

CORONAVIRUS — HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [4.02 pm]: The Nationals WA are very pleased to bring this motion to the house for private members' business this evening. I move —

That this house notes the increase in homelessness and vulnerable members of the community seeking assistance in regional Western Australia and calls on the McGowan government to deliver an immediate funding increase to provide the community services sector with the capacity to respond appropriately to the additional pressures of COVID-19.

This is a very genuine and serious motion that we bring to the house today for its consideration, and it is timely given the horrendous unemployment rate recorded in recent days for Western Australia. Our state, as has been canvassed in this place over the past two weeks, has the highest unemployment rate in the nation, with 8.1 per cent in May rising from 6.1 per cent in April. When we talk about such percentages in this place, it helps for us to talk about it in terms of real bodies because it is a bit clinical to talk about percentages or statistics. To the average punter, it is a bit removed from what those figures actually represent, and we are talking about a significant number of Western Australians who have lost their jobs. It means, specifically, that more than 30 000 Western Australians lost their job in just the month of May. It means that more than 112 000 people are now unemployed. It means that 104 000 people in Western Australia have lost their jobs since February as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Treasurer has acknowledged in the media during the week that these figures are not pretty. We would all agree that nobody likes to see these figures that we have seen over the past months. The Treasurer was quoted in an ABC article on 18 June as saying —

They represent people, they represent lives, they represent families.”

He is exactly right and that is why this motion is not condemning anyone and is not calling on the government to say that it has done an awful job; it is simply saying that this is a situation that we think needs special attention and it is a looming crisis, if it is not already right on our doorstep. The figures are not pretty and we are talking about people in our communities who are faced with the loss of their job, which comes with a loss of self-worth, the anxiety of not being able to provide for a family, the distress of losing a home, and that is why we bring this motion to the house today.

There has been a rapid and successful response to the health crisis that the state is facing. We are not too mean in our praise to acknowledge that the state government, with support from the federal government, has done a remarkable job keeping our communities safe. The health crisis has been, in anyone's measure, managed well here in WA, but we must acknowledge that the hard work to recover from this crisis is still to be done, and for many months, perhaps years, we will be feeling the impact of this crisis. For many, it is going to be the first time that they have faced such difficult economic times, the first time they have had to engage with a government agency or the first time they have even had to ask for help from people outside their immediate circle. These are quite confronting circumstances. I, as the local member for Central Wheatbelt, have had a number of business owners and individuals come through my office and I have seen this confrontation reflected in their distress: they have been very self-sufficient up to this point and they now find themselves, through no fault of their own, in a circumstance in which they have to interact with agencies that they have never had to deal with before. Of course, there are people who have been engaged with that system prior to COVID-19, and all that is happening in that circumstance is that they are becoming further embedded and distressed. I think that is something that we need to remember.

We also know, and it has been canvassed over the past few weeks, that women, in particular, and our youth have been the hardest hit as a result of COVID-19. They typically work in that part-time sector and service sector work. To respond to this, we need a very well-resourced communities sector, and this is where the problem is. It is an indictment on this government that prior to the COVID-19 crisis, more than 450 not-for-profit community service sector organisations had banded together to launch a campaign titled Your Help WA. This was designed to send a very clear message to the McGowan government that more funding was urgently needed to help vulnerable and at-risk people. I have a comment here from the executive director of Community Employers WA, Mr John Bouffler; he said —

... the community services sector is in crisis—demand for social services in WA is outstripping the available resources.

There is also a statement from the CEO of the Western Australian Council of Social Service, Louise Giolitto —

... the Community Service Sector and the State Government have reached an impasse which is underpinned by a lack of understanding the investment required for people who are in need in our state and for the community providers working on the frontline.

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They are two very influential people in the community services sector and it is very concerning because those statements were made before COVID-19 struck in Western Australia and across the world. In the media statement that was issued by those 450 not-for-profit groups under the banner Your Help WA, there was a fast facts section, and I preface the following statistics by the fact that, as I have just said, these relate to prior to December last year.

The list of fast facts states —

HOMELESSNESS	More than 9,000 Western Australians, including 3000 children and young people, don't have a place to call home.
DOM. VIOLENCE	In Western Australia, almost 300,000 people have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner. Family and domestic violence affects one in every four women in Australia.
FAMILIES	240,000 Western Australians are living below the poverty line and many of them are children.
CHILDREN	Each week more than 20 000 WA children go to school hungry because they didn't have breakfast.
LIVING COST	19,740 households had their power cut off in the last year because they could not afford to pay the bill.
EMPLOYMENT	WA's community services organisations employ more than 96,000 full and part time staff, that's 7.0 per cent of the State's workforce. WA's youth (15 – 24 years) unemployment rate of 14.5% is the highest in 20 years, according to the Department of Training and Workforce Development.
DISABILITY	One in five Western Australians have some form of disability.

Those are some fairly stark statistics. For that sector to get to that point, especially against a government of the current persuasion, is remarkable. It is remarkable that those organisations felt the need to express their concern back in December that they had reached an impasse with the state government. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a crisis in that sector in terms of adequate resourcing for the organisations that support the most vulnerable in our community.

I will now refer to a document created by the Department of Communities dated 29 May 2020 and titled "Impact of COVID-19 on the WA community (Youth)". I referred to this document in question time. On page 2, there is a presentation summary of the issues raised that I will read into *Hansard*. It states —

- We are already seeing areas of concern across the State, particularly in:
 - family and domestic violence
 - homelessness
 - child protection
 - rental and public housing supply
 - Youth
- Likely to be increased demand on a range of services, as well as pressure on accommodation (including homelessness and social housing).
- Financial impact on agencies will be significant if they are to meet increased demand.
- Difficult economic and housing market conditions will reduce usual State revenue sources.
- Economic recovery may be compromised by a failure to also appropriately address social recovery.
- Many of the social impacts are likely to continue for some time (potentially, several years). Some of those impacts will be permanent (e.g. impact of children going into care can last a lifetime).

I will read the section specifically about youth homelessness. It states —

- COVID-19 health impacts disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness — particularly those with underlying health issues.

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- Bed vacancies for youth crisis accommodation remain low in the metropolitan area, this means there is limited capacity to respond to any increase in demand —

This was dated in May this year —

- **For regional WA, bed vacancies for youth crisis accommodation have increased since the low point seen in early April, but are still low in comparison to historical levels. The South West, Great Southern and Wheatbelt have all been close to zero available youth crisis beds for close to a year.**
- Isolation and distancing requirements mean fewer homelessness services and less access to services.
- ...
- Economic impacts will likely see more people fall into homelessness. This will be a lagged, long-term impact if people have lost rentals or their own homes. Demand for support, services and accommodation will continue to increase for some time.

Finally, I will go to the section on mental health, because this is something that I have also raised with government, particularly from a wheatbelt perspective. The impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health is an issue that is raised right across the state. In this document, the department makes the following observation —

- Social isolation, long-term unemployment and homelessness are particular issues for youth, and contribute to and compound mental health issues and increase suicide risk. Access to mental health services is an immediate priority. Likely to be increased demand on services (and funding) for some time.

I do not think that that would surprise anyone, but the challenge is how the government will respond to those very concerning issues raised by the Department of Communities. It underpins the seriousness of what we are talking about today.

WACOSS is an organisation that is very well trusted—I do not think I need to be saying that to Madam Deputy Speaker or anyone in this place. It has a long history of engagement with the community services sector right across the state. As a part of its state budget submission for the 2020–21 budget, it held a series of consultations right across Western Australia. This submission was completed for the normal budget process and not the October budget process, and it highlighted that everything was not rosy prior to COVID-19 coming into play. We cannot be under any illusion that there were not serious concerns brewing and bubbling away, as we have outlined in terms of that 450 community sector not-for-profits coming together to start pushing the government to do something. At a glance, the WACOSS state budget submission for 2020–21 highlights some revealing community profiles. It has gone to regional communities and delved into some of those issues that face our regional centres, one of which was the City of Greater Geraldton. I do not want to steal the thunder of the member for Geraldton who I know will talk about some of the services under pressure there and the impact that COVID-19 has brought to bear, but I draw members' attention to the fact that in March 2019, the City of Greater Geraldton reported an unemployment rate of the 8.9 per cent compared with about 6.9 per cent across Western Australia, and that had grown from 5.4 per cent in March 2017. That happened under this government's watch from March 2017 to March 2019—significant unemployment growth in the City of Greater Geraldton. I would like to highlight one paragraph from this case study in its submission —

The WACOSS community conversations revealed the real effort service providers have put into resourcing and networking to develop formal and informal collaborations across governments, the community service sector and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. Many discussed the increasing focus on community services developing more partnerships, without recognition of the time and work needed to do this effectively, while some expressed frustration that the promised place-based planning and co-design had yet to occur.

The key words in that paragraph are “without recognition of the time and work needed to do this effectively”. That is echoed when I speak to the community sector right across the state: there is simply too much work and they are not resourced adequately to do the planning needed to effectively bring those collaborations that make that dollar go further. Certainly, I would like to raise a number of issues for those organisations located in the Central Wheatbelt, but I will also talk about some located in the Pilbara and Kalgoorlie. That comment is reflective of the sentiment of organisations like Share and Care, which delivers a suite of community support services in my electorate of the Central Wheatbelt, and in the wheatbelt in general. For those who are unaware of the good work that that organisation does, it is a not-for-profit that is funded by a mix of state, federal and Lotterywest funding. Its head office is located in Northam. It has a women's centre and homeless accommodation buildings offsite. It operates 22 services with about \$5 million a year in funding. It is very good at making a dollar go a long way. I know that the lack of funding puts enormous pressure on its board and executive to deliver those services, and that it is never able to meet the

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need that it sees in our communities. In Share and Care's annual general report of October 2019, which was pre-COVID, the treasurer's report states —

The last financial year proved once again to be challenging as we continue to work in an ever increasingly tight fiscal environment and competing for limited funding opportunities which is compounded by funding indexation not keeping up with true cost of service delivery and an increase in overall wages. Share & Care continues to be highly dependent on government grants and have had to tighten our belts and find innovative ways of operating to ensure that our core business of serving the needs of the most vulnerable in our community is never diminished.

