

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Libby Mettam; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr John Carey;
Ms Simone McGurk

MINISTER FOR HOUSING — PERFORMANCE

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Minister for Housing to address the raft of failures in his portfolio that have pushed Western Australia into a housing crisis.

This is a serious matter. It does not matter where I travel to around the state, there are housing issues. It is a very challenging conversation to have at the best of times, but it is even more challenging in the current environment when we can point to a government that has had an enormous budget surplus at its fingertips, not just once, but twice. I say that in the context of the fact that we have not only a housing crisis, but also a health crisis. More and more people in this state are struggling to make ends meet. I ask the government: how is it that we have quite a number of union members outside Parliament today, rallying for a fair go from a Labor government with a \$5.7 billion surplus? My office overlooks the front steps of Parliament House, and I wonder whether Minister Johnston would care to reflect on the response he got when he addressed those members. One specific member spoke about how she is struggling on her wage to make ends meet to pay her rent, despite the fact that two family members live with her and pay rent to assist. How is it that we are at this point in a state such as Western Australia, which has so much wealth at the fingertips of the state government, but we have massive union rallies and more and more people struggling to make ends meet? We have a health crisis, examples of which the shadow Minister for Health has relentlessly brought to this house, yet we continually get told by the Minister for Health that there is nothing to see here. How is it that we have this challenge?

I think that the union members outside Parliament House today who are already disillusioned—so much so that they have taken time off work to come and express that dissatisfaction—would have been doubly disillusioned when they saw the front page of today's paper. Imagine what they thought when they woke up today and saw that front page with the Premier heading into an intimate soiree with business chief executives to taste wine worth \$1 000 a bottle. That is a far cry from what these workers and the people who we are talking to on the ground are asking for consideration of. It is not a good look. The Premier may say that he is entitled to meet with any number of people in his role, and that is right. But the perception at the moment is that this Premier; Treasurer has a significant amount of funding available to his government, and his priorities are wrong when it comes to looking after people on the frontline—those essential workers and the people who deliver government services, who they regularly stand up in this house to talk about and praise. They receive praise without reward, without adequate remuneration and without the government understanding that these are difficult times in Western Australia for many people due to cost-of-living increases. This government chose not to provide relief through a whole raft of levers that it could pull in its state budget to make people's lives slightly easier. We have a dichotomy of views between what the Premier thinks is appropriate and what everybody else thinks is appropriate. We call that tone deaf. Five and a half years in and I think the Premier has lost touch with what people on the ground are thinking.

It is very challenging. Reports from organisations such as Foodbank and other charities like Anglicare talk about how, for the first time, they are seeing wage earners, who have a job and money, being unable to earn enough to put food on their table and pay their rent. Those statistics are coming directly from the charities that people are turning to for help, because they cannot afford both food and rent. Mark Glasson is the CEO of Anglicare, who we have heard from pretty regularly over the past 12 months and right through the COVID pandemic. I would say it is one of those organisations that sees the people who are struggling the most in our community. He is saying that Anglicare is seeing a new group of people emerging who are seeking support for bills and food assistance whom it never would have ordinarily seen in the past. I keep asking everybody to put that against the fact that we have a state budget with a significant surplus. Organisations are trying to deliver support and services to more and more people who are falling through the cracks, yet this government has the wrong priorities in making sure that we start to reduce the number of people who have to turn to Anglicare and Foodbank. Mark Glasson, the CEO of Anglicare, reports that one in six people who come to Anglicare has a mortgage, and that would have been absolutely unheard of only three or four years ago.

I ask members to contrast that with the commentary that we hear regularly from the Premier around the fact that our state is the best place to live. He is right; we are all from Western Australia and we love living here. We want more people to move to Western Australia, and we want more people to come and fill the jobs that we know exist and to provide those much-needed skills in businesses and sectors that are really struggling at the moment, but there is nowhere to live. It matters not whether they are seeking a private rental or seeking to purchase a home, if they are one of those people who is waiting on an ever-growing social or community housing list or they are a government worker in regional Western Australia; it is more and more difficult to find appropriate, affordable housing, or any housing at all. The houses are simply not available. The social housing list that we talk about continues to grow.

There were 13 795 applicants—that is applicants, not people—in June 2019, and, as I understand it, the number is now sitting at around 19 000 applicants.

Work done by the opposition to reveal how many houses remain in the system shows that a significant number are vacant at a time when people desperately need a roof over their head. That picture of a boarded-up vacant house that is not being turned back into housing stock and being made available is a really challenging discussion to have with constituents when they know that it is a public housing house sitting vacant in their community. There would be people in overcrowded houses not only in my electorate—I know because they come into my office on a fairly regular basis—but also right the way across the state who say, “I know that’s a public housing house. When is that going to be available so that I don’t have to live in a house with two or three other families?” Overcrowding is a serious issue, and they are the ones who have the option to do that. Then we have people who are couch surfing or the people who are turning up, in my electorate, to Share and Care Community Services and it is forced to send them away with a swag or a tent, and not because it wants to or because that this is its procedure. Quite often we see people living under the train lines in communities like Northam or Narrogin, and I have to say that that is not something that I have seen since I have been a member of Parliament from 2008. That has become more and more prevalent in communities in which we would not normally see that kind of street presence. It is challenging when we know that there are vacant houses.

A discussion last week between the shadow Minister for Housing and Nadia Mitsopoulos on ABC radio highlighted the Beaconsfield complex, where approximately 60 homes are boarded up and vacant, with 18 waiting to be demolished and 40 undergoing refurbishment. We have a similar situation in a number of different communities, whether it be Albany, Geraldton or Carnarvon, which we have raised on a number of occasions. I will not miss the opportunity to put on record what we discovered in Carnarvon, because this is a town struggling with overcrowding and its housing. There is a crime issue, despite what the police minister continues to say to this house, much to the dismay of the community leaders and people in Carnarvon dealing with that dysfunction and crime on a daily basis. As of 31 July 2022, there are 308 social housing properties in Carnarvon, of which 43 are vacant undergoing or awaiting to undergo maintenance and repairs, and two will be demolished. For the record, I go back to the point that this is all wound into the crime and dysfunction in some areas of the state. Some of those houses have very nearly been finished in their refurbishment, but have been broken into while they are being refurbished and damaged again. The builders, who are becoming increasingly frustrated, and also quite concerned for the safety of the people breaking in while those refurbishments are underway, are raising these concerns with the Department of Communities and local government. This is a real outcome of the crime issue in that community, and I would dare say that that is replicated across the northern parts of the state.

We have been into communities like Newman, Roebourne, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, and we know a combination of private sector and public sector houses have been boarded up and left. I am sure that the minister will talk about those that have been transferred across, but 43 houses in Carnarvon are vacant and undergoing maintenance or repairs. It is a serious challenge. I again contrast this statement with the fact that we have a police minister saying that there is no crime issue in Carnarvon, yet we have builders who are trying to do the right thing and get that housing stock back into the mix being constantly plagued by break-ins and really dreadful behaviour. It is simply not good enough.

I move on to the other aspect. We talk regularly in the housing sector about the supply chain and the different types of housing required to have a healthy supply chain—not only to build a house, but across the variety of housing options that we have as a state available to people so that wherever an individual is at in their journey, there is opportunity for them to have safe and affordable housing. Worker accommodation has been one of those issues we have raised again and again. I have to say that the government has been announcement heavy and action light in this. We have finally seen an announcement for the allocation of a tender for Kalbarri, 18 months after a commitment was made and the devastation we saw in the community as a result of cyclone Seroja. Exmouth, as I understand it, is still waiting.

When one meets businesspeople up there, they are at the end of their tether because they are unable to attract workers into the community to allow them to offer the tourism experience or business service that they desire, because there is simply nowhere for them to house their employees. If they are lucky enough to find someone who will move to work in Exmouth, there is nowhere for them to provide housing. In fact, most businesses have had to buy or purchase homes, which takes them out of the mix, to house their workers. It is really having an ongoing and very detrimental impact on people’s mental health. I do not say that lightly. It is evident when one talks to business owners who are forced to close their doors because they simply cannot stretch their staff any further. If one thinks about that in contrast with what this government is asking people to do—namely, to visit these communities—and the impact this has on the tourism experience in the jewels of the crown when one thinks about Exmouth, Coral Bay and places like Broome.

I think we are doing ourselves a disservice by not treating this with more urgency. That is our criticism. This was a commitment from the government at the 2021 state election, and we saw this government move at pace to bring in legislation to remove regional voices from Parliament when it saw it had opportunity to reform or slash voices in the Legislative Council, but when it comes to being able to deliver something to have a real impact on the lives of people living in regional WA right now, the government has dragged its heels for at least 18 months before we have seen an announcement—to the great frustration of the local government. That has been directly reported back to me.

We welcome the fact that there has been an announcement in Kalbarri. We wait on news for Exmouth. For the record, the request for inquiries—or ROIs—for this project were not invited until December last year. Before we broke for the winter recess in June, the minister revealed that he had to go back and ask for a second round of submissions. I do not know exactly why that was. I can surmise that perhaps the government was not offering a good enough deal or could not make the dollars work in that community. I am happy to be corrected by the minister when he stands up. It has meant that it has delayed responding to that again. I really call on the minister to provide an update on where this project is up to. If he has not done what I have done on numerous occasions, he should go to Exmouth and meet businesspeople who are thoroughly shattered and exhausted and needing additional staff, but have nowhere to put them. It is becoming an enormous problem for that community.

I heard the minister talk about the developments in Kalgoorlie, and, again, these were commitments made prior to the last state election—running into the election. It is all very well to stand in his house and blame the local government, but I think it is a low blow to do so. From our perspective, we have been fully supportive since day dot of the Pringle Village and the project expansion. We worked closely with Masonic Lodge homes when we were in government to deliver that first round, and it did a wonderful job. Since then, it has been talking to government for a significant number of years to try to deliver that second tranche, which it will now have to deliver in an overheated market in which it is very difficult to deliver such projects. Had the government acted with more haste on such projects, perhaps we would have seen more opportunities for those aged-care independent living villages for residents who are currently waiting to move out of their bigger homes and free up housing stock within Kalgoorlie or the goldfields by going into this new facility and we may have seen a better outcome. Kalgoorlie is another one of those communities suffering from a lack of accommodation when workers they so desperately need are attracted.

It is sad to say for people in regional communities that there has been very little investment in Government Regional Officers' Housing properties across the state over the last five years. Some of this accommodation is completely substandard, whether it be from GROH or the Department of Health. I think it is interesting, but I have never understood why the Department of Health insists on managing its own housing stock when it cannot manage to deliver the health services that it is supposed to. It grimly holds on to every piece of housing that it has, instead of putting it into the pool managed for all police, nurses and community service workers that GROH manages in regional communities. Nurses quarters in particular, in various different parts of the state, are still operating on those single-room nursing quarters with very little security.

I had someone who came and spoke to me, terrified, about the fact that they had been broken into, and that was in a regional community with only one security guard. It is simply not good enough to have so little support in an isolated community when multiple people could turn up on someone's doorstep. Not only is the security of our essential workers important, but also the quality of the housing. We do not have to go far to find examples of communities that need investment to bring them up to standard.

Quite often local governments in regional communities are forced to be the provider of last resort, and they will enter into an agreement with the department on a long-term lease. I have seen so much nitpicking going back and forth over whether or not the games room is big enough or whether a hallway or a third bedroom has been built to the specifications. A new build in a community would add to the housing stock, so to me it seems remarkable that local governments would be put through that when they are actually building the housing stock that the state government should be responsible for. It is challenging. When local governments do not have the bank balance or the capability to fund those properties, we see housing shortages for teachers, nurses and police officers in some cases.

