

Mr John McGrath; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Mark Folkard; Mr Zak Kirkup; Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr John Carey; Mrs Lisa O'Malley

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**Division 33: Communities — Services 9 and 10, Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering, \$83 245 000 —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr M.P. Murray, Minister for Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering.

Mr G. Searle, Director General.

Ms H. Nys, Assistant Director General, Policy and Service Design.

Mr B. Jolly, Assistant Director General, Commissioning and Sector Engagement.

Mr L. Carren, Executive Director, Business Services.

Mr S. Hollingworth, Executive Director, Housing and Homelessness.

Mr M. Richardson, Director, Finance and Business Support.

Ms E. Ramage, Chief of Staff, Minister for Seniors and Ageing.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 1 June 2018. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Are there any questions? I call the member for South Perth.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I refer to the payments to individuals under the service summary on page 420 of the *Budget Statements*. I gather that this is the delivery of benefits and concessions administered by the department, including the Seniors Card. Can we read anything into the movement in the Seniors Card and the amount of money that has been budgeted in this area?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I thank the member for the question on the Seniors Card.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I do not have a Seniors Card.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The Seniors Card is very highly regarded.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just interrupt. Member for South Perth, to be eligible, one has to work up to 20 hours a week, so that would disqualify you! Sorry, minister.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** It is interesting. This area is very important to a lot of Western Australians. What sorts of trends are we seeing in the number of people who are now accessing the Seniors Card?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I have a note on how many there are, because I thought the opposition would ask this question. In 2017–18, 307 772 people received the cost-of-living rebate and the seniors rebate. It is a substantial amount. Of course, we know that there were some changes in the federal area, which impacted on us by lifting the age slightly. We have followed that lead. As we know, the Seniors Card itself is very, very important to many, many people, and especially some of the rebates that people get through it. In 2017–18, \$23 million in rebate payments were made to eligible Western Australian Seniors Card members. That is a substantial amount of money that is going back into the seniors area. For the 2017–18 financial year, registered WA Seniors Card members were paid the cost-of-living rebate at a rate of 86.85c, which is another help in the seniors area. The people who have probably contacted me the most are the self-funded retirees—more so than seniors. It is something the government is certainly looking at, especially those people who are marginal and who are just under the line for eligibility. A lot of work is to be done in that area. We can look at the amount of money being paid out, such as the rebate on council rates. That is much sought after by a lot of people—they are not what one would call wealthy; they are average citizens. They need that help. We have no intention of changing that. As we have seen, the federal government has again changed a few things in that area.

**Mr M.J. FOLKARD:** I refer to the item on payments to individuals on page 427 of the *Budget Statements*, which states —

Delivery of benefits and concessions administered by the Department, including the Seniors Card.

I note that there has been a larger uptake of the cost-of-living rebate by Seniors Card members than occurred in the previous financial year. What else is the McGowan government doing to support seniors?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** This follows on from the previous question. The McGowan government is committed to creating age-friendly communities in which seniors are respected for what they have done for our country in previous times. Some of us are getting very close to being seniors, or may be past it. Seniors should be treated with respect, and that is what this government is about.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Hear, hear!

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Is the member for Dawesville one? I did not think he was old enough!

Honestly, today I have been out meeting with seniors groups. Since we have been in government, I have met with many of those groups. They are starting to feel wanted again, whereas previously that had dropped off a bit and seniors were not being respected. The government is doing many things. Western Australia is the only Australian jurisdiction to receive affiliated membership of the World Health Organization's global network for age-friendly cities and communities, which recognised WA as an international leader in the field of age-friendly communities. That says a lot for not only this government—I think there was some lead from the previous government as well. I have not been out there grandstanding, but people from around the world are coming to visit different areas in Western Australia. I have said before and I will say again that Melville is one of the leaders in looking after seniors. It is recognised for that worldwide. Speakers from that council go to other parts of the world and speak about what they do in that area. In saying that, some things really annoy me in the seniors area; that is, some of the departments do not quite pick up the ball in that area.