The CEO, Carol Jones, has been in that organisation for many years. There is not much that Carol does not know and is not aware of when it comes to how to secure funding to support that community. Carol states in her report —

Funding is ... an ongoing issue. Some services have had the same funding rate for over 9 years with the additional top up for the award and Equal Remuneration Order, which sadly in no way covers the ever increasing costs of running a service or wages.

Carol goes on to say —

Our Suicide Bereavement Service is very busy, supporting those who have been bereaved by suicide across the Wheatbelt, the numbers have risen sadly against last years. Share & Care are still funding this service until we find an alternative.

I have raised this matter with the government. I know it is difficult for the minister or the government to say to me or my electorate that the mental health or support services in the wheatbelt are in good financial shape in terms of staffing or personal. I think that that is acknowledged broadly. They are under enormous pressure. There has been a spike in suicides. Share and Care offers a bereavement service, but it cannot be funded by the state or federal government, or any other government organisation. To its great credit, though, it continues to offer that service because it recognises the real benefit it has for the community. Members will recall a spate of suicides that occurred in Narrogin at one point and a number of others more recently in my electorate. Share and Care offers and will continue to offer that bereavement service, but it will have to cut back on other very important services. Carol goes on to say —

Youth numbers needing accommodation and supports are rising, Emergency Relief is being accessed more frequently, housing stresses and homelessness are increasing exponentially.

We should not accept any of this. For me, it does not paint a rosy picture of the situation pre-COVID. These statements were in Share and Care's annual general report, dated October 2019, well before the impact of COVID-19 came into play and well before the impacts of the global pandemic. Share and Care does a marvellous job, but its services are stretched and, like many other service providers, it needs more funding.

I would like to briefly talk about another organisation that also covers the entirety of the Central Wheatbelt electorate, and that is Avon Community Services. The minister and I have discussed this matter. I really thank her for making time in her schedule to discuss it because it is something that the community and I are very passionate about. I know she understands the challenges that this organisation faces. I also understand the challenges of government. I do not come to this place not knowing about the hard discussions that need to be made about where every dollar is spent. However, I raise these issues that face Share and Care, and the homelessness statistics and the looming unemployment wave that is coming to our state in the hope that it strengthens the minister's voice in cabinet so that she can take the concerns that are raised by speakers in this place today to the Treasurer and Premier and say that we need do more.

Avon Community Services is based in Northam and provides support for vulnerable and at-risk youth in the wheatbelt—that is, 18 to 25-year-olds. It delivers housing services and works with people in unsupported and supported accommodation. It provides supported accommodation for young people aged between 15 and 25 in National Affordable Housing Agreement housing in Northam. That program requires participants to sign up to participate in a number of life skills. It is essentially a contract with the organisation. They go through the NAHA and are connected with services and educational opportunities and are transitioned into more sustainable and stable housing and, hopefully, into employment or further training. The program has been going for only 18 months but has had some success. The organisation as a whole has had a bit of a chequered history, but this program has demonstrated some success. The key to its success is through the 24/7 support that is available at the house. The participants have highly complex issues. They often come in as part of court orders out of the juvenile justice system, or have mental illnesses, or drug and alcohol issues, or are survivors of sexual or domestic violence. As members would appreciate, having someone on hand to provide these young people with guidance and support 24/7 so that they can be mentored to make good decisions and so that they can get into more stable workplaces is the key to its success. The board, chair and CEO have told me that they have seen a number of people go through that program and transition into the community. I am told that they no longer have appropriate funding to run that 24/7 support

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service. They tried for some time to engage with the government on this front to demonstrate that the program is worth supporting. It covers the entire wheatbelt. Nothing else in the wheatbelt—I am happy to be corrected—offers this type of service. It is something that we need right across regional Western Australia. It is very difficult when police or other departments come into contact with young people at risk. Often it is the job of the police to try to find these young people a safe bed for the night. This is an issue that the police should not have to deal with. But the can keeps getting kicked down the road, not because the police do not want to deal with it, but because there are not enough facilities in regional Western Australia to deal with these complex issues.

This is causing great distress for Avon Community Services. NAHA housing in particular used to be a challenge for the community. It was not well managed and there were poor outcomes for the community and the individuals involved. The NAHA program now has the support of agencies such as the Department of Communities, the Department of Education, the Western Australia Police Force, the mental health office, the Wheatbelt Health Network and the juvenile justice team. They consider it to be an enormous asset. It is for people from not only Northam, but also Merredin, Narrogin Katanning and further afield in the member for Moore's electorate. It offers supported housing options for people in the wheatbelt. The only alternative, as far as I am aware, is for people to go to Perth. I do not think that that is acceptable.

Given the observations of the Minister for Community Services, or in the Department of Communities presentation on 29 May, and given the challenges we know will be coming as a result of higher employment, stretched services and other pressures on families and individuals, I urge the Minister for Community Services to find funding in this year's budget for it. She needs to find a way of asking the Treasurer to release the purse strings. On that note, we do this in the genuine hope that this will allow the minister to go back to the cabinet and the Treasurer to say that we cannot ignore this. This is just one example of the enormous burden on our community when we do not spend the first dollar on prevention and support. We all know in this place that if we do not spend that first dollar, we end up spending \$10, \$20, \$30 or hundreds down the track on the juvenile justice system and the health sector. That is unacceptable to me. I understand the budgetary challenges that will face us as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I appreciate the fact that the minister took time to meet with us. This organisation is doing its very best, but it has already cut support and it has had to let people go. Now that 24/7 support is not available at times in that housing accommodation. Unfortunately, that compromises the outcomes. I do not think it will work nearly as well without that.

I now turn to issues in Newman, which we have previously canvassed in this place. I note that the industry made a significant announcement today about some of its housing. I have to say the challenge in Newman is not just with the industry. Overcrowding in the housing stock in Newman has been a significant problem. There is simply not enough housing and the standard is very poor. I have to say that when I have visited Newman, it has been quite confronting. I have seen streets of boarded up homes and heard serious concerns raised by the community sector about the impact of overcrowding in government social housing. Continued calls by local government and the not-for-profit sector for senior members of the Department of Communities and Department of Housing to be located in Newman to deal with issues on the ground and to provide the level of support that is needed, as opposed to being based in Port Hedland, some hours away, have fallen on deaf ears. That is the experience in regional Western Australia every day. I recall similar calls being made for senior level decision-makers to be located in Kalgoorlie so that they could make decisions and respond quickly so that issues would not escalate and become a problem for the government of the day and to get better outcomes for the community. We see that in all our communities and it is very frustrating. Of course, people would expect the Nationals WA to say that we prefer decentralised decision-making with senior roles so that people can pursue their careers wherever they live, as opposed to having to move to Perth to make those decisions. It is really simple to provide a level of support to the community through a person or persons in the community. Quite often the police and the Department of Education are the only decision-makers in those communities. That could be rectified to provide support to the community.

It is very challenging that the issue in Newman continues. We have seen the industry pick up some slack, after much prodding I have to say, with those boarded-up houses in Newman. I really look forward to Newman being rejuvenated and going through a process of urban renewal, because it is a fantastic place to live. There are jobs in Newman. There is actually an opportunity to have employment in Newman, in the mining and resources sector at the very least. There are also other opportunities. The state of housing and the support offered in that community is wanting, and I think that community services and not-for-profits would unhesitatingly say that it is a challenge. They would be very nervous because of COVID-19. The community generates a significant amount of the state's income and wealth, but there are some very serious issues there that are taking a long time to get traction.

I want to touch on some issues in Kalgoorlie. There are concerns about support services there. Again, I think this is a reflection of the lack of funding and support. There is under-resourcing, which means that businesses and organisations have whittled back the support they can provide. Nearly one in 10 women in regional Western Australia have been homeless in the last five years. Everyone would be familiar with the Red Cross in

Kalgoorlie. It announced a withdrawal of its services from Kalgoorlie–Boulder, although it appears to have moved back. It is moving its Kalgoorlie–Boulder Aboriginal Short Stay. There is great hope that it will not affect its delivery of services on the ground, but, again, these decisions are made based on financial challenges. Instead of focusing on delivering for the people it is supposed to be supporting, it is looking at ways to stay and survive. We need to monitor that service very carefully. I note that the Department of Communities has established a task force in Kalgoorlie to address homelessness and to consider the immediate risks faced by people at risk of becoming homeless.

The sector is engaged in that. This is probably taken out of context, but there was an article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* in March titled “Help for homeless amid COVID-19 crisis”. In the article, Labor member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, Hon Kyle McGinn, was quoted as saying —

“On a local level we have supplied soap and hand sanitiser to the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre to help with hygiene.

I am not sure that is going to cut the mustard as a response. I am sure it was very welcome at the time as people were very concerned about their health and wellbeing, but we need something slightly more substantive than that if we are to deal with some of these new challenges. We acknowledge that it is far more difficult to deliver these services in regional Western Australia—the population is sparse and we are operating on the smell of an oily rag in many circumstances. All of the issues I have canvassed were impacting our communities prior to COVID-19. We understand that the Lotterywest account and funds and a range of other things were announced to deal with the short-term issues facing the regions—the ledge that all of those organisations faced as they were overwhelmed with people coming to them. My challenge, and the challenge facing the sector now, is that these issues will continue, because more and more people will have to engage with that community services sector. Unfortunately, more people will become homeless. That is what the Department of Communities’ own presentation said. The risk is very real and is likely to come to fruition over the next two years if we do not see significant funding.