I spoke about safe accommodation for government staff, and I think that is really important, particularly in the more remote communities in the north of the state, with vulnerable staff and only a minimal police presence. That is a particularly challenging prospect for an agency nurse travelling and doing shiftwork, and it would not make recruitment easy for the health department. They all talk. As anyone who speaks to the police about this will know, the first question they ask about a posting in regional WA is, "What's the standard of the housing, and what does the police station look like?" Nurses are very similar. They know exactly what the facilities look like. It cannot be something that the government shirks, but, again, the government is found wanting when it comes to delivering what should be a priority for the community.

I spoke earlier about the fact that the government seems to be big on announcements but lacking on delivery. I draw the house's attention back to the Department of Communities, which had a COVID-19 stimulus budget of around \$319 million to spend on social housing initiatives across two to three years. Between July last year and March this year, it spent \$6.42 million, according to the WA Auditor General's report. A significant amount was allocated to increasing the amount of social housing available, yet it was significantly underspent. In fact, the budget for refurbishing 1 500 existing social houses was \$142 million, of which only \$2.8 million—or two per cent—was spent within the time frame that the Auditor General was looking at. There was \$80 million allocated to maintaining 3 800 regional social housing properties, including in remote Aboriginal communities, but only four per cent had been spent, which equated to about \$3.1 million. That was during a period when there were around 15 000 people on the public housing waitlist and the average time for public housing was roughly two years.

We get big announcements and big amounts of money from this government, but when it comes to delivery, we do not see the money hitting the ground. The shadow Minister for Housing has made the point very clearly that the minister should start reporting on exactly what has been delivered, as opposed to what has been promised. What we have seen in other projects by this government is that it makes the big announcement and then has to come back and say, "Sorry; that's been delayed. We haven't been able to deliver that." There is no point in the government standing up and talking about how passionate it is about the sector and about the projects if it is not getting the dollars on the ground and achieving the outcomes for the community.

My colleagues are going to cover other issues of concern within the portfolio, but by any measure this minister is failing to deliver on the promises that his government is making. As I said, he needs to start coming clean and talking about what has been delivered as opposed to what has been promised. We have heard that again and again. We can all read the media statements. It would seem that ministers in this government have taken to reading their media statements and ministerial statements when responding to Dorothy Dixers in question time, instead of using question time appropriately. There is more than enough information on the record about the announcements that are made and the spin that comes with how great it is that we are all very passionate about delivering an outcome, but intentions and passion are not good enough when the money is not actually hitting the ground for what should be a key priority for a state government of any persuasion. If government does not have safe and affordable housing, then it is failing the people of Western Australia or whatever state it is responsible for. That should be the number one issue. Anything else is just spin and rhetoric.

I talked about GROH just now. One of our first priorities when we came to government was to partner with the Department of Housing through royalties for regions to upgrade housing stock across the state. I suspect that was the last time any of those houses saw a lick of paint, an upgrade or a new build, and that was a long time ago. We are talking about 2008 and 2009, when we came to government. I vividly remember visiting the housing of police, teachers, nurses and other hardworking government employees, only to be completely appalled, when we were in opposition last time around, about the state of housing. It was one of the key things that we took to government to try to deal with. I put on record that at that point in time we were coming out of a Labor government that also had a budget surplus but had chosen to sit on it instead of spending to invest in key public infrastructure. Mr Ripper at the time was more focused on the surplus than on providing appropriate housing for essential workers in regional communities.

I heard the minister talk about opening up new land in towns, particularly those that are impacted by the cyclical nature of mining in the north west. I have to point out that when we came to government and did the same thing, we were criticised. We were criticised again in 2013 by the incoming member for Pilbara, who was very opposed to the way that we intervened in the market in the north west, in Karratha and Port Hedland, to try to get housing prices under control and open up new land so that people could afford to live appropriately in those communities. The member for Pilbara was very vocal on that front. Again, nothing had been done by the previous Labor government to accommodate what was a really big challenge in those communities, and we see the same problem all over again. It is not good enough.

We ran an aggressive land development program right across the state through LandCorp. Where the market fails, the government has a responsibility to step in. In response to the government's budget this year, which had a significant surplus, the opposition recommended that there should be a long-term regional headworks policy, setting aside \$1 billion over 10 years, to enable businesses to invest in residential developments in regional communities where that market failure exists. That would take the cost of headworks out of the equation so that there is an ongoing pipeline of developments, the private sector and government in partnership, to ensure that we do not see the cyclical approach to investment that we have seen over the last 10 years.

We put forward a long-term investment policy after the state budget and we said that this was something that the government could spend some of the budget surplus on. I think that still has merit and it will certainly be something that we will pursue, because our priority is to deal with preventing these housing lists from blowing out and the rent skyrocketing any further, and addressing those issues with towns crying out for workers' accommodation.

They are the priorities that the government should have but the government is failing on them. The government is failing to address the housing problem whether people live in Beaconsfield, Carnarvon, Joondanna or Jerramungup.

I call on the minister to do better so that we do not have to have conversations with local crisis care providers like Share and Care Community Services, in Central Wheatbelt, which is an organisation that has provided many years of support and is saying that it has never seen it so bad. Do better so that I do not have to have another conversation with the mother of two girls who is currently living in a caravan. I have raised it with the minister. She wants to create stability for her family, who have escaped domestic violence, but she cannot afford to find a house in the town that has given her support and structure. Do better so that people who cannot afford to rent their own home are not forced to couch surf or become homeless. Do better so that the businesses that are the backbone of our communities can actually take advantage of the opportunities that we so often hear about but are falling short on in areas of the state that so desperately need it because they do not have access to the workers or the accommodation they need. Do better so that our state's growth and the opportunities we know exist are not missed, because the housing sector supply chain has failed under this government's watch. We are five and a half years in and we have a massive budget surplus, but all we have is a housing crisis in every single sector along that supply chain. It is simply not good enough.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.31 pm]: Since well before COVID, the members on this side of the chamber have been calling for this Labor government to take serious action on housing, rentals and the homelessness crisis in our state. As the Leader of the Opposition has made clear, the Minister for Housing; Homelessness needs to address these issues with actions and not words. We consistently see press releases and statements from this government. I do not know how many; the shadow Minister for Transport could remind us of how many announcements there were about the Forrestfield–Airport Link opening. I think the government announced the opening three or four times; it delayed it and announced it again. We see stellar announcements about housing but we see poor action by this government.

Let us look at some of the basic facts around housing in this state. As of 31 June 2022, there were 19 070 applicants on the public housing waitlist. That includes families, singles and others totalling 33 563 people on the social housing waitlist. As of 31 July—just a month later—it increased to 19 103 applicants. That is an increase that I will talk a little bit about, but 8 519 people on the list are represented on the priority list. The priority list is not just some list of people who really want houses. I went to the government's website on priority housing assistance. These are people who have been subject to family and domestic violence, people who need to reunite a child with a family, people who are homeless, or people who have a severe and ongoing medical condition caused or aggravated by the housing situation, or, as I suspect in many cases, the lack of housing situation that they are in. This is not an idle statement about priority housing. More than 8 500 people are on the priority waiting list. They are desperate families, many of them single parents and, in particular, single mothers, who are looking for a safe home for themselves and their child. That jump of 33 applicants represents 81 people requiring houses and we can see that this is only going to get worse. We are seeing massive cost-of-living pressures, which this government has contributed to with record increases, well above the rate of inflation, for all government fees and charges over the term of this government. We have seen some pre-election bribes, as I have described them, with pre-election announcements of small amounts of money, but the underlying fees and charges have increased massively for every family in the state. Interest rates are going up. All of this translates into fewer families that will be able to afford housing. We are going to see people pushed out the end and an increase in homelessness because people literally have nowhere to go and will not be able to afford a house. We have seen a substantial increase in priority applications.

Let us just go back in history a little bit. I want to contextualise just how dramatic the increase is under this government. As of 30 June 2018, just after this government was elected, there were 1 437 priority applicants. Under questioning in the other place, the numbers listed show that from 31 July there were 4 212 priority applications. It has gone from 1 437 to 4 212. That is after this government has been in power for more than four years. It has been here and it has had the opportunity to see what the problem is, yet we have seen a dramatic increase. It is a massive failure by this government. That is almost a 300 per cent increase in priority public housing applications. It is a massive increase under this government. As I said, this is a government that is big on announcements but absolutely appalling on performance. A year in, a new government can blame the previous government; two years in, it may be able to blame the previous government; three years in, it must start to own the problem; but four or five years in, it is the problem. That is an unacceptable situation. Those numbers actually tell the real success or, should I say, the lack of success of this government. If this government cared, it would do more. It would have done more and it would be doing more now. I will not go through all those numbers.

The minister complains about statements about whether we think he or the government cares, but what is quite clear by performance is that they do not. The minister might say he cares and express those opinions with some vigour, but the reality is that actions speak louder than words. It is no surprise that the housing waitlist has blown out so dramatically under this government. We know that ever since the Labor government was elected in 2017, it has

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sold off public housing. As I have said in this place a number of times, the government sold over 1 300 public houses in its first term. Government members come into this place and boast about the number of houses they have replaced. I want to go into a little bit of discussion about that. The government says it has actually replaced that with 600 homes, through new housing and purchases. Let us dwell on that for a second. What does it mean when the government is actually purchasing existing homes for social housing? Yes, that increases the public housing stock—it recovers it, at least, back to some level from before—but the government is simply removing other homes that are available for other people. We know there is an enormous housing crisis in this state, so that does not solve the problem. It is robbing Peter to pay Paul. It simply moves the problem somewhere else.

Mr J.N. Carey: Can I ask one question? Why is Hon Steve Martin calling for an increase in stock quality?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not here to answer for Steve Martin.

Mr J.N. Carey: He's your Liberal colleague.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you for that, minister. I heard what the minister said and I do not need to hear any more.

In this debate, I am talking about the minister's performance and the government's performance. As I said, by purchasing those homes and taking them out of the market, the government is simply pushing the problem somewhere else. That is not solving the problem. The problem will be solved by the government actually getting more houses. Based on the numbers the government has reported, it will not get back to replacing the houses that were sold in its first term by the end of this year. If I recollect the numbers correctly, the minister said that there are 600 more houses and that 400 more, or thereabouts, are due by the end of the year. I do not see how the government can say that it is providing a meaningful response to the problem when that is the case.

One thing we consistently see whenever government members are under pressure is that they get personal; they get nasty. The Premier of the state comes in here and calls members on this side stupid, idiots and fools—gratuitous, juvenile insults—rather than facing up to the real problems and dealing with the issues we face. I have had private discussions with the minister. I have said in this chamber that there are opportunities for social housing. I have been challenged to say whether I would care if there was more social housing in my community. I have made it very clear that I have no issues with that whatsoever. My electorate has 50 per cent more social housing in it than the electorate of Rockingham—the Premier's own electorate—at 3.4 per cent. I have discussed with the minister that I think there is a golden opportunity to redevelop social housing, particularly in the southern part of Mosman Park, and to house more people there. I have no problem with having social housing in my electorate, despite the fact that some members of this place—I am not accusing the minister, but others—have tried to make out that I would somehow have a problem with it. The Labor Party portrays itself as having a social conscience, yet we have seen more social housing sold than replaced under this government.

We see PR spin from the government over substance. Let us talk about the Common Ground project. I and others on this side have raised concerns about that project. On my count—we did a quick search—there have been 15 media announcements by Labor on that project. There were glossy shots of Labor members wearing hard hats and fluoro vests—all of that. There have been 15 announcements, but what do we now hear? The project is on hold. The minister has made much of the fact that he believes opposition members are saying that the government has stopped the project. We have not said that the government has stopped the project; we have said that that project has not started. The minister may want to quibble over the definition of a word, but if the project is on hold, it has been indefinitely on hold.