I will give a small example—members will get plenty of examples tonight—of an aged-care facility on one side of the road and shops on the other side. The department that managed the traffic lights—I will not name it—would not allow the lights to stay on for an extra two or three seconds to give seniors more time to get from one side of the road to the other. That is because the rules say that the lights have to stay on for that amount of time. Those sorts of things are appalling and should be dealt with individually. It is not a case of one size fits all. It is very important that we look at the needs of seniors in those situations. Work has been done by the City of Melville and those sorts of things were addressed. It was the first council to have gradual footpaths coming on and off the roads. Those sorts of things are very important around that area.

Since 2006, governments have provided over \$673 000 worth of age-friendly grants funding to 75 local governments. Over 80 per cent of Western Australians over the age of 60 live in a local government area that has received state funding for age-friendly grants. It is recognised. A lot more work probably needs to be done. More than 380 000 Seniors Card members enjoy state government concessions and exclusive discounts from over 800 businesses. It was very pleasing to hear recently that a new print run of a booklet showing what businesses and services offer discounts to seniors is coming out.

[7.10 pm]

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** What about the TAB?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I will send one to the member for South Perth. I do not think there are any discounts for the TAB but there will be discounts for a few other places that he might want to cash in on. One of the things that has annoyed me in recent times relating to seniors is when people ask me if I have my concession card with me. It is a bit annoying. Also, when I was on the train going to the football the other day, a young kid stood up for me. I felt very proud of him but not too proud of myself for looking that old. We have to look at those sorts of things to help people get those discounts and understand that they are available. If they do not know they are available, it is not really worth the effort of making them available. It is the government's job to get out there and promote things like that.

Earlier this year it was the thirtieth anniversary of the WA Seniors Card, which was introduced by a Labor government. It was introduced—this is very important information—by the then Premier, Peter Dowding. He launched the card on 19 April 1988 following strong support and advocacy for the concept from a former Minister for the Aged, Kay Hallahan, whom I am sure many members have seen around the place from time to time. The Seniors Card has been well received and it is still well received. Sometimes we have to tighten things up because of the way the budget is. I know that seniors are very quick to say, "Don't forget about us; we're still out there."

We had a special presentation out at AQWA at Hillarys. There was a great turnout of seniors, who came out to recognise the discounts and rebates they get because they have a Seniors Card. A lady was sitting across from me and I asked who she was. She had turned 100 years of age and was still using the Seniors Card. Sometimes we

think of people aged 100 slouching a bit in their chairs. She sprung up and shamed half the people in the room with her agility and spoke very fluently about today's efforts. She did not talk about the third race at Flemington but she was out there and really enjoying her day. We got her up to cut the cake. She said that the one thing she loves is chocolate cake. She got a slice of chocolate cake for her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Several members interjected.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** This is very important. In July 2017, payments worth \$23 million were made to seniors by the Western Australian government. I think it is remarkable that that sort of money was allocated to them. People in some areas are still saying that they need that to survive. We are doing a lot of work out there and we will continue to do that. Other programs totalling around \$1 million will be rolled out this financial year.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I refer the minister to page 416 of budget paper No 2 and the first dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". I note that the department oversees some 5 500 staff—in large part which the minister overlooks—across 151 current office locations. Now that the six previous entities have been merged, I am keen to know whether any savings have been made as a result of the machinery-of-government changes.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Because I am not the facts and figures man down to the last detail, I will ask the director general to answer that financial issue.

**Mr G. Searle:** We are in the process of merging the departments. That comes with a range of challenges, some of which are straightforward and others are not. At last count, we had four financial systems, three human resources systems and three record management systems and a series of other issues that we needed to work our way through. The department has delivered the senior executive service cuts that were promised by the government. We will deliver all of the 350 staff savings that were our target. There are about 320 currently. It varies a bit as people either accept or do not accept their packages. We think there will be ongoing savings in the agency. More particularly, it is about how we then integrate the activities within the agency rather than run them as six separate agencies. In the financial year in question, we will see the first of the integrated modelling in the Kimberley, where we operate as one department and one counter. Savings will be delivered over the forward estimates.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Noting that they are substantial machinery-of-government changes, has a survey been conducted of staff morale within the department? There is a lot of change, as we would expect from significant machinery-of-government changes. Does the minister have a feeling for how staff morale and culture might be at this time?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** When there is change, staff morale fluctuates on a daily basis. Some people love change and other people resist it. I have seen that in the mining industry and right across the board. Change is always with us. We cannot stand still. For some, it is an opportune time to change their lifestyles, and others move on. If we do not have good staff morale, we do not have a reasonable government or a good government, to say the least. We will work very hard with all those departments. To go into the detail, again, I refer to the director general.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Searle, before you answer that question, you can be mindful that we are dealing only with services 9 and 10 and not the more general question that has been asked.