It is hard not to be cynical when we come to this place every week and listen to ministers talking about the millions of dollars that are being pumped into projects such as Metronet and cyclepaths, yet we see real need among families that are under enormous pressure. For us it is about getting those priorities right. We understand the need to get the economy pumping, but we do not want these very important community sector organisations that offer these incredibly important services to be overlooked because they cannot provide a big shiny rail line or a flashy ribbon to be cut at the end of the day. We know the government’s priorities are right when it is doing the things that will make a long and real difference to people in real stress. I point to the \$415 million being spent on three elevated rail crossings on, I think, the Armadale train line, which will reduce the commute by 90 seconds. I feel like we might be able spend that \$415 million in the community services sector. I am sure those 450 community organisations would happily accept that additional support, and we could push that project back down the line. I understand that the minister will probably say that we need to create jobs so the people do not fall into that space, but the reality is that there will not be enough jobs for everyone and we need to support people under real pressure right now.

So far, what has been put on the table has got us through an immediate crisis. I feel that more members will have this conversation with their not-for-profits. We need to have a serious conversation about rapidly injecting funding into our community services sector. The statistics I talked about at the beginning of my speech are really concerning. They come from the Department of Communities. We want to empower the minister to say to the Premier, the Treasurer and cabinet that we need a bigger slice of the pie to look after the most vulnerable people in our community.

MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton) [4.37 pm]: Homelessness is quite a big issue in my electorate. It has been made worse since the closure of Cameliers Guest House, which was a local institution, in August 2018. Of course, to a point the closure of Cameliers was triggered by the closure of the Geraldton Sobering Up Centre before it. Like everywhere else, we are watching and expecting that homelessness will be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We have a reasonable number of services offering emergency accommodation. They all do a fantastic job, as do the services in other electorates as I am sure most members would agree. Sun City Christian Centre has a tailor-made accommodation unit that was built under the Barnett government and opened by the current Minister for Housing. I have had a bit to do with Chrysalis House Women’s Refuge, because it had two upgrades during the time we were in government. There is also Short Term Accommodation for Youth—STAY—which accommodates youth experiencing homelessness or trouble in the family situation. All these bodies provide a fantastic service and they have also provided assistance to my office reasonably often to help with vulnerable constituents who have had nowhere to stay for the night.

Sun City Christian Centre has 34 beds, and it accommodates single parents and families as well as individuals and couples. For \$35 a night it provides a bed, three meals a day and a shower, as well as facilities such as a lounge room and a kids play area that can be utilised by those staying there. The manager of the centre has informed me

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that frequently all 34 beds are full and he has to increasingly turn away families and single parents, especially since the closure of Cameliers, because he does not have enough beds. The Salvation Army has a number of small units built just next to its church, which are quite neat, simple brick housing units of, I think, two and three bedrooms, and there are a couple of them there. There is a reasonable amount of land there, and in the past I have had a go at trying to get more of these for the Salvation Army, but unfortunately that was not successful.

Chrysalis House Women's Refuge caters for females and has 16 beds available for emergency accommodation. Like everywhere else, it sometimes exceeds the number of spaces that are available. The CEO of Chrysalis has informed me that a consortium of local agencies has applied to the City of Greater Geraldton for funding to establish a connections week for all homelessness and mental health services in Geraldton to meet and discuss what is needed. It sounds like a good idea and I hope it gets off the ground. It is interesting that it has to get money from the city to do that, but it may also be getting money from the state government.

Emergency accommodation services often liaise with other organisations in town such as the Salvation Army and the St Vincent de Paul Society, which can often financially assist individuals who are experiencing homelessness or point them in the direction of drug and alcohol and/or mental health services. In fact, individuals who work in the sector often go out of their way to assist the most vulnerable in our community. They are crying out for more funding so they can employ staff to take on the liaising role full-time, including being able to take service users to medical, legal or financial appointments.

Residents of Geraldton, like everywhere, engage with such service providers for a number of different reasons. It may be that someone is coming to the end of their tenancy and has not been able to find a new rental property, someone has relocated to Geraldton and has not been able to finalise accommodation yet, or someone has lost their job and has fallen behind on rent. There are also people who are nearly permanently homeless due to mental health issues, family problems, domestic violence, or drug and alcohol issues. Cameliers Guest House was a port in the storm for individuals who were experiencing permanent homelessness. Before it closed its doors, it had residents who had been staying at the guesthouse for 12 years. I tried to help it get a new project up but, unfortunately, it was one of the interesting things you sometimes come across with the government—the government was quite prepared to agree to fund it to develop a project, but decided not to fund building the project. Cameliers had some land that the council had given it to put its new project on. Unfortunately, it went ahead and did the earthworks, but it could not get funding to build the project. It is now stuck with that block of land. It has spent most of its money on the earthworks and cannot do anything with it. It is likely that a lot of the individuals at Cameliers were suffering from mental illness or had problems with drugs or alcohol. Another interesting thing that the people who were running Cameliers told me was that if they offered people free accommodation—they used to give new people free accommodation for a week—as soon as they asked people to make a contribution, they would leave.

Cameliers worked closely with the sobering-up centre. People dried out at the sobering-up centre and then could go to Cameliers. However, when the sobering-up centre closed, rather than the police taking people who were either in an intoxicated or drug affected state to the sobering-up centre, they took them directly to Cameliers, which was not able to cope with that because it was not set up for it. It made a request for \$250 000 or \$300 000 a year so that it could be run with people who would be able to deal with that, but that was rejected, so it closed. The other function Cameliers performed was to provide accommodation to backpackers and short-term workers in Geraldton.

The impact of those closures on those who are experiencing homelessness in Geraldton has been huge. The other day, a constituent arrived at my office at about midday with all her belongings. She had been dropped off at my office by one of the local organisations that looks after homeless people. They left her there with all her stuff and said that she had nowhere to sleep that night. I asked a bit more about it and it turned out that her car had been impounded. I think she had been living in her car. She needed \$1 500 to get the car out of impoundment and she had only 24 hours in which to do it. The car was already on a payment plan, so there was no way around it with that. We spent the afternoon contacting people and trying to get someone to take her. Eventually, we directly contacted the minister's office for some help. Crisis Care was going to contact us, but by the evening that contact had not come. Centrelink gave us an advance of \$100 so she would be able to buy some food for the evening. She ended up contacting someone she knew who was able to put her up for the night. Crisis Care rang us back the next day but she did not appear back in the office. We had expected that she probably would, but she did not. It was clear that the constituent was extremely vulnerable. She was confusing her facts and obviously had some mental health issues. I was advised by one service provider that it had tried to get her to engage with mental health services, but she refused to do so. Another service provider said that it had had her there in the past, but it did not have the facilities or staff to deal with her disruptive behaviour. That was a real dilemma for a member of Parliament to find themselves in. The services that we would assume should be able to take such a person find that they cannot, but the individual concerned does not want to admit themselves into treatment for mental health issues. Deciding what to do with such a person is a real dilemma, especially at five o'clock. My staff had gone home and I was wanting to go home

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myself. No doubt I would have got on the phone and found somewhere for her to stay, but I found myself in a very difficult position. I think that it would not be possible for me to put a middle-aged woman who has mental health problems and all her worldly goods out on the street at five o'clock and say that she was someone else's problem. I could not do that. It was a very difficult position for a member of Parliament to find themselves in. I had not really been aware of that situation before—that is, someone needing to engage with mental health services but refusing to do it and running around the streets, running their own lives and causing chaos wherever they go. To its credit, the Sun City Christian Centre said that it would have another go with her. It had found her very disruptive when she had been there before but it was prepared to take her in and see whether it could work with her. However, she has not appeared back in my office since that time.

The point to highlight is that when services such as the sobering-up centre or Cameliers are removed, the burden of care and responsibility falls on the police, the hospital and emergency accommodation providers, which are already stretched to capacity. I am told that the police now find that a lot of their time is taken up driving around town in the evening looking for places to leave people that can look after them overnight.

I reflected on the fact that it has been 40 years since John Pat died in Roebourne. There have been a number of demonstrations around the country on the subject of Black Lives Matter and the rate of Aboriginal incarceration. The sobering-up centres were built to address the problem of police having nowhere else to put drunken people than in the cells. Our centre in Geraldton was built in 2003. The project had a very high level of interest and the then member for Geraldton, Shane Hill, had pushed very hard for it. I think it is a shame that this government, which is the same party that Shane was a member of and still is, closed our sobering-up centre on 30 December 2017. As someone who was part of the Barnett Liberal–National government, I can hold my head up, and that government can hold its head up, because the sobering-up centre and Cameliers both remained open during our eight and a half years in government.

I see it as a connected issue, but other people may not. I have had this argument before, both when we were in government and now in opposition. There used to be a truancy officer in regional education offices and their job was to find the kids who were not turning up for school. That is another thing that is strongly linked with social disadvantage. I know primary school kids in Geraldton who go to school probably 20 per cent of the time and secondary school kids who have just ceased going altogether. No-one in our system is proactively out there in the community looking for these children and trying to get them back into school. The schools will say that they have badged attendance officers, but if the families of those children have moved towns, no-one who is out there looking for them will find them. If we cannot get those kids to go to school, the cycle will just repeat itself. If kids have no education, it means that this cycle will basically repeat itself. As I said, the last few governments have seemed to think that this is the job of the police. I do not regard this as the police's job. I think it is unfair to expect that the police can undertake this job.

Another observation—the minister, like me, is probably wondering about this—is that at the start of the COVID crisis, some homeless people were housed in five-star hotels. I thought that they would have been happy there, but I understand that most of them left after a few days. I think there is a message there. I wander up from the railway station most mornings when Parliament is sitting and I often wonder whether people who are in a position to make decisions have ever spoken to homeless people to see what sort of house or shelter they would prefer. Along a similar line, I remember reading about an alternative housing project that was run in the Northern Territory whereby architects were given the job of talking to the homeless people in communities and asking them what sort of house they wanted. We keep delivering these houses that we think these people want, and generally they are not that happy with them. The architects in the Northern Territory came up with some really interesting and quite different housing designs. It was good. In our minds, we would never have thought that someone would want a house like those that these architects came up with. I did a bit of a search yesterday and, interestingly, I came across this particular housing project at the same time as the member for Kalgoorlie was talking about dog issues in this community—that is, Tjuntjuntjara. It is interesting to look at the housing designs that they came up with there. I wonder whether we could speak to homeless people and ask them to tell us the type of shelter they would like to live in, because if they are not happy with where we put them, they generally up and leave. I note the project that the Bunbury city council has built. It is a very simple project, but I wonder whether we could build something that provides more shelter and more security that is similar to what has been done in Bunbury. It is some sort of hybrid thing that is not conventional housing, which, to me, seems to frequently fail them. There might be something else that they would be happy with. That is just a thought.