I will go through a little of the history of that project to see how far it has gone. That project is a priority of this government! The minister said in this place, "You've got to realise it's an overheated market in terms of demand for labour and for builders." The perverse thing about that statement and the minister complaining about that as a cause is that it is other ministers in his government who are competing for the very workforce—the labour pool—that would build those houses. We have the ludicrous situation of a Metronet project that has ballooned out from \$3 billion to over \$10 billion. None of it has been delivered on time. The Auditor General did her report. She looked at 14 projects; seven of them were more than a year overdue. The Forrestfield–Airport Link was 2.5 years overdue, and I assume it will be three years overdue by the time it opens, or something like that. Metronet is billions of dollars over in terms of cost. The Labor government, not content with the fact that it cannot actually deliver the project it promised back in 2016 before it came to office and was its priority once it came into office, and despite the fact that it has now had to push back the commencement date of a number of those projects by a year or more, has announced a \$2 billion project for the Armadale rail line. It is competing for even more labour. I tell you what, Minister for Housing: the Minister for Transport is winning this battle.

This government is prioritising its vanity project of Metronet over public housing. That is what it is doing. It is prioritising not the acceleration but a desperate catch-up on Metronet over public housing, and has committed even more money on another project. Does the government have its priorities where it says they are—that is, with the people? It used to say that, but I do not think it says that much anymore. Labor used to say that it was here for the

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people who were struggling and doing it tough—that the Labor government would stand up for them. What do we see, aside from the minister going to \$1 000-a-bottle wine-tasting events at a billionaire’s house? We do not see this government prioritising public housing over the Metronet project. That is simple. The Metronet project is competing directly for the same labour, outside of a couple of skilled positions, that would go into helping the government build public housing. Make no mistake: when we talk about competition for resources, the government is the biggest competitor. I have had numerous complaints from people in the construction industry that because the government is so desperate to try to recover some face on the Metronet project, it is outbidding the private sector for workers to come into the Metronet projects. This government cannot resile, at any level, from the fact that it has made a conscious point to prioritise the Metronet project over the critical work that needs to be done in public housing.

I have asked a number of questions about housing in this place. I asked a straightforward and important question last week of the minister, hoping to get him to address housing and hopelessness—“housing and homelessness”, I should say, although it is a Freudian slip because many of those poor people do feel hopeless and their lives are in disarray. My questions were about Labor’s 10-year strategy on homelessness and the East Perth Common Ground facility, which has been delayed once again—it is still nowhere after 2.5 years. One would think that there has been ample time to get support for that project and achieve it. In fact, the minister could not provide the details on the social housing that had been provided, although he subsequently provided that information, in part, in response to a Dorothy Dixer asked by one of his colleagues. I note that what we again see from the minister is that rather than facing up to the issue, he wants to get in there and criticise my colleague in the other house, the very good shadow Minister for Housing. We saw a little bit of that a moment ago. The minister is the minister. He has his hand on the tiller. He is the person in charge. Rather than focusing his efforts on someone in the other place, maybe he could focus more on this issue.

The Common Ground project was a key part of the Labor government’s response to homelessness in our state. It is a significant problem. On 15 July 2020, Minister McGurk announced in a press release —

... the location for the new supported housing ... along with additional funding for homelessness services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The minister added —

People with complex needs will be housed and supported alongside low-income earners in the purpose-built Common Ground complex, which will include at least 70 self-contained apartments.

The press release continued —

The East Perth facility is one of two Common Grounds funded as part of the record \$71.7 million State Government funding boost for homelessness services announced in December to support the implementation of WA’s first 10-year strategy on homelessness.

[Member’s time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: What did we see once again? An announcement of dollars! If the announcement of dollars was achieving things, I would give the government a gold star, but for the announcement of things that have been completed, I am afraid it gets a complete fail.

This project was first mentioned in late 2019. As I said, this was a key plank—not some small, ancillary thing on the edge—of Labor’s so-called 10-year strategy. Here we are, two and a half years in, and it is not even off the ground. That is extremely disappointing. The Premier says that he is alert to the issues. Indeed, in 2019 he said —

Safe and stable accommodation is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of people in our community.

It is so fundamental that the Premier is prioritising the Metronet project over public housing. If it was truly a key plank of the Labor Party, that project would be underway; in fact, it would be well on the way to completion.

It is not a surprise that this is a challenge for the Labor Party. The challenge for Labor in this state sits at the feet of this government. At the start of the pandemic, I said in this place that it is prudent that the government takes action to prevent general travel into the state, but it should not prevent critical workers coming into the state. I outlined that those critical workers were in the horticulture and construction industries. That was at the start of the pandemic. But for the sake of politics, the government played the game of saying, “We’re going to be tough. We’re going to keep everyone out” and it kept out those critical workers. I was never critical of the government for keeping out people who wanted to come to the state to attend a birthday party or as a guest of a wedding, but it was readily apparent that keeping those critical workers out of the state would lead to harm. I said that when this pandemic is over, we would see critical impacts on the state’s economy because the government had kept out those key workers. It sits at the feet of the government that those critical workers were not here to build houses and now we have an exacerbated housing crisis.

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Homelessness is a distressing issue. As a small aside, one of the criticisms I have heard from members on the other side of the chamber is that opposition members repeat stuff from *The West Australian*. I can tell members how grateful I am for the good work that *The West Australian* does in bringing forward issues.

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I can tell members how grateful I am, government Whip, that *The West Australian* does that good work and that it is holding your government to account, and no more so than in an excellent article by Rebecca Le May of Sunday, 17 July 2022. I will go through a bit of that article, but I thank *The West Australian* for the good work that it is doing to hold this government to account. I will happily quote from *The West Australian*. When it raises issues, I will happily bring those issues into this chamber and challenge ministers and others on those issues. If members opposite think that it is some kind of defence to criticise us because we use *The West Australian*, they are completely wrong. I gladly use it as a reference because it raises issues that are important to this state.

The Rebecca Le May article to which I referred is titled “Perth homeless crisis: Piece by piece approach as government, councils scramble to tackle surging crisis”. It contains some awful stories, including that of Elaine, who became homeless after her grandparents, who raised her, had died and then her boyfriend attacked her with his steel-capped boots. She now travels with only her footy boots and some everyday clothes and sleeps out in the street. She does not have a place to stay. Many members in this chamber tell me that they care about these things, but that poor lady is in a desperate situation. She has been subjected to violence and abuse and has to sleep on the streets. Members all know that being out on the streets can be a threatening situation for anyone, but it is even more so for women.

It is interesting that often in this chamber, the Minister for Housing seems more concerned about his own reputation. On a couple of occasions at least, he has come into this chamber and said that I claimed that he had caused 100 homeless deaths on the streets of Perth. That is completely untrue. For the sake of the record, I will read out the tweet that referred to what the shadow Minister for Housing, Hon Steve Martin, had said.

The tweet said —

@SteveMartinMLC, is correct when he says the housing & homeless situation in our State is an emergency.

With 100 homeless deaths in WA, it's time for @WALabor to ditch their rookie Housing Minister and replace him with someone capable of fixing his mess

Mr J.N. Carey: Member for Cottesloe, you are quoting the wrong tweet. I have got it right here.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am quoting the tweet here.

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Minister! You will get your opportunity —

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: No, no, no! Minister!

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, I call you to order for the first time. If you are not careful and you continue behaving like that, you will not get the opportunity to respond. Leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

We will find out whether that was the tweet the minister was referring to, but certainly when we did a search on it, that was the only tweet we could find in relation to that matter.

Comments have been made in this place about Boorloo Bidee Mia. Hon Steve Martin has been asking the question: how many Aboriginal people are housed in that facility? The facility was announced as being a major solution because it has 100 beds. What have we seen? The facility opened last August and, in early June, it was able to accommodate only 56 Aboriginal people. It is excellent that 56 Aboriginal people had the chance to be housed in that facility, but we understand that somewhere around 60 or so is the maximum number of people who can be accommodated safely in that residence. I understand that people who are homeless often have complex histories and that it is a difficult environment, but why say that the facility is suitable for 100 people when it seems apparent that it is not? I am happy for the minister to tell me that it can take 100 people but, once again, saying that it can accommodate 100 people sounds like spin because, in fact, it cannot. That means that somewhere around 40 places in that facility are not usable, which means that we do not have adequate facilities and we need more.

Earlier this week, the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations of the other place held a hearing for its inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia. The inquiry heard impassioned pleas from Shelter WA for more government funding. It said that service providers are struggling and

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not getting enough to cover rising costs when contracts are rolled over. I warned that homeless people would suffer. I will read a bit of testimony that was covered very well in an article by Rebecca Le May in *The West Australian* of Monday, 15 August 2022. She cares about this issue and is bringing it to light. The article covers some of the quotes from the hearing and states —

“At the moment, the funding of homelessness services is not sustainable”, chief executive Michelle Mackenzie said.

There’s a 12.2 per cent gap between what they get with their contract and the cost of delivering the service, so that’s just woeful.”

That means that sector cannot provide the services they need. She added —

“And we know already that two out of three requests for accommodation can’t be met. So it’s going to get worse.”

In an article by Rebecca Le May in *The West* online on Wednesday, 17 August, she again covered this issue. The article is titled “State Government cuts funding to Homeless Healthcare’s Highgate clinic”. I will not go through the whole article, but I want to highlight particular sections because, again, it goes to the core of this government and how much it genuinely cares about homeless people and the impact they have on health services. Dr Andrew Davies, the founder of that centre, said about the government —

“They think that they’re saving money ... but they’re going to be spending millions if these people start presenting back to ED like they did in the past, which is highly likely.

“I just can’t fathom why they would do this.”

The article continues —

An analysis of the effectiveness of the clinic by Notre Dame University showed that before visiting the clinic individual patients’ hospital bills were costing governments a staggering \$13,100 a year.

Over that time, emergency department presentations, inpatient admissions and inpatient ‘bed’ days rose—a finding in-line with the fact health deteriorates the longer people remain on the streets.

But comparing their hospital use between the first and third years of going to the clinic, ED presentations dropped by 40 per cent, ambulance arrivals fell by 29 per cent, inpatient admissions sank by 41 per cent and admitted inpatient days were halved.

One Hub patient costs just \$831 a year—less than a single emergency department presentation costing \$922.

What do we see from this government? We hear lots of spin and statements about how it cares about the people.

Ms C.M. Rowe: Who was your Minister for Homelessness? That’s right. That’s how much you cared about it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not soliciting interjections from the member for Belmont.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms C.M. Collins): Members, the member for Cottesloe does not want interjections.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The government claims that it cares, but it will cut a service that will see homeless people suffer worse health outcomes and the hospital system that is already overloaded will be more overloaded with unnecessary hospital presentations. That is the record of spin over actual action. In this case, the government has cut funding to that critical service. The government talks in this place about how much it cares about Indigenous people in this state.

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Belmont!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

One in three homeless people are Indigenous people.

Ms C.M. Rowe: Don’t go there.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Your lack of care —

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Belmont!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The government’s lack of care for homeless people translates into a lack of care for those Western Australians who are suffering most. It is an absolute disgrace.

The previous Liberal government increased social housing by 35 per cent during its term in government and this government has cut it. This government does not care about the issue of homelessness in Western Australia. It does not care about providing the critical housing that is needed for workers in regional Western Australia. Unfortunately,

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I do not have time to go through that in the detail that I should, but housing availability in nearly of all of Western Australia is almost zero.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [5.02 pm]: It does not give me a lot of pleasure today to speak to the motion that the Leader of the Opposition has brought on, but it is very necessary and, quite frankly, needs to be addressed. We keep talking about it, but, unfortunately, as the member for Cottesloe pointed out, every day in question time rather than answering questions, the Minister for Housing deflects by abusing members of the opposition. He runs people down rather than addressing the issues at hand.