**Mr G. Searle:** Thank you for that advice, Chair. The Public Sector Commission has conducted a staff survey and we are yet to see the results, so, yes, it is being monitored.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** The director general noted the different payroll systems and obviously enterprise bargaining agreements and HR systems that are in place across the agency. I am keen to understand what process would be undertaken to find the best suitable human resources management system and payroll system. Given that so many exist, what process will the department undertake to ensure that the most efficient and cost-beneficial studies are taken to identify which ones should be utilised and which ones will not be? I am keen to know how they would be merged or what would happen there. I am conscious, I suppose, of another Office of Shared Services—type arrangement with a large number of people who have to be looked after and a number of different areas, different enterprise bargaining agreements and stuff like that.

[7.20 pm]

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Certainly, I understand the question. One thing I will say is that members should not underestimate anyone in the public service and their ability to work through issues and come out with the best results. For the more finer detail, again, I will pass across.

**Mr G. Searle:** We are in the process at the moment of evaluating the actual need of the agency in each of those areas and going through a detailed evaluation of the existing system and determining the best match. We are trying to do it incrementally rather than in a big bang, to reduce the risk. We had four finance systems and I understand that we are now down to three. That process will be continuing. There are some big decisions a little way down the track. My guess, given there is not a lot of money for capital expenditure on new systems, is that we will try

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to pick best of breed of the existing product for the time being and work our way through that issue one system at a time.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Given that the financial systems, for example, are being merged, does the agency have a deadline in mind as an acceptable final cut-off point? How many years does the minister think it should go on with such a fractured finance, human resources and payroll system? Does the minister have a preference for when it should be all tied up and finalised?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Again, I will pass the question over to the director general. It is something that has to be internally worked through. There is no easy fix in these sorts of things. As we work through it, we will make sure that we have the best system.

**Mr G. Searle:** The reality is that all the systems work fine doing what they have to do. There is no real issue until we have to consolidate answers for the whole of the department and then there will be some additional work. My expectation is that we will have those issues resolved in a two-year time frame, but I will not rush it and get it wrong.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 419, “Relationship to Government Goals”, and the line item about two-thirds of the way down the page, “Local community services and community building programs meet the identified needs of individuals and families.” What value does the minister place on community resource centres in the creation of strong communities?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** As a country member, I certainly understand the work that community resource centres do. But they will have to readjust their core business. It is certainly not my decision to say what they should be paid because they are not in my portfolio as such. But I understand what they do. I understand how hard they work and how much they do in some communities. I have concerns when they sometimes take on commercial work in competition with some local people who are trying to start businesses or who have existing businesses. That worries me immensely. Community resource centres have to be a bit more innovative and think about how they can get funding outside of government. It is not a government handout. We know that the figures have blown out considerably over the last five to 10 years and they continue to rise. It is not just a place to create jobs; they should be the creator. They should be the ones that charge people who utilise the area service fee. I know some of them do and they run a tight ship. I would never criticise that. But in some places that are not too far out of major city centres or country centres, it is time for them to rationalise and think about what they are doing.

**The CHAIR:** I remind you, member for Roe, that we are dealing with seniors, ageing and volunteering. Is there a further question?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This question relates to volunteering, Madam Chair. Is the minister aware that some 100 volunteers and some 400 paid staff —

**The CHAIR:** Where is the item number?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This is a further question.

**The CHAIR:** That item number does not deal with volunteers.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is two-thirds of the way down in the “Desired Outcomes” column and relates to local community services and community building programs.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** That is a bit of a long bow. Come on!

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It is a legitimate question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am trying to talk about volunteers and volunteer burnout.

**The CHAIR:** Maybe the member can find something in the budget to put it next to. That is the delivery of community services.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can I just ask —

**The CHAIR:** The member can if there is an item number.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I will come back to that if you like, Madam Chair.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Perhaps I can give the member for Roe a bit of a lead-in because I have a couple of questions about the same line item on page 419, “Local community services and community building programs meet the identified needs of individuals and families”. That was the same line item to which the member for Roe referred. What are some of the examples of community building programs and how are the needs of individuals and families identified, assessed and delivered? How does the program work? What does the government intend to deliver? How does the government identify the needs of individuals and families?