I will talk for a little while about housing in Geraldton. As of 31 January 2020, there were 532 housing applications waiting to be processed in Geraldton and 822 in the midwest. Respectively, 31 and 38 of those applications were priority applications, with over 1 000 people in the region on the waiting list. At the same time, it was identified that there were 145 vacant properties in Geraldton, with 60 undergoing maintenance and repairs and 85 scheduled for demolition, sale or redevelopment. Figures such as this frustrate the services in Geraldton that provide support

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to homeless individuals and those experiencing mental health issues. All public housing should be adequately maintained and immediately available to individuals in need.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Of course, we all understand the difficulties and that things have to be tendered for and it takes a while.

I want to talk a little bit about a suburb of Geraldton that I have been putting a bit of time into. I have been aware of the problems there for probably as long as I have been the local member. The suburb is called Spalding and it has a very high proportion of public housing. It is particularly critical that houses in this area are not left. If houses are left without anyone living in them, immediately they suffer damage. The city council has come up with a redevelopment plan for Spalding that has been supported by the state government. The government did the work for it, but of course no funds are available to revitalise the area. The minister has previously suggested that the government is waiting for market conditions to improve in Spalding before it can progress in this area. I think it might be waiting for a very long time, purely because of the fact that there is so much unsold land in new estates around Geraldton, so it will take a long time before Spalding comes good. In a way, it is similar to what I have read about the city of Detroit in the United States, where people move out, the houses are left vacant and the houses immediately get vandalised, and because they get vandalised, it drags down the whole suburb.

I also have an intense amount of frustration with Spalding because right in the middle of Spalding is a site for a new school, but some years ago the government decided that it was not going to happen, so it gave the land to an organisation called the Property Asset Clearing House to get rid of. At the time, the Sun City Christian Centre had plans to build a church and housing there, which would have lifted the whole suburb. The then Department of Housing put up its hand and said that it would take the land, and it has done nothing with it ever since. There is 12 hectares of land in the middle of this suburb that is empty when it could have been used. I was extremely frustrated by that, because I think that could have changed the face of the entire suburb. Instead of that, another government department has taken the land and done absolutely nothing with it.

I spent some time in the suburb the other day and I was surprised at the number of boarded-up brick houses there. I am quite used to seeing the old Homewest-type asbestos houses boarded up; that is not unusual. I suspect that some of those houses have reached the end of their worthwhile life. However, I was really surprised to see a reasonable number of brick ones like that. I suspect that they could be renovated into a good house that we could get another 20 or 30 years out of. Under the housing stimulus package that was announced earlier this month, with \$100 million to be spent in the regions, Geraldton, and Spalding in particular, cannot be overlooked. Redevelopment of the 34 vacant properties in Spalding is long overdue, so it is imperative that the stimulus package provides the boost that is needed to enable work on these properties to finally start. Not only will this give much-needed encouragement to Spalding residents and community organisations that regularly use the area, but also the program will be welcomed by very depressed local building and construction companies that were struggling even before the COVID-19 pandemic started. The COVID pandemic has been a huge blow to them, and I can illustrate the magnitude of that. In 2013, about 380 houses in Geraldton were started and I think last year about 40 were started, so that gives members an idea of the scale of the drop in that industry. The minister's announcement lacked details about where the money reserved for the regions will be spent. Obviously, now is the optimum time for the government to say where the money will be spent.

I also wrote to our federal local member, Hon Melissa Price, and to Senator Dean Smith to underline to them the importance of funds for Spalding. They both replied to me. In the case of Senator Smith, it was a handwritten letter—everyone knows that you do not get them very often these days! They both agreed how important the area is and said that they would look out for it. Of course, it is frequently regarded that Western Australia runs these projects quite well, so the federal government tends to just hand a block of funds to the state government and tells it to work out how to spend it. It is vital that the government still considers injecting funds from royalties for regions into the Spalding development, especially considering the underspend from the program under this government. Plans drawn up for the Spalding development include changes to roads and housing. A significant proportion of royalties for regions funding should be directed to this instead of it all being spent in Perth or redirected to Treasury.

As the Leader of the Nationals WA said, Geraldton's unemployment rate is higher than average. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly made conditions for local businesses a lot harder. The problem is that nearly all of the industry in Geraldton is focused on trade with China. The crayfishing industry exports about 98 per cent of its product to China and about 90 per cent of Geraldton's minerals go to China. In agriculture, we do not grow a huge amount of barley but most of our grain goes to Indonesia or China. That is of particular concern to me because if relations with China continue to slide, we will probably trade less with it. Once again, that will provide a further dampening of the local economy. That will feed into higher unemployment and fewer opportunities for people, resulting in

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a spiral effect. I hope that does not happen. They are all my problems in this area. I know the minister's heart is in the right place, so good luck!

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [5.01 pm]: I, too, would like to make some comments to support my colleagues and also the Leader of the Nationals WA in the motion she has moved in private members' time. The motion states —

That this house notes the increase in homelessness and vulnerable members of the community seeking assistance in regional Western Australia and calls on the McGowan government to deliver an immediate funding increase to provide the community services sector with the capacity to respond appropriately to the additional pressures of COVID-19.

I do not envy the minister's portfolio. It is not a portfolio that would suit me. Having been a minister for some time in the previous government, I got to see a lot of the vulnerable parts of our state and the challenges that many people face. The minister's portfolio is on the front line of that. I do not for a minute underestimate her challenge in trying to meet all those challenges.

On a broad level, we are in a very unique scenario right now. Before the COVID issues came to bear, we knew this government's history in regional Western Australia. It has taken fairly significant hits in the royalties for regions program. The most recent update in the March quarter financials shows what the Nationals have highlighted: we are heading towards a \$200 million underspend in royalties for regions. I would have thought there is capacity within the government's coffers to respond to challenges. The National Party does not want a \$200 million underspend given that the government said it was committed to royalties for regions going into the last election. That was important to highlight up-front.

We are in a very unique circumstance. The COVID issues are very challenging. I even stood at this very spot a week or so ago, or maybe it was a bit longer, and said that the government is doing a good job in its response. We are certainly getting a sense from people in Western Australia that all the settings the government has put in place have been right. I, for one, will certainly acknowledge that. As I have said privately to a couple of ministers, the challenges going forward are big. The lockdown bit was relatively easily. It was a tough decision but relatively easy. The challenge now is how we come out the other side once restrictions are lifted; also what is resourced and where, to deal with the many and varied issues that have come to the fore. A litmus test of the pressures that will come out will be Parliament itself. There is a state election in March, not that that changes what members of Parliament do so much, but we are a focal point for issues that arise in our respective communities. We will be the litmus test for the pressures that are happening. What the Nationals are bringing to the table is some of that sentiment that sits in our electorates. As the Leader of the Nationals WA quite rightly highlighted, this is not a condemnation motion; it does not have a massive crack at the government. We are saying, "Please note, we are getting these issues and therefore it very much needs to be at the front and centre of discussions that happen around the cabinet table and discussions that happen in the various forums that this minister has in order to respond appropriately to the issues."

I will touch on four main items. If I have time left, I will touch on a couple more. Homelessness is an issue that comes to the fore. The electorate of Warren–Blackwood runs from Mt Barker–Denmark to Margaret River. The hotspots are probably Denmark and Margaret River at either end; they are the preferred locations to live. They have traditionally had reasonably high unemployment rates. That is now a focus, with the amount of available employment dropping, particularly casual work. The unemployment rate has gone up and probably more so than even the state average. It is certainly a focal point. The challenges that sit in those communities are complex. Many complex factors contribute to the homelessness challenge in and around mental health, family and domestic violence, and disability, and managing complex issues in some cases. Margaret River went through a very challenging issue not that long ago. There are programs that are funded not only in the social services and homelessness space, but also affordable housing. It was an issue that came up, Acting Speaker (Mr S.J. Price), in a committee that we are involved in, the Economics and Industry Standing Committee. We were involved in the Airbnb inquiry. The online platforms were causing housing stress by artificially putting up the price of rents in that community. It encouraged home owners to take short-term rentals rather than long-term rentals and therefore displaced people who might want to have longer term rentals in the affordable rental space. A whole range of factors contribute to the issues.

An article about homelessness headed "Residential crisis" was published today on page 1 of the *Augusta–Margaret River Mail*. I want to quote from it. It commences —

MANY livelihoods in the region have been shattered during the COVID-19 crisis, seeing an increase in people seeking help to find affordable housing.

As people lost their jobs in the region the number of applicants seeking the government's JobSeeker payment increased by 153 per cent in Busselton and 133 per cent in Margaret River.

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Advocacy group Just Home Margaret River had 18 new clients with 10 children between March 27, 2020 and June 9, 2020 seeking help to find housing.

Just Home chair Naomi Godden said it was triple their usual intake.

Further down, the article states —

“We recently completed our quarterly data reporting for March 2020, it showed a total of 101 clients came through the service since July 2017. Of those 38 people were rough sleeping (on the street, in a car, or in a tent) or couch surfing at the time of intake to our service.”

...

“We were overwhelmed with community requests for support from people experiencing financial stress, people who have lost their jobs and are now homeless, and women and children experiencing family and domestic violence.

That is in response to the COVID challenges. They are big challenges. The point they are making is that their resources as a not-for-profit group are stretched. They go on to say that even the funding available through Bunbury, in particular, is also stretched. Another part of the article states —

“As a proportion of the Augusta Margaret River Shire population of 14,500, our figures indicated that the incidence of homelessness and need for support in Margaret River is significant.