As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out today, it is quite interesting how the supposed party of the people does not have the backing of the people. Thousands of public sector workers were out the front of Parliament House today demonstrating about their wages. There are shortages of teachers, police and nursing staff and the party of the people has thousands of people from the public sector complaining about wages while there is a \$5.7 billion surplus. The Labor Party claims that it is the party of the regions, but what does it do? The first thing it did when it came to government, despite the Premier claiming again and again that it was not on the agenda, was to bring in electoral reform to reduce regional representation in the upper house. We get mixed messages from the government; but, in fact, the clear message is that this government is not the party of the people and it is not the party of the regions either.

The Leader of the Opposition pointed out that organisations such as Foodbank and Anglicare are coming to the fore and giving this government an understanding of the grief that is happening out there at the coalface.

I am a bit disappointed that the Minister for Commerce just left the chamber, because we have heard that cabinet is considering changing the tenancy laws. If those claims are correct, that will change the balance in tenant and landlord relationships. Potentially, that could reduce even more the number of available houses and exacerbate the homelessness problem. I am very curious. I think that the Minister for Commerce and the cabinet are in a quandary at the moment. There will be real issues if WA tenancy laws are changed, as we have heard. A lot of people will take their rentals off the market and transfer them to Airbnb and all sorts of effects will be created. As I said, I am disappointed that the commerce minister left the chamber because I am very curious to hear about what cabinet has come up with for those tenancy laws.

The member for Cottesloe also pointed out that the government is competing with itself. Metronet is said to have blown out by more than \$6 billion but the government keeps announcing large projects. It competes with the private sector and itself on housing. It cannot deliver.

The member for Cottesloe referred to articles in *The West Australian*. An article in *The Guardian* on 3 August titled “McGowan government says it cannot find builders for social housing developments” states —

A spike in demand and rising costs for material are impeding efforts in Western Australia to address a housing waitlist with almost 19,000 applicants.

...

John Carey, the state’s housing minister, has told a forum organised by Shelter WA “massive cost escalations” are forcing a rethink of how best to provide social housing.

WA’s social housing waitlist has grown to almost 19,000 applications, with the average wait time exceeding two years.

University of Western Australia research this week highlighted an almost 40% increase in the number of homeless people accessing services in WA over the past five years.

It is very interesting that during question time the minister throws around these figures. The article in *The Guardian* said that women sleeping rough were more likely to experience violence and health problems, with more than 84 per cent reportedly being attacked on the street since 2020. The minister criticises Hon Steve Martin, the member for Vasse and the member for Cottesloe when they question his statistics. An article in *The West Australian* on 18 August, just a few days after Minister Carey made his accusations, confirms that the number of people forced to sleep rough or couch surf in the metropolitan area was about 1 000.

It is all right for the minister to fall back on the methodology of the Premier and make personal attacks when answering a question. He never answers the question; he just attacks the person who is asking the question. It is quite disappointing. When I first came here five and a half years ago, we would hear the line that the previous government had left us \$40 billion in debt. We heard that for about four and a half years. The modus operandi of the government has changed. Now it attacks the person. It attacks the Leader of the Opposition. It attacks the Leader of the Liberal Party. That is the answer to the question. It does not worry about dealing with social housing or dealing with statistics.

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I must say that as an elected member who came in here thinking that if I ask a question, I will get an answer, I am fairly disillusioned with what has developed. I am disillusioned by a government that attacks the credibility and the person, instead of just answering the question. That is all we are asking for at times. Anyway, I am slightly going off track.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Hansard will find it very difficult to hear the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am just trying to alert the government to the disappointment of not only the opposition but also Western Australians with the arrogance that has developed. We saw the COVID situation; we all understand that. We all understood people flocking to the polling booths to support the Premier. We saw it, but the arrogance that has now flowed on from that is really quite disappointing. It is disillusioning for people who watch Parliament and see some of those very ordinary answers. I think the Minister for Housing is leading by example with the way he attacks people; he probably comes a close second to the Premier, I must say.

I want to focus today on the regions because as far as I am concerned we are the party of the regions, not the party that has brought in electoral reform and wiped out regional representation in the upper house. We are the party of the regions. I want to refer —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I want to refer to a few of the towns in the electorate of Roe, such as Narrogin where 29 individuals are waiting for single-room accommodation; 32 waiting for two-bedroom accommodation; three seniors waiting for one-bedroom accommodation; and 11 families waiting for three-bedroom accommodation. I also know of one family living in a tent in subzero conditions, and most of those people who are waiting are couch surfing. In Narrogin there are three houses and one unit to rent. There is a three-by-one for \$420 a week. There are two houses for around \$360 a week. There is one house in Cuballing, which is on the main highway and has had numerous renters over the previous years; that is \$230 a week. There are no houses for rent in the surrounding towns. That is an example of one of our regional towns in my electorate and what we are up against.

When we look at some of the other figures from around some of the other towns in the electorate of Roe, it is quite disturbing because after rental searches this week I found not one house to rent in Kojonup, Gnowangerup, Nyabing, Bremer Bay, Cranbrook, Lake Grace, Pingrup, Newdegate and Borden. As I said, Narrogin seems to be the place where we have a handful of places to rent. I mention Bremer Bay, which has zero rentals available but has 40 Airbnb vacancies. This is why I raised the tenancy laws that no doubt your cabinet will be considering now, Minister for Health.

Ms A. Sanderson: What is your position on them?

Ms L. Mettam: Are you taking interjections?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am not taking interjections. I have a lot of things to cover here. My concern is we are seeing a trend unfold; and if the tenancy laws that I am hearing about come into being, we will see an increase in the number of Airbnbs, a decrease in the number of houses available for rent and more people out on the street. I am very interested in the government's position when that comes to be. That is why I am disappointed the Minister for Commerce has left the chamber. They are the sorts of figures that are starting to come out of the regions.

I want to go onto the topic of schools, because back in March this year, the Principals' Federation of Western Australia called out the McGowan government on the limited availability of GROH properties and the president, Bevan Ripp, said that regional schools faced a huge struggle to attract staff amid a dearth of suitable accommodation. The Leader of the Opposition pointed this out in relation to nursing accommodation. We have a similar scenario in accommodation for our teachers, and violence issues in the north west of the state are really putting our nursing and teaching staff off even going there. I have heard some horrific stories of some of the threatening behaviours that have taken place in some of those communities in the north west. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, that is another example in the regions of attempted violence to one of our nursing staff. These are the sorts of issues we have. From 2016 to 2020, the number of available GROH properties shrank by 600 in the regions. The south west and the midwest were the two areas that recorded the biggest drops, as referred to in the *Countryman* of 28 April 2022. The minister knows—I have spoken about it before—that security is a real issue as is the timing of when security is dealt with and building maintenance. Teachers are leaving the sector. I have spoken about it

before. Twenty-five per cent of our graduates have left within five years, and a large part of it is the lack of suitable housing and the grief that they find with security issues and the like in these north west communities and other communities. We have some real headaches there.

I will say one slight highlight was the Nyabing school. A principal has not been able to live in Nyabing; they have had to drive in and drive out for the last few years, so I welcomed the minister's announcement. Especially after the shire and the community took up the reins, I welcomed the minister's announcement that he was going to come onboard and help build a couple of houses for teachers and their principal as well. That was a rare highlight, I would call it, in the GROH space.

I want to highlight some of the other things that are happening in our communities. This is more in relation to our doctors. In somewhere such as Katanning, through royalty for regions we spent over \$30 million on a new emergency department and a new hospital, and we are still having challenges with our doctors and our ED staff having to drive in and out. Our smaller regional towns are looking at \$3 500 a day for a locum to fill the gap. They come in from a larger metro or regional centre. This drive-in drive-out scenario is a real concern and I think there is no two ways about it. Our doctors, our nurses, our police and our teachers need attractive packages to attract them to their towns and bring their families to the towns as well. Some of these scenarios that are now playing out in the space of the emergency regional accommodation are pretty concerning. I know the Minister for Community Services is well aware of the Katanning Regional Emergency Accommodation Centre. It offers three-day stays for up to 20 people a week, as well as assistance in securing safe, long-term accommodation and rentals. But, once again, the housing crisis is limiting its ability to help families find a new home away from domestic violence and abuse. Basically, people have nowhere to go; the centre has nowhere to send people. This is a real challenge because local housing is not available. I congratulate those who work at Katanning Regional Emergency Accommodation Centre. They do a fantastic job. They protect and help out those people suffering domestic violence. They also have a little building to the side, where they can sometimes accommodate the father or the male perpetrator, which allows the mother and the family to stay in their own house.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: They run a valuable service, but what worries me is the delay in housing maintenance. I have brought this up many times with the minister. He likes to deny there is any problem there. This is all about using locals. If I have said it once, I have said it 10 times in here. If we have a house with a tap leaking in Katanning, it should not be maintained from Bunbury, which is a three-hour drive away. We have local plumbers who can walk down the road and fix it; but, no, we have to have this structure in place. It is not on. The government needs to restructure this maintenance regime.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! The member for Roe is not seeking interjections.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct. I am not taking interjections. I do not have enough time for it today.

The government needs to restructure the housing maintenance regime and get locals to fix local issues. It will get its houses back on track much more quickly. It is pretty straightforward.

On a good news basis for our industries, we have quite a few things happening in the great southern. We have WAMMCO International. It is flat out, and a lot of Pacific workers have come in; but, of course, they have taken up a lot of spare housing stock in and around Katanning, Wagin, Woodanilling and Dumbleyung—the towns that provide easy access. It is good we have industry there, but we also have a shortage of housing. We have Ausgold, which is looking at a long-term goldmining operation around the district. It could potentially employ 120 to 150 people. That will also soak up some housing stock. Then, of course, we have the Flat Rocks Wind Farm, which is 35 kilometres from Kojonup. It goes across the Kojonup and Broomehill–Tambellup shires. That will be a massive project, with an investment value of around \$200 million. It has an estimated construction time frame of 18 months and plant operational life of approximately 30 years. The Shire of Kojonup CEO, Grant Thompson, who is very supportive of the project, expects 120 jobs will be created. He said that the shire will have positions for 10 ongoing roles. There will be 120 people looking for accommodation around the region. They will soak up absolutely every accommodation option and then, of course, the shire has those 10 ongoing roles.

I look forward to those industries coming forth over the next few years, but I am worried about the pressure this will create. That is why we need to deal with social housing in our regional towns in a more efficient way. We need to understand that some of our renters are being forced out of the market. We need to understand that on a metropolitan level, the government is competing with itself on these large Metronet projects and other building projects, while at the same time cannot fill its tenders for the likes of the Common Ground facility. This is a real challenge for the minister. I look forward to hearing answers when we ask a question, rather than abuse of members as a defence. What about answering a question that has been asked in good faith?

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Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Minister for Housing! You will have your opportunity to speak in a moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Those people who are on the street, those people who are couch surfing and those people who look to us as members of the opposition to ask a reasonable question and get a reasonable answer are as disillusioned as I am. The Labor Party says it is the party of the people, but looking at the demonstration in front of Parliament House today, I can tell government members that I think they have lost their way. The Labor Party has lost its grasp on being the party of the people. It has lost its grasp on being the party for the regions, as we have seen with electoral reform. I look forward to seeing some good honest answers come up in the weeks ahead.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [5.25 pm]: I rise to support this motion that this house calls on the Minister for Housing to address the raft of failures in his portfolio that have pushed Western Australia into a housing crisis. I want to focus on a range of issues that have been raised with me in the electorate, but I will also touch on some of the broad concerns that have been raised by my colleagues in the opposition and express my support for this valued motion.