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**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** There is quite a simple answer to that. I will defer very quickly across, but we have to look at what is put out there and the results we get from that. If the member is alluding to the question asked by the member for Roe, some of those results were not coming through in some of the other departments. I can say one thing—it is not funded from my area but comes under regional development, so I am limited in what I say. But to give members a couple of examples, I will hand over to the director general.

**Mr G. Searle:** The department is doing a range of things that will impact on communities more broadly. Volunteering is clearly an area in which this department has invested a range of money, about \$1.4 million in the current year for volunteer development services, International Volunteer Day and those sorts of things. We are also working very strongly on the community services that are developed within and delivered by the community. As I said, as of 1 July, the Kimberley will be going to a regional model that is relatively autonomous. It will aim at goals and have locality managers who make decisions within each locality within the Kimberley. There will be one in Derby, and one in Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra, the whole idea being that decisions will be made closer to the community, closer to the ground, and those things are important. In total we will probably spend nearly \$54 million through the community sector to provide services to Western Australians, again working with the community and volunteers to deliver outcomes for a range of people, including seniors.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Given that the department will spend a lot of money, how will it identify the needs of people in the community that have to be met by a government department?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I do not think that is a difficult question to answer. Good local members will be able to tell the minister what they need straight away. If members are not out and about, they will not find out. A lot of that comes through a member's office, and whether the member is in opposition or government does not make any difference. They would find out what is needed in those areas and then a survey would be done to determine what is needed. As we just heard about the Kimberley area, a lot of work has been done over probably 50 years there. Members have to come forward and do something instead of doing surveys and running around the place. The detail on exactly how we get there is, again, up to the director general, but can I just say that if there is a need in some areas, it should be brought forward with either a letter to the minister or at least talking to the minister, as we do at times in the corridors—because if we do not, the people who are in need will miss out. I will pass the question over to the director general.

[7.30 pm]

**Mr G. Searle:** I thank the minister. There are a couple of ways that we do it. At an individual segment level, a range of advocacy groups talk to us regularly, and we engage them in policy discussion about what the priority is, where and why. At another level, we have just established district leadership groups that include the commonwealth and local governments, the old human services manager groups, a couple of non-government organisation representatives and, when appropriate, Aboriginal-controlled organisations, with a view to discussing local issues and challenges. Those groups have been relatively successful in already addressing a couple of issues. To date, those issues have not been in the seniors or volunteering space—they have been in the youth space—but we think it is a very useful tool to get local opinions about local problems.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Given the information we have received, what is the basis of the reduced spending forecast in the forward estimates? Is the minister expecting to get on top of this need for community building programs?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** What line is that in the budget?

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** There is a line in the budget I am now trying to find that indicates that the spending forecast in the forward estimates will be reduced in this area.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The member still has not helped us to get to the detail.

**The CHAIR:** Is that a further question or a new question, member?

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I will have to get back to you with that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can I ask a further question to that?

**The CHAIR:** You are not on the list, member.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** A further question to that.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, give it a go.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given the —

**The CHAIR:** Item number please.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Sorry, further question to the member for South Perth.

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**The CHAIR:** Yes, but he did not give an item number either.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Yes, I did. Item 10, “Delivery of Community Services, Grants and Resources”, under “Relationship to Government Goals”.

**The CHAIR:** I can sympathise with you, members, because I am astonished there is not very much mention of seniors or volunteering, but I am not sure that some of these questions are within the minister’s portfolio.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Volunteering?

**The CHAIR:** Find the reference in the —

**Mr M.J. FOLKARD:** Stronger communities are safer communities.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, member for Burns Beach; we will sort it out amongst ourselves. Item number, member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Item 10.

**The CHAIR:** On what page?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** On page 419. I have a further question.