“Unfortunately, the funding allocated to Bunbury will not address the needs in our community, and we await with hope for further funding allocated to Margaret River and other regional communities to address the entrenched and growing issues of homelessness.

It is certainly a very acute issue, and one that is extremely challenging. I am absolutely certain that the minister is aware of it. Dr Naomi Godden made the comments about Margaret River. As you are aware, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr S.J. Price), she also presented to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee during our Airbnb inquiry. I passed on Dr Godden’s requests in a letter to the Minister for Community Services, which sits on her desk. The letter I wrote is dated 3 June. I sent a copy of the letter that I received requesting \$150 000 so that Just Home Margaret River could continue to support the community in the 2020–21 financial year. That money will help it as a not-for-profit to manage issues. In the letter of request to the government, Naomi states —

Given the insufficient social housing stock in AMR and high local rental prices, we request that the WA Government allocate funding for a rental subsidy program for AMR people experiencing homelessness to access and maintain secure housing.

Again, Naomi has put together a comprehensive request to government citing data and information. This was not just quietly snapped together in a hurry. It was put together with some thought and by a person who, as you know, Mr Acting Speaker, is very much committed to sort out the many challenges faced by her community.

The homelessness issue is there. I also wrote a letter to the Minister for Housing. I remember when I was housing minister, I was very sold on the housing affordability strategy—I think that is what it was called—that the previous government put in place, which was a continuum from homelessness through to home ownership. There was a heap of points on which we would encourage people to move along. It is not just about building a house for someone who is homeless. We need to find a way to move someone from social housing into employment and rental subsidised housing, and then we can make a house available for someone behind them to move into. We tried to encourage people along the continuum of points, going from being homeless to having access to a job, rental subsidies and shared equity arrangements in housing, and then getting a loan from Keystart, for example, to buy their own home. A lot of requests from members of Parliament are to build more houses, but it is much more complex than that. The Minister for Community Services knows that, and I am sure that the Minister for Housing knows that. With the information available to me, I do not pretend to have the easy answers. I do not know the full profile of what is happening in places such as Margaret River and Denmark, but I know that there is a need there and that through the lens of COVID-19, that need is getting worse. Unless action is taken, we will have some challenges going forward.

Before I get onto my next topic, I want to touch on the backpacker issue. I am very pleased that the minister chased up this issue. Backpackers in Margaret River and Manjimup in particular are fundamentally required during harvest in the horticultural season for picking. Of course, as the COVID-19 crisis came into play, they could not move and were locked in, as were the jobs they were coming off, so fewer jobs were available and they were therefore displaced. They did not have support. They could not get Centrelink payments. They did not have anywhere to live. One community in particular, the Manjimup community, led by the Shire of Manjimup, did a tremendous job. I talked to the minister about it and she got someone from her office to give them a call. I was really pleased about that, because it is important to highlight good models so that they can be repeated in other communities to support particular issues. That was good, and I hope the minister got something out of that contact. I attended a funeral this

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morning in Margaret River so I had to drive to Margaret River and back today. As you will know, Mr Acting Speaker, I was missing from the committee meeting this morning. I heard on the radio that harvest is coming on for many horticultural crops and they need backpackers. I do not know how well the numbers match up—I am not sure how many backpackers are there—but the work the Manjimup shire did find that between 800 and 1 000 backpackers were in the Manjimup shire when the COVID-19 crisis hit, which is not insignificant. If they are all still there, I am sure that they can help with the harvest. I want to highlight the good work done by the shire in response to the backpackers having nowhere to go and needing support.

Another person I want to talk about is Ed Fallens, who has bought and upgraded the pub in Manjimup. He is housing backpackers in 60-odd rooms and has received donations from the community. The last time I spoke with him, he said that the donations had amounted to \$3 000. That money will be used to provide food for the backpackers who do not have any money. They are really looking after them. I want to put his name on the record because what he is doing is absolutely significant.

Mr D.T. Punch: It's about time it was done up.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Yes, but when we come out of this, he is also investing in Manjimup. He is backing in that community. The member for Bunbury would be well aware of Tall Timbers Manjimup. Having bought the pub, he wants to build a distillery, a brewery and a few other things. He will be well and truly a part of the return to normality, but, more particularly, to getting our economy up and moving.

I want to talk about community resource centres and my concern about the government's actions, particularly the Minister for Regional Development's actions, relating to Linkwest. From memory, there are 105 community resource centres around the state. At one point, the McGowan government was ready to cut their resources in half. There was a massive outcry from regional Western Australia, and, quite rightly, the minister reinstated the funding. They have a support network through an organisation called Linkwest, which basically provides network support services to all community resource centres around the state. Up until a week's time, Linkwest has been funded by government to support centralised network services to all the community resource centres. I will go through a few steps that are concerning, but the landing point is not where the community resource centres want to be. In December, the Premier wrote to Linkwest and said that for governance reasons, the CRC support services contract would go out to tender in expressions of interest. This process was cancelled after the expressions of interest were received and Linkwest was provided with two short extensions to deliver services up until 1 July 2020, which is at the end of this month. Of course, one wonders why expressions of interest were called for and then put on hold. Recently, the Department of Finance advised that due to the COVID-19 crisis, the state government would extend current community resource centre contracts to June 2021. The contracts of all CRCs were extended, but Linkwest was not included in that. The network support services for CRCs through Linkwest was not supported in the same way that the CRCs were supported. Twice, the CRCs have been surveyed about what sort of support services they want, and both times Linkwest was strongly supported. That organisation centrally supporting the CRCs was supported by all the CRCs; therefore, one would have thought that the government would have responded, "Okay, we're going to keep funding you"—even if it was a one-year extension, which is what it did with the CRCs. However, the government said that it would give \$2 500 to each of the CRCs and let them procure their own services. Subtly, the scuttlebutt around the tracks is that that is the Minister for Regional Development's strategy to divide and conquer and let other people come into the mix and take away what has been fundamentally a supported essential service support from Linkwest to all the CRCs in the state.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is interesting that during the COVID-19 crisis—this is the reason I highlight it here—the support from Linkwest was significant. It stepped up and, as described by one of the CRCs in my region, it was absolutely outstanding. It stepped up to the plate and coordinated a whole range of support through the CRCs to provide services to those regions. Linkwest stepped up to the plate during the COVID-19 crisis. I would have thought that the government would have said, "That is great—fantastic. We'll back them in." It could have backed it in for a period until the COVID-19 crisis was over. To give members some examples, from 26 March, there were weekly "Corona Convos" on a Thursday afternoon via Zoom with a guest presenter from a range of peak bodies. Those peak bodies included the Western Australian Council of Social Service and emergency relief and charity food relief. Linkwest organised conferences for all the CRCs with WACOSS and emergency service relief arrangements, Volunteering WA, the Western Australian Local Government Association, ConnectGroups, Playgroup WA, the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services, People with Disabilities WA, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health, Community Legal Western Australia and a group of others. The point I make is that during the COVID crisis, this central group that has been providing support services to all CRCs stepped up to the plate and provided a wealth of information that the community resource centres have been absolutely rapt with. Why, then, has the government pulled the funding? It tried an expression of interest, but then it backed away from that and said, "Right, we're going to give a little bit to all the CRCs. Go and get your own services." It is

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a disappointing arrangement. At the very least, the resourcing could have been extended to keep that service going so that there was a bit of continuity during the COVID crisis. There was also a range of sessions for the staff and the committees involved with the CRCs to upskill in HR, JobKeeper and hosting groups online. We know that there were challenges in getting connection in regional WA. People had to use online services. Managing mental well-being, making effective requests and engaging with communities were a range of services provided to support the CRCs during that time—and we are still in it; we are not out of it yet. I call on the government to provide a little bit of money to each of the CRCs and to keep funding Linkwest. It is well supported by the CRCs and it has shown its mettle during the COVID crisis in a coordinated way across the state, independent of the government and independent of other groups. That is exactly what we want to see—resilience built in our communities. I will strongly support the minister to take up that case.

Mr P.J. Rundle: Now they get rewarded by pulling the rug out!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Absolutely!

The minister will come back and say, “Yes, we’re pulling the Linkwest funding, but we’re going to give it back to all the CRCs individually.” That is a divide and conquer strategy, and those CRCs that have less capacity may hire someone who may not even get it right, and the CRC may be strapped with having to pay \$2 500 and will not get the grant. Then it will have to be acquitted, and there is a whole process attached to that, so I am not supportive of the divide and conquer strategy. We will have a broader debate later, but at this time—when we have the lens of COVID sitting over all of us—we need to have those support services across our CRC network because they provide a fantastic service to all our regional communities.

I want to talk about mental health, but I suspect I will not have time.

Seniors and aged-care services are probably more appropriately pitched to the Minister for Health, but the Minister for Housing is in this space a little bit as well. The transition from home and community care—effectively from state to federal responsibility of the commonwealth home care packages—has not been good. I have, to some extent, accepted that there will be transitional challenges, but what worries me is that the landing point that we are finishing up on is not where we expected to be when we started out with this transition. Also, a whole range of services will slip during that course and it might just be accepted as the new normal. I know my colleague the member for Roe may not have those full services rolled out in his patch—I know there is a staged approach to this—but I can make a couple of comments about my patch. Basic cleaning and gardening packages are available, but it is hard to access higher level support. There are recurring issues of lack of transport for people to get to appointments, particularly specialist appointments, in major regional centres—for example, from Boyup Brook to Bunbury and Augusta to Busselton. Silver Chain is relying on volunteer drivers who are not always available, driving to areas is more difficult due to COVID restrictions and older drivers do not want to compromise their health. Cleaning is still available, but there is less social support—for example, shopping trips and outings to cafes et cetera, which were there under the old HACC model. In many cases, that was supported by local government and the not-for-profit sector services through the WA Country Health Service.