This motion comes at a time when the most recent figures show we have 33 600 people on the public sector housing waitlist, which is an increase of over 9 700 people since June 2020 and nearly 1 900 since the start of the year. The average wait time for people on the list is two to three years and over 2 100 applicants have been waiting five years. The figures show a 40 per cent increase in the number of people trying to access public housing. We are faced with a significant challenge—a challenge this government has failed to meet in the housing portfolio.

We know that upon coming into office the McGowan government sold off 1 300 houses, and these have not all been replaced. We know this government is big on announcements and big on promises, but very poor when it comes to delivery. Now it has been in power for five years it is fair to ask about and raise these concerns about a crisis that is happening in this critical portfolio, which is having an impact on so many different areas across the state.

The West Australian today once again highlights issues relating to some of our most vulnerable people, reporting a cut in state government funding for a Highgate medical clinic for homeless people. It is extraordinary to see a cut in funding when there is so much pressure on not only our most vulnerable people, but also our emergency departments. Dr Andrew Davies is the founder of Homeless Healthcare's clinic, the hub. He has been running the hub for some time. More than 1 200 people were cared for last year by the two FTE doctors and the nurses. The hub not only makes a significant contribution to the homeless, but also provides value through the savings related to preventing people presenting at emergency departments. According to the hub's figures, one patient costs \$831 a year, which is less than a single emergency department presentation, which is \$922. In the article, Dr Davies highlights the real value that the hub has provided to the homeless over the last 12 months. The figures also back up the great value it has provided over the last five years. Over five years, there were nearly 41 000 appointments—94 per cent with a general practitioner or a nurse. There was a significant uplift of 42 per cent in the number of patients seen by the hub and a 22 per cent increase in the number of appointments as well. There was also a significant associated cost reduction in the health system associated with the hub. The hub estimates that there was a saving of \$20 000 per person in its first year and \$10 000 for the following three years, and an overall reduction of about 48 per cent in hospital costs as a result of the role it plays in preventing hospital admissions or ED presentations.

It is very fair that the founder of the service, Dr Davies, is so exasperated by the cruel cut that this government has made to such a valuable program, given the obvious value outlined in the "Homeless Healthcare hub evaluation snapshot: August 2022". The impact of this site on reducing hospital use is outlined in the document. The example is given of Greg's experience. The document states —

Greg ... had a history of childhood trauma, family breakdown, early drug use. He first saw HHC on a GP hospital ward round in 2017, at which time he had been homeless on and off for years. Between mid-2016 and 2018 he had 16 ED presentations and 12 hospital admissions ... the latter accounting for 60 inpatient days. Most of his hospital use was associated with alcohol dependence; however, a lengthy admission for a severe lung infection at one point saw him transferred to a palliative ward ... As noted by HHC GPs, homelessness was a stressor that exacerbated his drinking, perpetuating a cycle of hospital use, stress, and deteriorating health.

Support Provided: In the first year after HHC contact, there was considerable liaison between the RPH Homeless Team and HHC GPs to support him with alcohol withdrawal, manage his alcohol and source accommodation.

The document goes on to outline the great outcomes for Greg. He has sustained his accommodation in a semi-supported unit. That example paints a picture of the great value of this service and highlights why it is so extraordinary that the McGowan government has made a cruel cut to the funding of this service.

In my electorate, the affordability and availability of housing has a huge impact on women and children escaping family and domestic violence, with many forced to choose between staying in an unsafe home or facing homelessness. The shortfall in funding for this area hurts our most vulnerable as well as the networks that support them. This is the experience of the South West Refuge centre, which has been running on the same contract for the last seven years. I will give a picture of the demand for accommodation. Since the beginning of this year, 332 individuals have requested accommodation, with 120 provided accommodation and 212 refused simply because nothing was available. That raises some real concerns about people living in cars or seeking other very desperate options. We are told that women are being forced to share accommodation with other women and their children, move into overcrowded environments with family or, even worse, return to the perpetrator. That is a real issue. It is a grave concern that I know the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence is aware of. The other outcome is the other reason why these issues are of such grave concern.

We know that the mobile domestic violence outreach service has supported over 260 women to date. It is a two-year funded program that I understand will end in November this year. There is concern that the program will not be extended. We hope to hear that that program for vulnerable women in our community will be extended, given the ongoing demand we are seeing well beyond the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the obvious shortage of housing.

Housing availability remains an issue around the country. In my electorate, the vacancy rate is about one per cent and more and more people are being caught in housing stress associated with the significant cost-of-living pressures as well. Anglicare WA's chief executive officer, Mark Glasson, is reported as saying —

“In the last 12 months, we’ve also seen a growing cohort of so-called ‘working poor’ employed in insecure or casual jobs, and even those working full-time on minimum wage, struggling to pay the rent.”

That is certainly very evident across the Vasse electorate, with many really desperate families living in cars or with extended family members or friends. We know that the situation is also having an impact on small businesses being able to attract workers, and they have been let down by a supply of housing.

We have spoken in this place before about the Youth and Community Activities Building on the foreshore of Busselton that opened in January 2018. Its opening highlighted a range of issues experienced by our most vulnerable youth. The community has been calling for some investment by the government, along with the local government, to address the homelessness situation in the region. I appreciate that it is much easier to resolve and support these measures if we have an idea of the size of them. That is why, in 2020, the Department of Communities undertook a project to collect data on the extent of homelessness across the electorate. It is disappointing that that project stalled and has now been dropped altogether by the Department of Communities. There is certainly a lot of support in seeing that project continue, and I have raised this issue a number of times with the local government as well because of the vulnerability of not only many of our youth, but also many single women and a range of aged groups, both men and women.

I have touched on the opening of the activities building, which revealed that a number of children were couch surfing or sleeping rough. In 2018, Accordwest opened emergency accommodation at Simon Street, Busselton. This was proposed and planned as a pilot project to house five to six homeless youth. The criteria to stay at the accommodation was that the youths had to be in education or training or have work. As I understand it, this facility was always full. However, I have recently been advised that that trial has finished. The local feedback that I have received is that there is an obvious and real concern about the gap of the provision of youth housing.

In relation to other issues surrounding the local impact of youth homelessness, local housing prices have significantly increased.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: There has been a 5.5 per cent rise in the median house price for the March quarter. According to Joe White, local real estate agent and representative for Real Estate Institute of Western Australia —

“Listings are 21 per cent lower for the quarter and down 42 per cent from the same quarter last year.

This has had a significant impact on the availability of rental properties. I have received some comments about this from local advocates as well. Morwenna Richardson from Anglicare WA raised concerns about the crisis point that the region is facing. She is concerned that people are not just moving to caravan parks; they are couch surfing. Kirsty Watson and her partner, a plasterer, have been living in Busselton for over 12 years and are now calling a caravan park home. But they are very grateful for at least having accommodation. This is now more than ever becoming the new normal for families in not only the region, but also across the state.

Rob Reekie is a local advocate and a coordinator of a team in the region that did some work for the census to put a spotlight on this issue. The census revealed that 250 people were homeless in the City of Busselton, which

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again highlights the importance of data collection as there is real concern that the extent of the issue is much more significant. As I stated before, the Department of Communities had started a data collection project, but that conversation with the City of Busselton ceased in 2020, which is a real concern. The City of Busselton also applied to the Department of Communities for a homelessness fund but was notified that it was not successful.

Our community has stepped up to provide some local support, and I will take the opportunity to acknowledge the Rotary Club of Busselton Geographe Bay. It has invested in a Shelterbag project in response to the real concern throughout the community about homelessness, which impacts vulnerable women and youth in particular. It formed a steering committee with the Combined Churches of Busselton's welfare committee and the City of Busselton to invest in 750 Shelterbags, which required funding of almost \$60 000. They have already started delivering the Shelterbags throughout the community of Busselton. This issue has become prevalent and is of great concern among the community.

The next project that this group is investing in is a free community mobile laundry. The project is still in its planning stages, but it will be available to the countless homeless and vulnerable people who are struggling to make ends meet. A committee of very dedicated volunteers are working on this project to provide laundry services and they hope it will also offer shower services. With the support of key welfare groups and potentially the local government, this project will certainly be of great benefit.

At a local level, the Busselton CafeSmart fundraiser is designed to help raise money for local charities during Homelessness Week and has been very well received locally.

Just Home Margaret River is just outside my electorate. It is a not-for-profit organisation that has been looking at accommodation solutions, advocating for more social housing and crisis shelters for the region. The chair is Naomi Godden, and she has stated —

... John Carey's position as WA's first Minister for Homelessness and a new office recently established raised hopes that the State Government would outline further direct action to address the rising social cost on families in the housing crisis.

“Margaret River has been struggling with housing unaffordability for years, and with the cost-of-living crisis at our door, as well as rising inflation, it is likely more families will become impacted,” ...

She goes on to underline just how desperate this community is, as are many others. This is underlined by the voices of community advocates who are now providing Shelterbags for youth and for single women, in the wake of what they are seeing at a local level. We are also seeing the impacts on local businesses, which are facing challenges in attracting staff from outside the area because of the lack of housing supply. It is also evidenced by the many individuals who are waiting on the housing list—a list that continues to grow under this government. There are myriad challenges.

Dr Andrew Davies of the hub in Perth is exasperated by cuts to funding for a service that was not only helping the homeless in Perth with their health needs, but also reducing the number of people presenting at our emergency departments. I cannot imagine what living on the street would be like. It must be very distressing. It would obviously have a significant impact on the deterioration of one's health, which is why the health hub is so important.

There is a new wave of people experiencing homelessness. I heard from a local, 39-year-old Rebecca, who is one of those desperately needed health workers, juggling work and raising four active children under 18. She was living in a car. It took three life events for her to get into that predicament. Amongst other things, she had the trauma of an abusive relationship and a rental increase that put her new home well beyond her budget's reach. This was a local story reported online by the ABC. It just goes to show how vulnerable the community is when it comes to increases in the cost of living and the lack of support for those who are vulnerable.

That is why we have brought this motion to the house. This government has now been in for five years. It has been very big on promises and very poor on delivery. The issues that I have just captured, many at a local level—family and domestic violence, youth homelessness due to the gap in youth housing, and community groups raising funds for Shelterbags in response to widespread vulnerability—point to a government that has failed in this area. That is why I am supporting this valuable motion brought forward by the opposition.

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [5.55 pm]: I rise to contribute to this motion and aim to breathe some life into the debate and into the chamber, after the opposition almost killed us all with its lack of enthusiasm or commitment to the issue. I do so in the spirit of acknowledging the deep understanding of the Minister for Housing; Homelessness. He commits himself with energy, integrity and enthusiasm to all his portfolios. Indeed, that is the way he has approached all his roles in public life. Prior to entering this place as the member for Perth, as the Mayor of Vincent he was quite reforming and transformational. He has brought to the cabinet a deep understanding of the processes of local government, planning, homelessness and housing and how all those things intersect with each other and require a systemic approach.

I have a deep sense of empathy for anyone who finds themselves in the most awful and devastating situation of not being able to house themselves and, more frighteningly, their children. For a parent to find themselves living with their children in a car, or homeless, is a terrifying and devastating life event, and it can take just one catastrophic event. People can find themselves in that very precarious situation through no fault of their own. It is the Labor government and the labour movement that have championed supporting people and families who are vulnerable. We have done that on the record, both at the commonwealth level and at the state level. It is the Labor government that supports our vulnerable communities, without question. The fact that the Liberal and National Parties have just realised there are vulnerable people is extraordinary. I remember the former police minister in the Liberal government, Liza Harvey, blaming the not-for-profits for homelessness: “What are the not-for-profits doing? They get lots of money.” There is such a deep lack of understanding or even willingness to try to understand the complexity of this issue and the fact that there are many different reasons people find themselves in that place.