**The CHAIR:** Is that under “Delivery of Community Services, Grants and Resources”?

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** That is it.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Can you repeat the question for the minister.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given the reported rise in volunteer burnout, how is the minister supporting volunteers throughout all his networks, whether it be sporting groups, community resources centres, community groups—whatever you like? How much funding is directed towards supporting and rewarding volunteers?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The member really hit the right note in that the volunteering sector is one of the pleasures of the job. It is honestly a pleasure to go where people are putting back in and not taking out. In the main, they are there because they want to help. They are being mentors. People out there lead by example. I am not talking about seniors; I am talking right across the board. It is so pleasing to see Western Australians do that. I will share a couple of statistics on that. One of the first things I always say about volunteers is that in Western Australia, on an average yearly basis, volunteers contribute the equivalent of \$39 billion worth of work across the board. That is all volunteers, whether that be bushfire, sporting or whatever. That is remarkable and something that does not happen in other countries. Other countries have a lot of what they call volunteers, but they are corporate volunteers. Anyone who has been to Japan will see them marching down the street with their corporate flag—it might be Coca-Cola or some other company—and they will march, do a job and then go back. I am a little concerned about that because some of that is happening in Western Australia in which people become corporate volunteers, so that it is part of their job. That takes away the weekend volunteer who comes along and says, “I’m going to help out here”, instead of sitting back saying, “I’ve done two hours in my work time” and then not contribute. Around 80 per cent of Western Australians aged 15 years and over volunteer in some way every year.

I was out and about today thanking some volunteers in the central city, shaking hands—I will not say kissing ladies, but certainly shaking hands—saying, “Thank you for the work you have done.” Members might think that is small bickies, but they were so appreciative of a pat on the back and sometimes that is all they need out there. But we have to work very hard in giving support and working with those people from behind. Even this week we have National Volunteer Week. I have two badges on; a lady gave one to me today because I gave her a pat on the head. That sort of thing is recognition to those volunteers. At times we suffer from volunteer burnout. Setting parameters for volunteers is very important. I have gone into different clubs and one of the things I learned from a club was that they give volunteers an A4 piece of paper with their job description on it. There are no arguments. If a person has gone there to wave the flag for little Johnny at the first game and are still there at the third, they want to go home to do something, but they feel obliged to stay. That club does not have those problems, so people then come back. It is about managing them all the way. The WA Volunteer Service Awards is on again this weekend. I have an award for people who have done more than 25 years of service, but I must tell another one of my stories about last year.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Please do; please let the stories continue.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The member has to realise the background into the whole theory of this.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Tell us what you did for breakfast first on that day. Give us the whole time line.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No, I have to tell members what happened. I went out there, because it was 25 years and over of service. I got two nasty letters back because one had done 27 years and he wanted the certificate to say 27 years. There are some pedantic people around, but we have to be very mindful of what volunteers do. Last year, I launched the “WA Volunteering Strategy”, which I am quite proud to say has moved forward. The strategy provides a framework for action as well as other issues across all levels of government, non-government organisations, the private sector and community to support volunteering. In October last year, I established the volunteering community reference group, which was an election promise. We amalgamated a lot of people and then asked for nominations to come through. One thing I do not want to see all the time when I go out to volunteering groups is the same faces. We need interaction across the board, so we need to have a variety of people.

Here is a statistic that the member for South Perth would love. On any Saturday at junior football—below professional football—40 000 volunteers come out to help football be played in the parks. It is remarkable that 40 000 people volunteer at football games on a Saturday. Imagine if those people pulled out and went on strike all at once. I hate to say it, but we would not have anything. We would not have umpires or goal umpires. I am sure that the member for South Perth would not put on his whites to run up and down the middle and bounce a ball. I think that figure is really remarkable.

[7.40 pm]

As I said, I am quite proud of the establishment of the volunteering community reference group. When it met recently, it talked about how to make it easier for volunteers to get a police clearance card. It is quite simple. Some people are not able to volunteer for different organisations because they do not have the finances to get a police clearance card. If they are in two or three different groups, they cannot just move the card across. We have to work through those sorts of things and make sure that people are recognised for what they are doing—not in a monetary sense. When people are nominated for an award, it really brings them to the fore. We are out there patting them on the back and giving assistance from all walks of government—from not only one area, but right across the board—to make sure that we encourage and keep our volunteers.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I finally found that bit of information for Mr Searle. I refer to the line item “Delivery of Community Services, Grants and Resources” on page 420, which is what we have been discussing. This is an important program, but I notice that the funding decreases quite considerably from the estimated actual of \$56 million in 2017–18 to \$47.3 million in 2021–22. That is close to a \$7 million drop. Why is there that decrease in funding? Mr Searle spoke about the spending in the Kimberley, but the overall spend will decrease.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I will defer this financial question across.