It may not be quite right for some of my colleagues in terms of where they are at, but to me it is almost time for an audit of the delivery of state government–focused services compared with where we are now with the federal model that this government signed off on. I recognise that there are challenges in that transition, but the landing point needs to be at least where we were when we started. I do not believe it is. I believe people are falling through the gaps. We almost need to have an audit to see a snapshot of where we are at. I remember having a debate in the house—it may have been a grievance—and the Minister for Health and I talked about the service provider of last resort. In many cases, providers fail due to thin markets when there is not competition for services, as competition hopefully produces a better outcome. In many cases, there is only one provider, if any at all, and even that one provider finds it challenging to deliver the services. Many parts of regional Western Australia have very thin markets. I am unconvinced that the new model is going to deliver on that, and for me it is probably time for an audit to see a snapshot of where we are at with the transition to the federal arrangements, because I regularly get contacted by constituents who find their unique circumstances very, very challenging to manage.

One issue in the aged-care services space is the provision of housing. As I said before, it is very challenging. I have an ageing demographic in my electorate. We want to encourage people to live near where they work. When we were in government, we made significant investments through the royalties for regions program. Some of that was cut pretty much the day the McGowan government came to power, but there are some examples that could work. I recently wrote a letter to the Minister for Housing with an example from Margaret River. Baptistcare has units located in Margaret River at Silver Vines Village in Mirrambeena that are jointly owned and co-funded in partnership with the Department of Communities. The issue raised with me was that a number of units were not habitable and required an investment of approximately \$467 000 to bring them up to an appropriate standard. The letter reads —

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According to the level of ownership by the State Government, the DoC would be required to contribute \$224,000 with Baptistcare covering the balance to proceed with the upgrades.

That did not happen and the department did not make a call on that. Baptistcare then approached the Department of Communities to purchase the department's share in the development, which would then allow it to renovate the units and provide accommodation needs for the elderly. But after waiting a considerable time, the Department of Communities reneged on that, so we still have, as I understand it, the white elephant of a number of units that have not been upgraded. The government could do it for nothing. The government could allow Baptistcare to purchase the units and put the necessary investments in place to make those units available for the elderly in Margaret River.

That is one example that, on the face of it, does not sound like it is a complex issue to resolve. The minister replied in a letter —

I acknowledge that the negotiations have been protracted, however the Department of Communities has assured me it is working with Baptistcare to reach an outcome that will secure long term aged care accommodation in Margaret River.

That was in May and, through the filter of COVID, those issues are not getting any easier.

I will not stand here and give criticism on all fronts. I will touch on another couple of issues. I am very pleased with the government's support for regional men's health. The regional men's health program started in Wheatbelt Men's Health many years ago and it provides a fantastic service in the rural communities. Its next funding round was recently approved for three years. It sends me its annual report every year, which is actually a good read. The report highlights its efforts in many remote and regional parts of Western Australia to deliver services for people who are isolated and are some distance from some of the bigger centres and therefore would not normally get access to those services. In fact, from time to time, we find ourselves—I have as a member of Parliament—referring people we have come across to that service. If people who find themselves in difficult circumstances give them a call, it is right there on the phone to support them. That service is there all the time, depending on the season. It is more challenging in the bad seasons than it is in others, but right now, due to the challenges of dealing with COVID-19, we are hearing about this issue in our electorate offices. It is becoming a more dominant issue that needs a response. If we are not careful, we will have a lot of very disaffected people who could very well do harm to themselves. We certainly do not want to see that landing point with the mental health challenges that are about.

One of the next crisis points, which I am sure the minister is aware of and has had briefings on, will be when the JobKeeper payments cease. We do not know the settings of the federal government yet. I hope that it puts in some sort of glide plane—I am pretty sure it is thinking about this; I do not expect the federal government to listen to my speech in Parliament and respond to it. Perhaps it might put in place a glide plane as it comes off those payments or it might respond by making investments into specific sectors. That will be another cliff face because it will put more people into the unemployment queues and more mental health and homelessness issues will arise as a consequence. That is another point in time that we have to be on the lookout for.

As the member for Geraldton said, the Minister for Community Services is hardworking and her heart is in the right place on this. This is a huge challenge, but, hopefully, she has listened to the discussions here that highlight that many of these issues are coming through our electorate offices. We hope that the government comes up with a good response.

MR A. KRSTICEVIC (Carine) [5.31 pm]: I rise today on behalf of the Liberal Party to express our support for the motion moved by the National Party that deals with homelessness issues in the regions, and more broadly, and the community services sector. I have a few things that I want to go through.

In question time today, I was listening to the minister answer a question. Like on many occasions, I listened to the minister's words and I started to feel heartened about the way she spoke. I thought, "That's good. I'm hearing the right words and the right intentions", but, unfortunately, we never see the follow through. I am not necessarily blaming the minister for that because I know that she is one of 17 members of cabinet, one of 40 members on that side of the house. If she does not get the support of her colleagues and the Premier and she does not get the vocal activism necessary to support homeless people, victims of family and domestic violence, people with mental health issues and all the other things that fall under the community services portfolio, it is very hard for her to deliver on those outcomes, and that is very disappointing. Today, there was an energy in the room when members talked on the Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Bill. Obviously, nobody supports puppy farming. The energy in the room was electric and the debate was strong. But when we talk about homelessness, family and domestic violence and the victims and perpetrators, suddenly the atmosphere becomes very sombre. It seems that no-one wants to participate. The energy level and activity falls off. It is quite disappointing to see.

Several members interjected.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The members are right; there are not many people in this chamber for this very important debate, which is disappointing.

In March 2017, when the Labor Party was elected to government, the community services sector and its providers got a bit of a stride in their step. They were thinking “The Liberals have been in government for the last eight and a half years. They did a pretty good job of helping us out. They gave us a \$600 million boost. They built Foyer Oxford and all these facilities.” Obviously, we could have done better. One can always do better in this space; there is no doubt about that, but we did a pretty good job. Obviously, those providers are now educating me on how we can do a better job the next time we are in government. However, those providers had an expectation of the WA Labor Party, especially when they looked at its platform document for 2017 and what was mentioned about homelessness, the not-for-profit sector, case management and the acknowledgement of issues. I note one interesting thing in that document. It states —

... there has been a large amount of uncertainty in the homelessness sector due to short-term funding contracts, and the lack of a clear strategy ...

Do members know what? Today, six months out, or a little more, from the next state election, short-term contracts are still ongoing. There is still uncertainty. Providers in the sector still do not know whether they will get funding when their contract expires, and sometimes they do not find out until a few months before the end of the contract. I regularly talk to them and this is what they tell me. Labor also promised increased funding to the community services sector. A statement in the document refers to the support of early intervention programs and initiatives; all these things were in there, and, of course, there was the equal remuneration order, which we know has been a big problem and has still not been fixed. Many organisations are still suffering under the equal remuneration order and are being told to cut their services. They tell me that when they talk to the minister and the government they are told that the funding will not be cut: “You were getting X dollars previously. You’re getting the same dollars now.” Of course they are getting the same amount of money, but when we take into account the ERO and the increasing costs of services, the services have to be cut by 30 or 40 per cent. These issues were an extreme problem before COVID. Now, in the COVID environment, one would have thought that there would be a massive influx of money into this space. Unfortunately, that has not happened. I know that the minister will list a couple of services that have been funded, which is great; they are good little projects but they do not come anywhere near close enough to scratching the surface.

The issues for the Department of Communities started with the machinery-of-government changes; that was the first big mistake that this government made. It rolled all these services into one department that had four ministers; the department did not know which way it was going. We have seen plenty examples over the last three and a half years of the serious issues, concerns and problems that have occurred in that department. I know that people in that department are struggling for direction and enough capacity and resources to deliver what needs to happen. The National Party and the Liberals want to help the minister in this space, albeit that three and a half years under this government have passed and nothing significant has occurred. But one more budget is approaching. Let us try to pretend that we care. Let us make sure that this next pre-election budget contains all the bells and whistles, even though it is all too late, and at least show that there is some level of interest, care and support for all these service providers that also engage a lot of volunteers in that sphere.

In 2019, the Labor Party released a document titled “Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity”. There is nothing in there about community services, homelessness or housing. There are a lot of great motherhood statements, but, firstly, there is nothing of substance, and secondly, it does not refer to community services, homelessness, family and domestic violence or any of those sorts of issues. The Labor Party does not appear to be promoting prosperity.

The Leader of the National Party mentioned the campaign that started in December 2019. It was the first time in history that the community services sector had ran a campaign against the Labor Party, saying: “You have messed this up. You have destroyed the community services sector. You are hurting people.” Reluctantly, and unbelievably, those 450 organisations combined forces to start a campaign and were publicly vocal on this issue. They were not scared by Labor Party statements that funding might be cut or that they might be hurt in some way financially. They stood up to the Labor Party and were strong and united.

It is interesting to note that a media release in December 2019 states —

Representatives from the Community Services Sector have held meetings with senior bureaucrats in the Departments of Treasury and Finance, and with Premier Mark McGowan and he gave no clear acknowledgement of the scale of the issues faced.

There was no acknowledgement of homelessness, family and domestic violence, the abuse of women and children or the programs to stop perpetrators doing what they do. The government had no idea of the scale of the problem,

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which I find absolutely amazing. Obviously, there was an impasse and the community services sector needed to step up in this space. That media release also states —

“We need the State Government to put people first and adequately fund the organisations that have skills, local knowledge and empathy ...