When it comes to the context, it is important that we provide context with examples. That is something that this opposition always fails to acknowledge. That is partly because those opposite are faced with every opposition’s worst nightmare. They are down to a raw husk of members on their side. They cannot even muster the numbers to bring a motion to the house; they require the government to support them to do that. The government provides that support, in good grace, to ensure that the good functioning of Parliament goes on. I have been here in opposition when the Liberal and National Parties were in government, and they were not nearly as cooperative as this government and this Leader of the House. The husk of members opposite are faced with, by their own admission, some talented, competent ministers, certainly leading up to the 2017 election; a disciplined caucus; disciplined government benches; and a wildly popular Premier. That was in the Liberal Party’s own report. It is literally every opposition’s worst nightmare, and the opposition is not doing well rising to the challenge. But government members are here and we respect the Parliament and the processes. We will continue to debate and to work and to make sure that we participate appropriately.

It has been a challenging environment in which we have had a pandemic. We have seen a huge number of Western Australians returning to Western Australia, which is a great thing because it has brought people home and reunited families in Western Australia. That has meant that a lot of the people who had invested in private rentals and moved overseas have come back and returned to those private rentals. That is one of the impacts on the private rental market. We have also seen significant supply chain disruptions around the world, and that is particularly and acutely affecting the construction industry. We have seen an increase of up to 50 per cent in the cost of products and essential materials like timber and steel. We have seen a labour shortage, partly because of the construction boom and partly because of some of the measures that we put in place to keep the community safe. Those measures have contributed a small amount to that labour shortage. We have also had market stimulus from the federal and state governments. In 2020, we were expecting economic devastation. The construction and building sector came to us and said, “We need stimulus, stimulus, stimulus. We’re going to be devastated and wiped out. We need to start building homes.” Both the state and federal governments stepped up and provided that significant market stimulus, which helped a lot of first home buyers enter the market.

This government and this Premier kept the resources industry and the construction industry open, despite the bullying from Scott Morrison in Canberra under the former Liberal government and from Clive Palmer. In the short times when we had lockdowns, we kept the construction industry open because we knew that that essential business and work needed to keep going to ensure that people continued working and that we could get houses built. The building industry shut down in Victoria and other places, but we worked constructively with that sector to keep that industry operating safely.

Amongst all that was a confluence of circumstances that contributed to the slowing down of new houses coming online, but we are working with the construction sector to help ease that problem. When the pandemic hit, we were concerned about widespread unemployment and people losing their jobs immediately and for months on end, but that did not happen in Western Australia, to a large extent, because of the measures that we put in place. We were watching what was happening over east and we put in place emergency provisions for tenants and landlords that kept tenants in their homes so they would not be kicked out if they lost their job. We also provided financial assistance to landlords because we know that the private rental sector is a really important part of the housing mix. We have very few levers over the private rental sector. The opposition seems to think that we can somehow control the private rental sector, but there are few levers to do that. It is an important sector and we need people to invest in it. We know that a lot of people have either a single investment property or maybe two investment properties, and they are really important to the whole rental mix. We provided certainty and financial support for both tenants and landlords. In addition, we have provided tenants with support funding, which keeps vulnerable tenants in their homes. We worked with landlords and the commerce department did an outstanding job working with Anglicare to keep families who were under significant financial pressure in their tenancies, because we know that once people lose their tenancy, it is harder to get back in. I am sure that the minister will provide an update, but I think that the initial funding to keep people in their homes was around \$30 million. We also supported them by providing financial

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counselling services, which were cut under the previous government. I do not need to understand the on-cost of people losing their homes; we know that. It is inherent in our belief that we support these people, and that is exactly what we have done. We have had a confluence of challenging issues and we are absolutely committed to increasing our housing stock and our social housing stock. To somehow say that it is up to one minister to fix what is a global crisis is just nonsense. It is ridiculous.

I will respond to the member for Vasse's comments about the 2020 Homeless Healthcare temporary COVID grant. The services the member described are primary healthcare services for homeless people—primary healthcare services. That is well and truly the commonwealth's purview. Like with the many, many things that the last commonwealth government did not do, the states have stepped in and funded that. We saw an issue emerging with the commonwealth government not doing what it should have done and we provided more funding for those services to deliver more primary health care, vaccinations, COVID testing and the management of chronic disease for a very vulnerable community. The federal government refused to even acknowledge that there was a problem, let alone fund it, so the state government significantly funded that primary healthcare service. We provided a six-month grant of \$735 000 and \$317 000 for a transition clinic. That was always a temporary COVID measure, and the coordinator of that clinic is aware of that. The clinic still provides an outstanding service, but this was always a temporary measure. We have also delivered on our election commitment to secure \$3.65 million in funding for the 360 Street Doctor program to operate free medical services in Perth and Fremantle. We provide that health care through Street Doctor. We are investing a record \$2.4 billion over four years to improve the quality of and accessibility to social housing and for homelessness services. Under the Minister for Community Services, we developed and launched the first 10-year plan for homelessness. That is a comprehensive and systemic strategy, because that is what it takes. The member for Vasse is right to say that we can fix one part of the issue but have it shift to another area of government that has to deal with the strain. Therefore, we need a systemic strategy, and that is exactly what this government is doing. That is what the former homelessness minister did and what the current homelessness minister is continuing to do.

The member for Cottesloe is quite fixated on the Centre for National Resilience—the Bullsbrook quarantine facility—that was built by the former federal Liberal government, although it was built too late for the pandemic. That facility has been completed and handed over to the state to use. A huge amount of work has been undertaken to ascertain an appropriate use for that facility. What I can guarantee members is not an appropriate use of that facility is to just scoop up homeless people and put them in there. That is the opposition's solution. It wants to scoop them up and put them in there. It is extraordinary. If solutions were that easy, homelessness around the world would have been solved. There is a complexity of issues. Some people have deep and complex traumas, a mental illness, a chronic disease or drug and alcohol issues, and others have suffered from family and domestic violence. We cannot just scoop them up and plonk them in an isolated facility like a university dorm. It is not like the first year at university halls where everyone pops in and has a roof over their head. The reasons we cannot do that are that the facility is far from shops, services and shopping centres—all the things needed to help support people and integrate them back into the community and into society. In addition, because it is so isolated it is not suitable for any length of time due to the safety risks for young people, children and adults who have endured family and domestic violence, and it is accessible by only a single road in and out. Accommodation services for rough sleepers require wraparound support focused on individuals and the case management of individuals. A blanket cookie-cutter approach cannot be taken to those services. The individuals need health care, mental health care, social support, drug and alcohol services, and their individual needs must be dealt with. It is a complex issue and that is not an appropriate facility. I understand that a simplistic solution is one that the opposition appreciates because of the simplicity on the other side. Opposition members do not listen to answers. They live in a world of alternative facts that they then continue to peddle. One of the alternative facts claimed by the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse—not known for her accuracy in commentary—was that there was around 1 000 rough sleepers in Perth! We have data that is collected by the not-for-profit sector that shows that that is just simply not true, but she was still willing to peddle it outside. Actually, we know from the by-name list data that the number is around 280 in Perth. That is far fewer than the 1 000 that the opposition continues to peddle. The other mistruth, or misinformation, that is peddled by this government in a press release —

Mr R.S. Love: By this opposition.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Sorry, by the opposition, yes!

Mr R.S. Love: At least I'm listening!

Ms A. SANDERSON: I have lost my piece of paper.

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

Mr R.S. Love: You use the same one!

Mr J.N. Carey: It is actually your media release.

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Ms A. SANDERSON: It is actually your media release. Hang on, I might have it. Yes, here we go. It is a media release that was put up today, and removed today, on the LOOP website—full of misinformation. It was about the Common Ground facility, which is going out to tender, and states —

Shadow Housing Minister, the Hon Steve Martin MLC said the project’s cancellation was an insult to the nearly 1,000 Western Australians sleeping rough of WA streets.

There are two bits of misinformation in one sentence. Two things are wrong in that sentence. It is not cancelled and there are not 1 000 on Perth streets!

The next sentence is —

“We have around 1,000 rough sleepers around the greater Perth area who will undoubtedly be feeling less optimistic this Government is looking out for them.

Again, there is more misinformation. What is the greater Perth area? The opposition is shifting the boundaries because it knows that the 1 000 figure is not true. It continues —

“The Boorloo Bidee Mia homeless shelter that was opened last year is also operating below 50% capacity,” said Mr Martin.

Not true! I notice that the opposition took it down, but not in time. There is no quality control going on over there. People make mistakes, but this is constant and consistent misinformation that is peddled.

Another bit of misinformation is that the Leader of the Liberal Party personally blames the Minister for Housing for 100 homeless deaths. He personally blamed him on 10 January 2022—and the opposition calls us grubby! I mean, honestly, members opposite need to have a look at themselves.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms A. SANDERSON: I know that my other colleagues want to make a contribution and, certainly, the current Minister for Homelessness and the Minister for Community Services. I am proud to stand on our record in this portfolio, through what has been an exceptionally challenging time. The state has not seen more challenging times when it comes to delivering housing. This minister has the energy, vitality, integrity and enthusiasm. Most importantly, he has the drive and ability to look at things in a different way and deliver things in a different way and to be innovative and work with other levels of government and other sectors to deliver good housing solutions for our community.

MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing) [6.13 pm]: I rise as the lead speaker to not only address the issues raised by the opposition, but also outline our position, as I have done extensively in this Parliament. I want to address one claim by the Leader of the Liberal Party, which was that we do not care. I actually believe that everyone in this chamber cares about social housing and homelessness. I do not think anyone on any side of politics—the Nationals, Liberals, Labor—does not genuinely care about the most vulnerable people in Western Australia. I just think it is absolutely wrong for the Leader of the Liberal Party to make the claim that I, or the government, do not care. I actually think across politics, and I had a great meeting today with one of the upper house members who does not belong to one of the major parties and we talked about homelessness solutions. In fact, I have always had an open door to any members of Parliament, regardless of their politics, to talk about reform, homelessness and housing projects in their local communities. I have always done that and I will continue to do that.

I want to put on the record that the housing challenge that we currently face is not just a challenge for Western Australia. The opposition makes it appear that it is unique or historically unique to WA, but it is not. When I went to the first ministerial meeting of housing ministers in a very long time, with the new federal minister, Julie Collins, it was clear that Liberal, National and Labor ministers all face similar pressures because of the COVID pandemic. People have returned home to their states because of the skilled labour shortage and the international border closure, which was the right decision by the federal government at the time. More people are returning to Australia and trying to squeeze into skilled labour, which has created overall housing supply issues. On top of that, expenditure started to escalate in the home renovation market because people could not travel overseas, so there was greater demand for trades. There were also deep fears of potential recession. We have to remember that prior to COVID, there were deep fears about the state of the economy. We did the right thing. The Master Builders Association said it was the right decision to provide support to grow housing supply and to support jobs. As the Minister for Health indicated, unlike other states, we did not see a shutdown in the construction industry. Our building bonus grant enabled 27 000 building approvals, 4 000 of which were in the regions. They are being completed, but, obviously, that boom is also creating demand in the trades market.