**Mr G. Searle:** Those grants are across a range of areas. To my knowledge, no specific reductions in those numbers relate to seniors or volunteering.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** That leaves us in a fairly confused state, if it is over a range of areas. There is still a reduction.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I assume that a lot of the reduction will come from efficiencies and working smarter. With some of the changes that are in place, we do not necessarily need more money. I will again defer to the director general.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, the director general has given a response that suggests it is across a range of portfolios. If you are unable to limit your answer to your portfolios, perhaps we can put the question on notice or you can provide supplementary information.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Will the director general answer the question?

**The CHAIR:** Member for South Perth, he has already answered the question. These figures deal with the whole Department of Communities and are not easily disaggregated.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I will accept your ruling, Madam Chair, but it was a bit of a flaky response.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I refer to page 440 and the table headed “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. I appreciate the Chair’s guidance here. If this does not relate to the minister’s specific area, I am sure that the Chair will pull me up very quickly. I am keen to understand the “Grandcarers Assistance (Respite) Program”, which seems to be cut going forward and perhaps merged into “Grandcarers Support Scheme”. If that relates to the portfolios we are dealing with, I would like to understand what that is and why that cut has occurred.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Again, I think that area is not quite in my portfolio.

**The CHAIR:** Is that Minister McGurk’s portfolio?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Yes.

**Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY:** I refer to the fourth dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 16, which refers to family and domestic violence initiatives. As part of the government’s response to family and domestic violence, what progress has been made on —

**The CHAIR:** Can I stop you there?

**Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY:** No, I am getting to it.

**The CHAIR:** All right.

**Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY:** — commitments made to raise awareness on the issue of elder abuse?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Again, one of the things in our society that saddens me is the abuse of our seniors. Elder abuse has been misconstrued in some ways, because some see it as a black eye or a split lip. It is not that at all. It is right across the board and includes mental abuse and, as much as anything else, bullying. People do not have anywhere to turn. When we look at it from that point of view, how do we get people to come forward? Recently, we had a meeting with a group in town, including the police, because we are trying to educate people across the board to make sure that everyone is aware of the issue. The police are called out to someone’s house. There is an elderly person and another person sitting over there, but there is no complaint when the police get there, because, generally, it is about a family issue and people do not really like to discuss those sorts of issues. In elder abuse, people take advantage of an older person. We are working on that problem.

The state government has identified the Department of Communities as the lead agency with the overall responsibility for the coordination of the government’s response to elder abuse. Again, we are leading the way. I say that with all sincerity. We are leading the pack to combat elder abuse in Western Australia. Western Australia will co-chair the Attorneys-General elder abuse working group. To me, that is a feather in the cap of our department. I, and I am sure other members of Parliament, see many elder abuse issues, such as someone’s will being changed when the person concerned does not want it changed. An elderly lady is brought in with one side of the family and has her will changed. The following week after the will has been changed, a sister or brother comes in and says, “What was mum doing here?” Then there is a bunfight because mum has been pressured to change her will. There are also things such as financial theft, which can be very small. However, it is still abuse and can make the life of a pensioner very difficult. An elderly person may ask their relative to get them a loaf of bread and a couple of apples or whatever and the relative will take \$100 out of their purse and not give back any change. That hurts that pensioner for the rest of the week. It is a huge impost on the person concerned.

We have a working group that will develop a national plan to combat elder abuse in response to the Australian Law Reform Commission’s recommendation. We will be co-chairing this working group, and my office and the Department of Communities are taking a key role in the development of the national plan. I am saying the national plan—not Western Australian, but the national plan. This will certainly fulfil our election commitment to work in this area.

In August 2017, Communities made a submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee into Elder Abuse. It is about raising awareness and letting people know that they cannot do these things. It is also about people not having to ring the police department over some of these issues. We have some hotlines that people can ring to get advice about how to go about stopping it. It is an indictment on our society that it is happening, yet I am hearing about it happening more. So we need to put something in place to give people absolute confidence when they ring or call in. Rockingham runs a very good program; I was talking to those people again today. A lot of people have been coming in and saying, “What about it? How can we stop it? What can I do?” People do not see it as elder abuse, but it is. People are being pushed into a corner in their senior years.