It is not the Liberal Party saying this. This is coming from 450 community service organisations before the COVID pandemic. I am sure that there were tens of thousands of people behind this who had the same sentiment and were crying out for help. We know that post COVID, family and domestic violence has increased dramatically. We know that homeless people have been left behind while everyone has tried to look after their own personal financial, emotional and psychological circumstances. Again the most vulnerable have been completely ignored, bar a few media opportunities. Fundamentally, they have been ignored. As I said, the equal remuneration order is serious. That was all the way through to 2020. Again, it has not been addressed appropriately. As I have said, we put \$600 million into that space. It really needs something to be done. I know the minister has changed the indexing and a little bit of money has been put towards that scenario. That is great; it is fantastic. But, again, the minister is only scratching the surface. I am sure the minister is not blind to this. I am sure that she can step back and look at this objectively and look people in the sector in the eye and say, “I know you’re suffering. I feel your pain. I want to help you, however, I am not allowed to help you. I do not have the capacity to help you, but I can’t because there are no votes in it for the government.” If there are no votes in it, there is no compassion and no interest in helping. We know the sector needs a 23 per cent increase in funding. That is what it is asking for. The government needs to come on board.

It was interesting to listen to Treasurer Hon Ben Wyatt on radio 6PR a while ago when he said, “We’re not going to give the not-for-profit sector the same funding that the Liberal Party gave them, because the Liberal Party gave a lot of money to the not-for-profit sector and they squandered it; they wasted it; they didn’t use it well. We do not think it was a good investment.” Of course, we know from experience that the not-for-profit sector delivers things on the smell of an oily rag. No better efficiencies and no better results are achieved, both through employees and volunteers. Predominantly, women work in this space. They are highly underpaid and undervalued for what they do. I was shocked to hear the Treasurer come out and say on radio that the not-for-profit sector does not deserve any extra money and needs to prove that the funds from this government would be spent wisely. We keep talking about equality and equal pay, but, of course, the most vulnerable and underpaid do not get that help.

We know about funding for homeless support services. I have said in this place previously that every time the federal government tops it up, the state government more or less takes out the equivalent amount of money. There has been \$90 million for the homelessness services in the last three budgets—from 2017–18 to 2019–20. The federal government has increased its contribution over that period by about \$14 million.

Ms S.F. McGurk: You either do not understand finances or you’re being very misleading.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is right here in an answer the minister gave. It has her signature on it. It says \$15 million. I know the sector agrees that the funding has been cut massively. I look forward to seeing much higher figures in the budget papers this year. Hopefully, the government will not cut funding again after the feds have put more money in. Only five per cent of those in the community services sector believe that they can meet the demand. The rest believe that they cannot meet the demand. That is an absolute disgrace.

We know that since this government came into office, it has sold more than a thousand social homes at a time of unprecedented need. More than 350 homes under the Government Regional Officers’ Housing program and 900 affordable houses have been sold at a time when need has never been greater. For what purpose were all those homes sold? Again, it is on the public record. They were sold because the government wanted money to spend on its pet projects and other initiatives.

Interestingly, I wanted to see how many new social homes have been built. In 2016–17, under the previous government, 956 social homes were delivered. In 2017–18, when this government came into office, 89 homes were built. In 2018–19, there were 70. In 2019–20, for the first six months from 1 July 2019 to 31 December 2019, 25 homes were built. The level of social housing investment has been abominable. I know some money is going into that now. Again, it is very insignificant relative to what has been got rid of and what has been sold. Of course, in remote communities, in 2017–18, 71 homes were sold; in 2018–19, 34 homes were sold. In the first six months of this year, from 1 July 2019 to 31 December 2020, how many homes were delivered in remote areas—zero. That is absolutely unbelievable!

Of course, when we look at demand for specialist homelessness service providers, in 2017–18 they provided roughly 10 303 accommodation places, exactly. How many were needed—13 884. That means 3 545 people, or 25 per cent, who were desperately in need of a home were told, “Go away. We can’t help you. We’re not interested.” This is from the specialist homelessness service providers. It is not even through the ordinary course of events. It is quite amazing that we have had that level of demand.

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Believe it or not, for the young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer plus cohort, there are only four beds in the state—four beds! That is all! That is unbelievable. In September 2019, I asked a question about crisis, transitional and short stay accommodation, and family and domestic violence refuges and got an answer in October 2019. I note that in March 2020—a significant time after—the minister resubmitted the answer, because the original answers given to me in October 2019 were wrong. The department did not even know how many family and domestic violence refuges it had over those five years. It did not know the figures for how many crisis accommodation places it had and it had to correct the record. That is interesting. We heard a lot about the creation of a Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, so I thought that that would mean something; there would have to be something behind it. But when I asked how many family and domestic violence refuge beds there are, I was told that in 2017–18, when the minister came to government, there were 298. Three years later, in 2019–20, guess how many there are? There are 298. Not one extra bed has been created—zero. That title is fantastic but there is absolutely no service delivery.

I can only go on the information that the minister provides to questions and ask why these things are still happening. We know that during coronavirus, domestic violence has been spiking astronomically. I know at a national level, calls to 1800RESPECT and people accessing the online chat tool increased by 38 per cent between March and April. Police records show that assaults within families were up by more than 10 per cent between February and March. The statistics are there but the support is not.

It is interesting to note the number of people in remote and regional areas fleeing family and domestic violence who are flown or transported by bus to the metropolitan area because there is nowhere for them to go in the regions. In Geraldton, there is nowhere. I heard the member for Geraldton say that he could not find any accommodation for someone. They bus those people down from Geraldton and were flying them down—obviously not now—from the Kimberley and other places to the metropolitan area because they had nowhere to put those people. That is an indictment of what is going on. Does it not surprise us that this is going on? It should not surprise us because we all remember.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: We remember the stories in *The West Australian* and issues with homeless people in the City of Perth. When Parliament is on a break I still walk down to the City of Perth with the member for Dawesville and we see what is going on with the homeless. The problem is still there in the City of Perth, as it was before. The only advantage for homeless people now is that when they sleep in front of shops in the City of Perth, they know they will not be disturbed in the morning because there are “for lease” signs on the shops. The shops are empty. They are not woken up in the morning and moved on. They can camp there permanently if they want to. It is an absolute disgrace and a shame that that is still going on. Anyone who walks into the City of Perth at any time will see that.

We have heard stories about the problems on the waterfront in Mandurah. Rockingham has well-documented issues. We know that the Premier wants nothing to do with the homeless in his electorate. We know how that played out. I do not want to go through that sad story. The Premier promised other individuals they would be helped. As members know, after a lot of pressure and a lot of media, the Premier finally did go to Rockingham to see what was going on. He made a commitment to a couple of people there that he would help them out. Of course, as I brought to the attention of this house previously, I went there a month after he made the commitment and, of course, there was no follow-through in the commitment. The media got involved after that, and all of a sudden things started happening. I am obviously talking to the councillors in Rockingham as well, so I am fully aware of what goes on there. I ring them to make sure of what the situation is. I know there are still issues on the foreshore in Rockingham. I have not ventured there, but I am sure that during the parliamentary break I will spend a bit of time in Rockingham. I will have a look, see what is going on, take some notes and see what I hopefully do not need to bring back to Parliament. Hopefully, the Premier will be aware that I will go there to show an active interest in what is going on in his electorate with the homeless people down there and try to do my bit to help them.

I am surprised that the government does not care about this, but the biggest rising cohort of homeless people is women over 55 years of age. They are on the verge of filling that gap. In WA there has been a 16 per cent jump in homelessness for those aged 65 to 74, so the numbers are growing in the older demographic, whether it is through negative equity, mortgage stress, separation or other sorts of issues. It could be due to cost-of-living pressures. We know how bad they have been. There have been cuts to the hardship utility grant scheme. There have been massive cuts to HUGS worth of tens of millions of dollars, which is very interesting.

Several members interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I will go through the statistics, because I have all information here. I will go through that, because I have 10 minutes.

Young people are very compromised in this situation, and they are at a very vulnerable stage in their lives. Again, the Youth Affairs Council of WA is scathing of this government and what it is not doing to help young people to get them off the street and on the straight and narrow. Youth unemployment is over 16 per cent. Youth are the hardest

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hit in this coronavirus. Hospitality and the sectors they work in are the hardest hit, and nothing is being done to help them—nothing at all. It is an absolute disgrace.

How do we not mention the City of Fremantle and the homelessness issues there? The minister refused to even acknowledge that there was a homelessness problem, but I can tell her that when I went there and spoke to traders and had a look around, there was a serious homelessness issue in Fremantle. I suppose that is an indictment of the fact that the minister cannot even fix her own electorate. She cannot even put enough funding and support there. I am sure the minister wants to, but the Premier is not interested. He was not interested in Rockingham, so why would he be interested in Fremantle? That is just ridiculous. Other ministers have zero interest in homelessness or family and domestic violence, because where are the votes in that? I talk to the sector regularly and I tell it that the only way it is going to move this government is to shake it up. I say, “Get public, get vocal. Don’t be scared by threats of funding cuts, don’t be scared of intimidation, don’t be scared to stand up for what you believe in, because you know what? You’re fighting for the most vulnerable people in this state. They need a voice and your voice should not be scared to be heard.” I tell them that they need to stand up, and if they are not given the support they need and they are given an ultimatum by the government, they should walk away. I know it is hard to do that, but the sector should give the problem back to the government.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Pressure is mounting —

Mr D.T. Punch: Smear and innuendo!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The member needs to talk to people. As I said before, they may not necessarily be funding cuts. A body may not be given additional funding but has to cut services by 30 per cent. I suppose that is not technically a funding cut; it is a cut to services. They are not even maintaining the cost of wages and expenses so they cannot deliver the same services.

Ms S.F. McGurk: So it is not a funding cut, is that right?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: No, I am saying that is one example, but the people I have spoken to have indicated that funding cuts are also potentially on the table.

Ms S.F. McGurk: There are no funding cuts at all—none. You just make it up.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is good, so the minister is saying that if those organisations speak up, she will not cut their funding. If they publicly attack her and her government for failing, she will not cut their funding.

Ms S.F. McGurk: What are you talking about?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: There we go, so no answer.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am not taking any interjections, because I do not have much time.