The other thing we know, because of the tight rental market that all states face, is that the waiting list is connected to the rental market. That is a fact. When the rental market tightens, people start to feel that they would like to apply for public housing. We have to be clear on this: it has fluctuated. In 2010, under the former government, it

peaked at 24 000 at another boom time. It was directly related to the state of the economy and the rental market. As even Hon Steve Martin recognised in the other place only this week or last week, the majority of people on that waiting list are not homeless; they have a roof over their head but they have a preference for social housing. We face huge challenges in our social housing stock. I think successive governments have faced this.

We have an ageing stock system. Ageing stock refers to houses aged 30 to 40 years. Ordinary community members look at that and think that is not that old, but given the churn and the number of tenants going through, there is far more significant wear and tear. We made some tough decisions in our first term of government, like closing down Brownlie Towers. I have not heard anyone suggest that that was the wrong decision; everyone has said that high concentrations of social housing like the Beaconsfield project is necessary. The previous government did it and we are also doing it, in particular areas like Beaconsfield, Subiaco East, Spalding, Withers and Spencer Park. Overall, it has been welcomed in all those areas because we need to create more vibrant and dynamic communities. We have made a very clear investment—that is, an \$875 million injection, with \$2.4 billion for 3 300 homes. Contrary to the member for Roe’s claim, I actually have provided detailed answers, even in this week, when he asked about vacancies. I gave the numbers and I went through a whole range of reasons for that.

I do not know what else I could have done. The member for Roe did not seem dissatisfied by my answer. In this Parliament I constantly report on the social housing economic recovery package and other programs. Despite the most heated construction market that I think the industry said we have ever faced, we delivered 600 social homes in the last year, and 860 are under contract or construction. Critically, 429 of those were in the last four months. Our program is kicking in. We also support the community housing sector and have already given \$39 million in grants for the delivery of 173 new homes. Over the next few years, the sector will roll out those homes.

As the minister, I have come in with a fresh set of eyes and sought to drive reform in any way I can. There has been no recognition by the opposition of the reforms, such as the timber frame program that we brought in that sees homes knocked out in four months after the concrete pour, or the modular program, which obviously make things faster because we build them offsite. The \$100 million modular program has resulted in 200 new homes being built, the majority in the regions, with 60 already being contracted across the state in the Pilbara, the great southern, goldfields—Esperance, the south west, the wheatbelt and the midwest. In addition, the spot purchasing program is a critical part of that. We look for whole blocks of units that are for sale and are not going on the individual market because they are a good opportunity for the government to buy social housing. The Leader of the Liberal Party criticised this and said that we would affect the market. There are a couple of things to say here about that. Number one, obviously, is that we spot purchase in some markets but not others. We recognise that; we take that seriously. We do not want to compete with buyers looking for low-priced and affordable properties. That is why we buy complexes if we can, because obviously a homebuyer looking for an affordable home will not be able to buy a complex. But I also say genuinely that the member for Cottesloe’s statement contradicts what the opposition has said on four occasions. On 8 September, Hon Steve Martin welcomed the investment in spot purchasing. In two media releases, one on 21 April and another on 13 May, the opposition said that we should do more spot purchasing. Both the member for Cottesloe and Hon Mia Davies have called for an increase in spot purchasing. The position that the member for Cottesloe has taken today, I must respectfully say, contradicts his position and the position of the opposition leader and Hon Steve Martin.

Dr D.J. Honey: It does not change the total stock of housing, minister, which is the point I made.

Mr J.N. CAREY: The member called for an increase in social housing. The shadow spokesperson called for an increase in social housing by spot purchasing. The Leader of the Opposition called for it. I have done it as one mechanism in addition to modular and timber-framed homes.

I also want to address the Leader of the Opposition’s comments regarding SHERP. The Auditor General’s report in November referred to data from March. We are getting the money from the SHERP program out the door. We provided a grants program to support 47 community housing providers to undertake 805 refurbishment projects and the construction, as I said, of 173 new purpose-built houses. Through all programs in the last financial year we invested over \$200 million in maintenance. That included almost 2 500 delivered through the SHERP program. In the last financial year through the SHERP and the Housing First Homelessness Initiative programs, over 500 major refurbishments were completed to a value of \$40 million. That is the investment we have done through SHERP and refurbishment.

Again, I come back to what the opposition said. Hon Steve Martin was put on the spot and asked by Nadia Mitsopoulos on the ABC, “What are you going to do about it?” His reply was, “I think we can look at maintenance work.” I just demonstrated the level of investment in maintenance work. On top of that we are investing \$12.8 million to fund building assessments on around 10 000 properties so that we can not only plan for the future, but also minimise the loss of ageing stock in the system. It is very clear: money is going out the door. As I explained in the Parliament this week, we are seeking to refurbish property and to address vacancies. It is interesting to note that the Leader of the Opposition referred to the ABC story in which Hon Steve Martin got his facts completely wrong and claimed

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that there was a doubling of vacancies. The ABC had to correct the public record the next day because he simply compared the wrong datasets. That followed the member for Vasse claiming the wrong statistic in her column. I have said again and again that I will call out members of the opposition who distort or mislead on these issues. It is ongoing. There are repeated mistakes. In fact, we have heard from journalists that they do not know whether to trust what the opposition says on housing and homelessness because they get basic information wrong.

I want to address what was said about the Common Ground facility. The Leader of the Liberal Party said that there were 100 beds. We have always said that it has 64 beds. It is at near capacity. There are 66 beds and 64 are currently occupied. Depending on singles and couples, the number of people residing at Boorloo Bidee Mia changes, but it is at near capacity.

I note that a media statement that was put out today by Hon Steve Martin has now been taken down. It made three errors. First of all, it said that the East Perth Common Ground project had been scrapped. That is false—resolutely false. That was the headline. Secondly, it said 1 000 Western Australians were sleeping rough on WA streets. It did not provide clarity at all about the particular area and did not refer to the raw data. It then said that the Boorloo Bidee Mia shelter that opened last year was operating below 50 per cent capacity. That is not the case—64 out of 66 beds.

I do not know whether this has happened before, but I think that this is the first time in maybe a long time that the opposition has put up a media statement and then taken it down because it was false.

Dr D.J. Honey: Do you want to know the background, minister?

Mr J.N. CAREY: No. I am not taking interjections.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! Leader of the Liberal Party, the minister is not taking interjections. You had your chance to have your say. It is his chance to respond.

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think that it is a first that a media statement has come out and it has had to be taken down. I note that it has been taken off the Leader of the Opposition's page but not the Liberal Party's page, so they might want to run over and fix that. Hon Steven Martin got it wrong today. He got it wrong on the ABC and the ABC had to correct it. The member for Vasse wrote a column—she clearly did not write all of it; one of her staff did—that referred to a wrong figure. She did not correct the public record.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr J.N. CAREY: The member should correct the public record.

Ms L. Mettam: I did before it went to print.

Mr J.N. CAREY: She corrected it, did she?

Ms L. Mettam: I sent an email well before the deadline.

Mr J.N. CAREY: "I tried. It apparently made the paper, but I was trying to fix it"!

Ms L. Mettam: I did!

Mr J.N. CAREY: Okay; I take the member's word for it.

I also want to say this. I will come to one last part before I talk more about our delivery. In January this year, the Leader of the Liberal Party did another social media tweet—not the one that I accept now about the 100 deaths. In his tweet, he said that homelessness was up by between 30 and 40 per cent from September to January. I want to tell members why datasets and facts matter. I have not put out a media statement about how there has been a decline. I notice that the opposition only does that, as it did when it said there was a homelessness increase of between 30 and 40 per cent from September to January. That is what the opposition has done, and it does this. Between January and July, there has been at least a 40 per cent reduction. I do not go out to the media or do anything like that. Why? It is because I understand that the figures for rough sleepers fluctuate due to a number of factors, including the season. The opposition seeks to exploit and spread fear. I predict that what will happen coming up to summer is that the Leader of the Liberal Party will do another tweet and the opposition spokesperson will attack me for the increase. We know that we need to look at the overall trend and that it fluctuates during the year. I do not think anyone in this chamber believes that it is acceptable to have any rough sleepers on the streets. We are all doing everything we can to address that. It is time that the opposition looked at the evidence and at the datasets, rather than trying to distort the figures on housing and homelessness whenever it can.

I have talked about the alternative delivery methods. I have talked about modular homes. I also want to talk about regional renewal. We are investing in regional communities, with \$9 million for Spalding in Geraldton, \$5 million for Withers in Bunbury and \$4 million for Spencer Park in Albany. All these communities have faced challenges

because of their high social housing concentrations. We are working hard to address the liveability of those communities. In some cases, homes have been demolished. I will give members an example. In Spalding, that has been with the support of the—I cannot say the word!—effervescent and energetic member for Geraldton. Do not get me to say the word “Congo” or “chi-chuana”! That is a dig at both of us, member for Cottesloe. The Geraldton mayor and council have been supportive of this. We demolished some homes so that we could get a better road built to encourage better pedestrian and traffic flow for safety reasons. We are investing in regional renewal programs. However, in doing so, we may lose some houses because they are beyond repair or need to be demolished for traffic amenity and liveability. I do not hear anyone criticising those sorts of projects.

I now turn to Government Regional Officers’ Housing. We are constantly reviewing how the GROH system operates. The Leader of the Opposition said that she did not think there had been a new build or a lick of paint on GROH properties. We are investing \$200 million over four years in Government Regional Officers’ Housing, whether it is maintenance, delivering improvements or expanding availability. Whether it is our government, the previous government or governments before that, governments have always leased, spot purchased or built. Governments look at the market. That has always been the case and that has not changed. I have done a review of Government Regional Officers’ Housing. Again, that is a different lever. As a result of that review, I was able to transfer to social housing 39 homes that were surplus to needs. We also made GROH homes available to regional local governments and other non-government organisations. We have been going out of our way to look at vacant stock. If we cannot use it for social housing, could a not-for-profit or a local government use it? That is good reform because it shows we are trying to be flexible.

The Leader of the Opposition again crowed about the coalition’s record on GROH but I note that the previous government’s GROH program collected a debt of \$180 million and that it then commissioned and kickstarted an aggressive sales program. Clearly, it was worried about its books. We saw the largest number of GROH homes sold in any year for the wheatbelt in the first year—around 44 homes. The previous government panicked, realised it clocked up an enormous debt and then commissioned an aggressive sales program for GROH.

The latest budget includes the remote communities fund, which was allocated \$350 million. I am deeply proud that our government, using that budget surplus, has created a new fund that will invest in energy, water and housing because we understand that there are challenges and overcrowding issues.

We have to remember that this issue has been created because the former federal government vacated the space in 2019 and said, “That’s it. We’re not doing it anymore.” Our government is responding. We are getting in there. Along with the Minister for Water and the Minister for Energy, I am working with Aboriginal remote communities. Power and water is a key focus and a significant investment. That is on top of the \$100 million of recurrent funding for housing services and essential and municipal services for Aboriginal communities. That includes tenancy management and property management. We are working very hard in this space.

We also have a range of other initiatives for remote communities and Aboriginal housing through the north west housing fund. I am very proud that we are funding three new Aboriginal short-stay accommodation facilities. That was raised by members opposite. We understand that we need supportive, transitional accommodation to assist people coming out from country, who may be visiting family, friends, health services or travelling for other cultural reasons. That is why we are funding three Aboriginal support accommodation facilities, including one in the city. I think it will assist with homelessness in the city. People coming down on country sometimes get stuck in that city cycle and system.

On the lands front, we have been very innovative in boosting housing supply. I have worked with the Minister for Planning on the housing diversity pipeline. We are looking at lazy government land, going to the market and asking, “What can you do for us?” But we want a one-in-five social housing return. This is innovative. I note that the editorial of *The West Australian* said that this is the kind of innovation that is needed in housing delivery and in government. I am deeply proud that we are pushing on with that, including a site in Busselton, which has incredible potential. I think that would be welcomed by the member for Vasse. We are looking at a second tranche of potential lazy land.