Another thing that happens from time to time—it has been raised with us a couple of times—is when people say, “Mum, move in. You can have a granny flat down the back”, and all of a sudden it does not work and they go to move but mum’s granny flat that she has paid for is on the title deed of the people she is having the argument with. That becomes another problem. People see that as just an argument in the family, but to me that is abuse at its highest. People should not be caught up in those sorts of things. They think it is a good idea at the time; I am sure other members have heard similar stories. The South Australian Attorney-General’s Department has agreed to undertake research and evaluation surrounding the establishment of a national register for further consideration of the matter. We will watch what South Australia does, and if we can learn from it, why not?

We should also be looking at educating people such as general practitioners, lawyers, police and banking staff so that they can better identify these sorts of issues. This is dear to my heart. It certainly has not happened in my family, but I have seen it across the board. We should acknowledge the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre, which is dealing with this at the coalface. It is an important group that is leading the way on the issue for other areas. I would like to defer to the director general, and probably to Scott who has had a lot to do with it over time.

[7.50 pm]



**The CHAIR:** Minister, I have just noticed you have taken six minutes and 32 seconds. Is there anything additional that you need to add?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I think we need another two or three minutes to hear from the people at the coalface.

**Mr G. Searle:** We currently fund three particular things in this area that we are looking at on an ongoing basis. The first is the Older People's Rights Service, which the minister referred to, and the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre, which we fund to around \$250 000 a year. The other is the elder abuse hotline, which is run by Advocare; again, that gets significant funding each year from the department. We have also made grant funding to Advocare to produce an elder abuse protocol with guidelines for actions, and to conduct workshops to inform stakeholders of the updated guidelines. The minister will also host an elder abuse awareness summit next month. So a range of things are actively happening and are funded by the agency now.

**The CHAIR:** If I can just intervene. The minister said that South Australia is doing a register. What is it a register of—powers of attorneys or enduring powers of attorneys or wills? What is it a register of?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I am in discussions with the Attorney General on relevant amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act 1990. That has been an internal discussion, and we are trying to work through that. I will again defer to Scott who has been doing a lot of work in that area.

**Mr S. Hollingworth:** Yes, a lot of work has been done at the national level on elder abuse, and we are co-chairs with the commonwealth in that work. The work is focused on a range of things. One that is really important is to agree on the definition of elder abuse, because there is not an agreed definition anywhere in Australia at the moment. That means that when services are being designed to meet those needs, we are not quite sure who we are talking about. That work is being undertaken at the moment. The other piece of important work is looking at the prevalence of elder abuse. Although there are assertions around how common and prevalent it is, there is actually very little evidence and statistical data available to help us understand the magnitude of the issue. Once again working with the commonwealth, we will be looking at commissioning research to undertake the identification of the spread of elder abuse.

In relation to enduring powers of attorney, that is an election commitment of the government and we are working with the commonwealth at the moment about the opportunity to introduce a register of enduring powers of attorney. That is very important because quite often when people are helping other people make decisions, they are not aware that an enduring power of attorney is in place, so sometimes the advice does not take sufficient account of other views.

We are also looking at opportunities to undertake education campaigns. Once again, these are Australia-wide initiatives to promote awareness of elder abuse—for example with doctors, GPs, lawyers and community workers—so that they can help identify when elder abuse is happening. The role of banks is also very important, because sometimes of course people turn up and draw money out of their relatives' accounts. We are working with the Australian Bankers' Association on opportunities banks might have to better identify elder abuse. Indeed, the protocol that we funded with APEA that the minister referred to is a resource intended to go out to the community sector and to those working with seniors more broadly to help them identify elder abuse and the proper steps they should take to perhaps alert authorities to that or to intervene in decision-making in some other way.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** I believe there is an upper house committee looking at elder abuse, which obviously the departmental people would be aware of.

**The CHAIR:** The minister gave an answer earlier, member for South Perth, that the department gave a submission to that committee.

**Mr J.E. McGRATH:** Okay.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I may not have heard the director general correctly. Will a number of elder abuse forums be held across the community? Is that the case? Did I hear that correctly? It was something like that. Is some sort of public consultation on elder abuse being undertaken over the next few months? I think that is what the director general said. I just want to clarify the comment.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** We will certainly have a summit on those issues. I will defer to the director general, who has the details.

