud of because we know that our seniors can be more vulnerable and subject to social isolation, and the rest of the population now, I think, understands a little bit of what that is like, given the public health orders. That program totalling, as you quite rightly say, \$600,000 was awarded to 26 local councils, not-for-profit organisations and community groups across New South Wales. The specific recipients are available on the website, Mr Moselmane, and we can send you the link to that. Those funded projects are due for completion by June 2022. As I say, the next round is open and we want to combat that through the next grants program round. There is a range of programs: rug making, dancing, a whole lot of online programs which you can see.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I would like a rug made.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: I am very proud of that program because we know that combating social isolation for seniors is extremely important.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Can I just provide one more clarification, if I may, Mr Moselmane? You asked a question earlier and provided I think an article which we were asked to comment on. Can I just clarify that that article and those quotes were in relation to North Melbourne housing towers. So it was not something for which in New South Wales we were responsible for. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Any more questions from the Government?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: No, we are fine.

The CHAIR: Are you sure?

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I am struggling. There is so much I could ask.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Save them for next time.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you very much, officials.

The Hon. NATALIE WARD: Thank you for all showing up to the last afternoon. I am sure you have all had quite enough, so thank you, I appreciate your interest. Thank you for your questions, I appreciate that.

The CHAIR: I note there were a number of questions taken on notice. The Committee secretariat will be in contact with you soon. Thank you very much. Have a good weekend.

(The Minister withdrew.)

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(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.