That also complements all the work involving land supply that we are doing for housing in the region. I have gone through it. Our \$166 million Regional Land Booster program has seen more than 460 lots contracted, including 77 in Karratha, 46 in Kalgoorlie, 40 in Broome and 30 in Onslow. We have provided \$19.1 million to DevelopmentWA to deliver that land. For the member for Cottesloe, we have 35 additional residential lots in Kalgoorlie and 62 residential lots in Karratha. The government supported the transfer of 15.6 hectares of crown land in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for a major expansion of Pringle Village. Of course, we have the release in Broome north of 33 more lots. In addition, we are releasing land across Western Australia in places such as Oyster Harbour and Clydesdale Park in Albany and across regional towns in Western Australia. I am also working with local government, like in the City of Karratha, where we made land available at a discount so it could build workers’ accommodation. We also made a grant towards an innovative project that received excess housing from the mining industry and is refurbishing it and

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creating workers' accommodation. Of course, in Kalbarri, we worked with the Shire of Northampton, and I went through those details today.

We have also brought in tax reforms and incentives in this budget, which includes building up supply in the apartment market for social housing. It is not just for families, but units for singles and couples. We brought in a 100 per cent rebate for apartments in multi-dwelling developments valued below \$500 000, tapering to the existing 50 per cent rebate. We brought in a 50 per cent land tax concession for build-to-rent, which is often targeted at affordable rentals. We are working on an at least five per cent density bonus for social or community housing as part of the planning system. We also released a new Keystart loan created specifically to assist people to purchase infill product, with increased income eligibility limits for singles and couples. That is extraordinary work. That is a lot of work in the housing and land areas, and it is on top of lots of other smaller reforms I have talked about.

We are creating the small and medium builders panel, which is about encouraging smaller and medium businesses to participate in construction or refurbishment, working with my department. We have tried to increase the churn rate by saying to the department that if there is only minor painting or Spakfilla—my favourite vocab at the moment—to get people into that vacant housing and then do the works. We have been looking at every opportunity to accelerate the delivery of social housing.

The opposition does not recognise any of those reforms. It just says we need to do maintenance. That has been its policy suggestion on social housing—we need to do maintenance! On the homelessness side, I acknowledge the significant work by the former Minister for Community Services, who had carriage for homelessness, because for the first time in our state's history we had a clear 10-year plan. I note the sector's theme for Homelessness Week this year was, "To end homelessness we need a plan". They were talking about the national policy arena, but at a state level we have a clear 10-year homelessness plan that was co-worked and designed with the homelessness sector. That was a result of the extraordinary work by the former minister and the sector. We are backing that in with an investment of \$225 million to fund a range of broad projects and programs this year. We are working through that. That is all based around the Housing First approach.

I will address Common Ground. We are absolutely committed to that project. We have seen the claims by the opposition that it has been shelved or scrapped. That is not the case; that is false. The clear advice to me from the assessment panel was that the current process would not deliver for the government or for that project, so as explained to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations in the upper house, we are going through that process, reworking it with Treasury and Finance and listening to the advice to ensure we can go back out as soon as we can with the best procurement model, given the heated construction market we face. I talked about Aboriginal support accommodation, because that is part of the picture, as I have said. We know, as the member for Cottesloe identified, a cohort of rough sleepers are Indigenous people, and we want to provide support and break that cycle. That is why we are building Aboriginal support accommodation. That is why we funded Boorloo Bidee Mia, an innovative project of 66 beds. For the first time, an Aboriginal-controlled organisation is running homelessness accommodation with wraparound support. That is the kind of project I am talking about. Of course, we also expanded Koort Boodja, which is homeless accommodation close to the city.

We have also increased homelessness outreach. In December 2021, we announced a funding boost to expand homelessness outreach to seven days a week in the city, with two mobile teams. This includes two dedicated homes coordinators within communities and the outreach program, and they work with a range of other groups to identify and assist rough sleepers and transition them to accommodation. It is not the case, as the opposition appears to claim, that this is about plonking people in a building. I note that the opposition criticised Boorloo Bidee Mia because it was not just a drop-in centre. That is because, to make the model work, we need a referral service, and that referral service came from our housing first rapid response team—our HEART team. As at 22 July this year, the combined programs—the Safe City initiative and the HEART outreach team—have supported 104 people into short, medium or long-term accommodation, and 29 people into longer term accommodation. That is producing results on the ground. That demonstrates that we are assisting the most vulnerable people in Western Australia.

The opposition, on a repeat basis, has used completely different data and facts; it is all over the place. The member for Vasse, the member for Honey —

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. Honey: A new seat!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I know; it is very sticky! It has been a long day.

I say to the member for Vasse, the member Cottesloe and Hon Steve Martin—or Hon Steve "repeat offender" Martin: "I have to take my media statements offline in a hurry!" He is going to need a bigger badge!—that the data we look at is the Ruah Community Services by-name list. That indicates that there are currently 280 people on the rough

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sleeper list. We know, as we get close to summer, that that number will increase, as it has done every other year because of the fluctuations. We have to understand and respect that data. That is what helps drive our approaches.

As the new Minister for Homelessness with a new Office of Homelessness, I am working with the sector to bring about better coordination and ways in which to leverage the huge number of organisations that work in the rough sleeper space. What are the things that we can do better to assist more people to get off the streets? I will continue to have those conversations. Of course, I have also addressed the issue of stock vacancies that the opposition got wrong last week when it said there was a doubling. As I have already put on the record, in the 2016–17 financial year, the last year of the previous government, the figure was higher than it is now. However, it fluctuates; it fluctuated under the previous government, and it has fluctuated under ours, but as I have demonstrated, we are doing everything we can to get that stock back into the system or get tenants back into those properties, despite all the challenges we face from tradies, location, and the level of damage or refurbishment required.

Overall, I think I have given a very detailed display of what we are achieving through this range of reforms. It is a significant reform program. We are looking at what the market is throwing at us and trying to adapt every which way we can. We have a heated construction market with an unprecedented number of people coming back to Western Australia. We have had a skills labour shortage because of international border closures. Despite all of that, reforms we are getting through include timber frame programs; modular programs; reviewing vacant housing stock through the Government Regional Officers' Housing system; a spot purchasing program, where appropriate; a small and medium builders panel; and looking at every other way that we do procurement. All of that is about accelerating the delivery of social housing in Western Australia. I note that the homelessness sector and the construction sector can see that change flowing through. They know it is flowing through. They can see some of the results coming from that big new injection and I am deeply proud to work with them to continue the delivery of the biggest ever social housing injection in our state's history.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Community Services) [6.51 pm]: I rise as Minister for Community Services, but I will cover a number of different portfolio areas that I am responsible for. I am very pleased to make a contribution on this motion because, as I think has been very competently outlined by the Minister for Housing; Homelessness and also the Minister for Health, there is a lot to talk about that is addressing the complex issues that have come together to put pressure on our housing market. In many ways, the economy is in rude health, there is no doubt about that, but on the other side of the coin of many healthy economic indicators that our state is enjoying are pressures. These are pressures that everyday households are feeling. They are felt even more acutely amongst vulnerable members in our community. I know that very well as a local member and because of my portfolio responsibilities, including in community services, but most particularly in child protection and the prevention of family and domestic violence.

I agree with what the previous speakers on our side said about their frustration at the very shallow analysis by the opposition of the problems that we are facing in our community and the solutions that are demanded of policymakers who are either in government or want to be in government. We actually have to come up with solutions. We actually have to come up with practical answers to complex issues, for instance, in the heated market that we are in, how do we move through and deliver—I was going to say bricks and mortar, but it could be any range of materials—to get people a roof over their head? I am absolutely confident that the current Minister for Housing is the right person to deliver in these very challenging times. As the Minister for Health said, the current Minister for Housing; Homelessness has shown a focus, a drive, an energy and the innovation needed to deliver for Western Australians.

I could talk about a number of areas, but this government in particularly this term, but also throughout its period in office, has delivered a commitment to investment in housing, with \$2.4 billion in four years. Sometimes these figures can just sound fantastical. They can sound unreal; but what does \$2.4 billion over four years actually mean? It is a significant amount. As the Minister for Housing said, this is a record amount of investment in public housing and housing reform overall. Hearing the minister say that last financial year, 600 additions to the social housing stock were delivered, with the additional capacity to accommodate 102 people in the homelessness system, really needs some acknowledgement. That is a massive improvement. I know we will get others, particularly members of the opposition, saying, “What about the loss of stock since we have been in office?” In fact, there is always a loss of stock because stock ages. As the Minister for Housing said, it is put through its paces with the clients we put in them. Old stock needed to be retired, and that was a challenge because the amount of old stock means that we are forced to bring back that stock and more if we want to make gains.

This financial year, the government is investing around \$225 million to fund a broad range of community sector organisations to deliver homelessness services to not only support the additional stock and investment in homelessness services, but also make sure that people have the right supports around them to keep them in that housing. We know it is difficult, but that is why we are making record investments. We have heard about Common Ground and the additional dollars. The innovation around Common Ground facilities is significant. They are difficult projects to

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deliver. We have a responsibility, particularly in this constrained market, to make sure that the taxpayer is getting value for money. It will be a great project. A number of us have visited other Common Ground projects and, when it is finalised, it will deliver good, solid housing for some of our state's most vulnerable people. Of course, we will deliver another facility in Mandurah.

I have heard a few speakers on this side talk about the Aboriginal short-stay accommodation. Again, that is a very successful model. We are committed to investing more money to deliver more of that accommodation. There is \$65 million to establish new Aboriginal short-stay accommodation in Geraldton, Kununurra and Perth, in addition to the existing facilities in Broome, Kalgoorlie and Derby. What we see with Common Ground and Aboriginal short-stay accommodation is the coming together of investment and reform.

I am proud of the work we have done across government to join together through different ministerial offices and portfolios to make sure that we are doing our best and delivering twenty-first-century solutions to some of society's most challenging problems. That really comes together with homelessness, embedding the Housing First approach in our reform and not just doing more of what we have done before. It is all we hear from members of the opposition, who want us to put more in, doing what we have done before, and wonder why it does not work. We are committed to putting in more resources, but we are also committed to reform. Adopting the Housing First approach is a good example of that reform and I am committed to it.

Another example of the reform we are committed to in government is the Home Stretch approach. It will be a significant change to the child protection system and only a Labor government could have committed to and delivered it. I am interested in the quotes made by Mark Glasson. He is not one to readily heap praise on us in government. He is very quick to criticise and call for more money, but what he said about Home Stretch was —

Today's announcement will be an enduring legacy of the McGowan Government, with the roll-out state-wide of the Home Stretch WA Model to provide certainty and stability for the nearly 250 young people who leave state care each year on their 18th birthday.

...

It is important to recognise Minister for Community Services Simone McGurk, —

Thank you —

who has championed the case for extending support to care leavers since entering government in 2017 and has supported the development of a Home Stretch model unique to WA ...

He went on to talk about how good the program is. I thank him for that support and his work on that project, because that is really what it took. It took advocacy by the not-for-profit sector. It took a government that is prepared to listen and invest, and then to roll out that change. It was important that we were also committed to incorporating Aboriginal-controlled organisations in that rollout. I am proud of that initiative. I think it will make a huge difference to people's lives in practical terms.

The way we are approaching domestic violence is also where we see the coming together of investment and reform. That is another key reason that people end up being homeless. It really is a challenging area, but one that we are committed to across a range of different portfolios.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