**Mr G. Searle:** In June this year the minister will host an elder abuse awareness summit. The intention is to bring together a range of community-based experts and academics to discuss the issue of elder abuse awareness, and I think that summit might be happening in this building.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** There was early talk of having it here to give it impetus and importance. But as the director general has said, we could not fit the amount of people in who are interested in this area. We want to make sure

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that it is a showcase, to say the least, and that the community starts to understand what we are talking about. We have to get away from the mindset of elder abuse being physical abuse; it is more than that. That is what we will be working on.

[8.00 pm]

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I am keen to know whether the minister would look at doing something like that in a regional context. For example, per capita, Mandurah, in my district, has the most seniors. In a regional setting, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton would be similar. Would the minister look at Albany? Does the minister or the department anticipate doing something similar in a regional context?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I understand what the member is saying—I really do—but let us get past the first one before we make any promises. Yes, we understand the seniors' population in Mandurah is higher than the national average. Of course, people cannot come down from Kalgoorlie just for that sort of program or might not be able to get on the program. I would certainly be willing to look at it in the future.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the fifth line from the bottom of the table at the top of page 416, "Seniors Cost of Living Rebate—Parameter Update". What is a parameter update?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The department has updated its modelling to reflect a declining population, increasing workforce participation and a decline in the CPI from previous estimates. The spending changes reflect this forecast adjustment to the seniors' cost-of-living rebate.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What has changed to constitute this parameter update?

**The CHAIR:** I think he just answered that, member.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** It is due exactly to what I was saying about the increasing workforce participation of seniors. In other words, they are working for longer. There is a decline in CPI from previous estimates when we thought the way forward would be higher, but it has flattened out a bit, and the population is declining. Do not forget we have lost about 50 000 or 60 000 people out of Western Australia in the last one and a half to probably two years. That is reflected in the need for the finances to be adjusted across the board. The director may want to say some more.

**Mr G. Searle:** They are the relevant points. The overall number is going up. No individual is going to get less money as a result of these changes. It is recognising the demographic changes that have occurred and the changing CPI, and factoring them into the forward estimates. That is all that number reflects.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** In the out years of 2021–22, there is quite a change. Can the minister explain that?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I defer to the CEO. I think he has already answered the question, but he might want to repeat it.

**Mr G. Searle:** It is the same set of figures. It allows for adjustments in the population in that age cohort and our estimation of the percentage of who will be working. When they are factored in together, they are the numbers we come up with.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I refer to "Payments to Individuals" at page 427 and the table under "Delivery of benefits and concessions administered by the Department including the Seniors Card."

**The CHAIR:** Where on that page?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** It is the first table.

**The CHAIR:** It is under "Efficiency Indicators".

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Is it "Average Management Cost per Seniors Card" under "Efficiency Indicators"?

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** That is right. Last year, I note that a number of cuts were made to rebates for WA Seniors Card concession holders. Does the minister anticipate any further similar cuts in this budget or in the forward estimates?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I do not. In saying that, I understand where the member is coming from. I do not see the 2017–18 rebates changing at all. I see that remaining as we move forward. We will honour what is there, of course. There is always a temptation to make reductions in any budget, but I have stood my ground and certainly made it very clear that the seniors have done their bit in trying to repair the problems you created.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** Me?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No; you were not there, but the bloke next to you was.

**The CHAIR:** He was, but he was in a different role, minister.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 22 May 2018]

p158b-168a

Mr John McGrath; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Mark Folkard; Mr Zak Kirkup; Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr John Carey; Mrs Lisa O'Malley

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**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** In all honesty, a thin slice has sought to be taken from every budget. But, to make it fair, the seniors have done their bit and I do not see any changes to that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I take the minister to “Royalties for Regions Fund” in the fourth line under the statement of cash flows on page 442. What work has been or is being done to identify other projects in the minister’s portfolio that could be funded by royalties for regions?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Royalties for regions is not entirely my area, it is that of the Minister for Regional Development. I can tell the member that I am out there trying very hard to identify anything that is available along those lines. Any request for royalties for regions funding has to go back to the other minister’s office.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 8.08 to 8.13 pm*