Anyway, we know about the 10-year homelessness strategy and how long it took for it to come out. There is another 10-year strategy, is there not, minister—the one to do with family and domestic violence? Hopefully, that will come out before the next election. In four years the government has come up with one strategy, and maybe a second one will come out. The first strategy means two five-year action plans, and I am not even sure whether anyone has seen those yet. It was interesting, because, again, the minister only met with the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia once in the development of the 10-year homelessness strategy—only once. I found that amazing. The Youth Homelessness Advisory Council went to only one meeting, and the Multicultural Advisory Group also went to one meeting. Those are not many meetings. It has taken two and a half years to develop a 10-year strategy, and these key groups, which I think make up quite a large cohort advocating for homeless people, were consulted infrequently in this whole process. The government came up with this Common Ground facility, to be developed over the next three years. The government is supposedly going to build it somewhere. It does not know where the land is and whether it will be government or private land. The government does not know how many rooms it will have or where it will be. It thinks there will be one in the city. There are various councils such as Mandurah and Rockingham saying to build it in their region. I am sure the regions are calling for them to be there. Do members know what? There is no evidence or information. It is just a pie in the sky. Not only that, the document produced by the sector to deal with the Common Ground facility said that one 100-bed Common Ground facility would cost \$36 million. The government has only put \$34.5 million on the table, and it reckons it will build two. The documentation says that only one can be built for \$36 million, so the government is short to build one 100-bed facility, let alone two, unless it makes them 10-bed facilities or really minuscule. The government does not know where it will build them. If the government uses private land, it will cost more money. The government tells us how it brought forward \$6 million for the Housing First Homeless Initiative and put \$34 million towards a Common Ground facility. Do members know what? That was \$34 million over five years, up to 2023–24. It was roughly \$6 million to \$7 million

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a year over that five-year period. We have a crisis now. In five years' time it will be much worse. The fact that the government has brought forward \$6 million is very generous, minister. Why does the minister not bring forward the whole \$34 million? Bring the whole lot forward; do not spread it out over four or five years. Everything the government does is spread over four or five years. Nothing is for now. It is as though the government is saying that it will give people 50¢ today, 50¢ tomorrow, 50¢ next week, and good luck for surviving and coping in between. I can talk a lot more about that sort of information. It is quite disappointing in terms of what we are trying to achieve.

The budget submission of Western Australian Council of Social Service stated —

There is clear frustration that the promises of more collaborative and joined-up service design and delivery have not materialised, particularly place-based reforms in regional areas. Meanwhile, the focus on complex machinery of government changes —

Which I mentioned earlier WACOSS supports —

and a lack of communication have led to a loss of clarity in roles and responsibilities and contact points, particularly in the Department of Communities.

WACOSS is scathing of the Department of Communities and the minister in that budget submission. It is an absolute disgrace.

I can talk about the Hotels with Heart project. Again, the government should not have stopped the project. I picked up a whole lot of faults. The government takes people off the street, puts them in a room and tells them they cannot leave for 14 days—they have to self-isolate in case they have COVID-19. Hold on—the government is taking homeless people off the street and locking them up in a room and saying they have to stay there for 30 days, 14 of which they cannot even leave. Why did the government not test them? For a start, we know they did not have COVID-19, because we did not have that community spread. Firstly, we knew that reasonably comfortably. Secondly, test them. The government should have put them there for one or two days or however long it takes to get the test results, not for 14 days. Then the government wonders why some of them leave. It put all these stupid restrictions on them. In saying that, of the 30 people through who went through, 18 had a positive outcome, which is 60 per cent. The minister was telling us that that was a failure. It did not fail! To me, 60 per cent of the homeless people had a positive outcome —

Ms S.F. McGurk: You just say whatever you like. You make things up. It doesn't matter that it bears absolutely no resemblance to reality.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have the minister's comments here. I can read them.

Ms S.F. McGurk: I've never said it was a failure.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: She said in the paper —

If successful, the program would be scaled up to support people fleeing domestic violence and struggling with mental health issues ...

Has the program been scaled up? No, it has not been scaled up. The government has dropped the program and is not doing it anymore. It is not supporting people who are fleeing domestic violence and struggling with mental health issues. I only have two minutes. I have the evidence here and could read it to the minister.

Ms S.F. McGurk: I did not say it was a failure. I don't think you've read that in.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is not a problem. I can read it for the minister. Homelessness advocate Jesse Noakes said that that this government's contribution towards homeless people during the pandemic was insignificant and minuscule compared with that of New South Wales, which funnelled \$34 million into the issue; Victoria, which did \$9 million; and Queensland, which did \$25 million. What did we do? The minister put \$497 000 towards this COVID experience. Although 60 per cent of people found a home, the minister called it a failure. Why would the government not scale it up straight away and help people with family and domestic violence or mental health issues? Why did the minister not say that this program was a success and should be kept going? The COVID threat is no longer there, so the government thinks that it does not have to worry about homeless people anymore and can throw them back onto the street. Why did it spend that money and go through that process? It is an absolute disgrace. The evidence and the information is there. I could read it out but, unfortunately, I only have one minute, so I cannot go into the detail. Again, answers to questions on notice can give members all the details about how many men and how many women were involved.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury) [6.01 pm]: I appreciate many of the comments that members of the Nationals WA made today. I want to deal with those in a little more detail and talk about them in terms of my own experience. I also want to comment on the member for Carine's contribution right up front. Four words in the member for Carine's contribution really stood out to me. It might be corrected in *Hansard*, but I am pretty sure that I heard them. I heard the words: "Let's pretend we care". That about sums up the member for Carine's contribution. All it was was

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innuendo, scaremongering, conversations here and parts of conversations there, stitched together in some sort of argument that, at the end of the day, did not add anything to the issue of the vulnerable and homeless—those most at risk in our community. If the member for Carine were really serious, he would look at how he could make a contribution that says something. I think it is a race between him and the member for Dawesville for the award for saying a lot of words that do not mean anything at the end of the day.

I come back to this motion. It talks about the impact of the coronavirus. The biggest thing that this government can do for our community, which includes people who are homeless, those who are vulnerable, people in business and families is to make Western Australia safe. That has been the focus and has been based on health advice. The government has put in arrangements that have been pretty tough for all of us. I think that has been acknowledged today in this place. Those arrangements are geared to making Western Australia as safe as possible and we have succeeded. I think it is pretty well recognised that if there is anywhere to live in the world at the moment, it would be Western Australia. At the end of the day, we need to come out of this with an economy and a community that is strong, resilient and capable of moving forward.

There was a lot of mention in the contributions by members of the National Party about the need to strengthen the arm of the Minister for Community Services in her dealings with the cabinet. I can say that on this side of the Parliament there is a very strong consensus within cabinet and a strong commitment that is backed up by our backbenchers. I know that the minister also regularly receives contributions from members opposite. We have a very strong approach in cabinet and the issues of the community services sector are well recognised.

Mr A. Krsticevic: Are you in cabinet?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I talk to our ministers. The member clearly does not. I am not taking interjections from someone who has not made any sensible contribution at all to the debate.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We need to have an economy —

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: — that is capable of supporting a strong community services sector. Equally, we need a community services sector that is capable of supporting people who work in an active and vibrant economy. That is the balance that this government is seeking all the time to find in our fiscal response and our policy response. Going into this pandemic, we were well-positioned because of the hard yards put in by this government. One of the historical things that members opposite like to forget is that we came to government with something around \$35 billion of debt and an operating expense account that was going to take us well over \$40 billion. Imagine if we had not brought that under control! We would be in a very difficult position.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Members opposite have no fiscal responsibility. Their approach to everything is to spend and spend and not think about strategy, the outcomes we are after, or how we can do things better. Their response is to spend the money but not engage properly and effectively with members of the community services sector to deliver the best outcomes for regional Western Australia and the state as a whole. That is why we talk about being evidence-based and taking the time to put strategies together. I heard the member for Carine say, “Why didn’t you do this? Why don’t you do that?” It is like a grab-bag of lollies of ideas—trying anything in a rush and putting it out there with no regard for the unintended consequences or the lives of people who might be subjected to those impacts. There is no regard for sensible decision-making, sensible budget application and a sensible approach to policy.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member for Carine, can you stop interjecting, please? It is now on record in *Hansard* that I have asked you to stop interjecting. Thank you.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: They are not even sensible interjections, Madam Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Bunbury, that is not helpful.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I want to talk about the issue of homelessness. I heard very generic terms coming from across the chamber about the concept of homelessness. It embraces a whole range of issues, but the fundamental part of

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it is people who do not have a place where they can feel safe and that they can call home. It includes people who are sleeping rough, sleeping in cars, couch surfing or relying on friends. It is a very complex issue.

I think it was the member for Geraldton who mentioned the Bunbury experience. The council down there has been proactive in trying to address the issue of how to support people who are living on the street. It put a shelter in place and I think it has some regrets about that shelter because we have found that an unintended consequence of a very well-meaning intervention, which was made for absolutely the right reasons, was that people became very territorial over that space and fought over it. The impact on drawing people into that space was quite significant. The consequent implications in terms of risk to people and behaviour that is not appropriate escalated significantly. The City of Bunbury has made the decision to continue working and having conversations with people who use that shelter, but it is not the best option. It highlights that we need to have an approach that treats people as individuals and not just a generic label of homeless. It must take into account the individual circumstances of each person.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is a combination of providing housing —

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: — and looking at opportunities for a case management approach to support people.

There are many reasons people end up without a place they can call home. It can be due to family breakdown, alcohol and drug usage or contact with the justice or child protection systems. In my experience, homelessness mostly arises out of poverty. That has been driven significantly over the past three years by the federal government's approach to Newstart and supporting people who are in dire straits. We know that Newstart as it existed has not been able to adequately support people to enable them to maintain accommodation. It has directly transferred what should be income support from the commonwealth to the very agencies that we are talking about, and has had an impact on their demand profiles. I know that the member for Warren–Blackwood talked about the tapering or the blading out of those income supports. Until we can address that in a proper, positive and long-term way, we are always going to have demand transferred onto the not-for-profit sector.

A few people talked about a couple of issues I found really interesting. One was on the notion of how funding is organised. One of the outcomes over the eight and a half years of the Liberal–National government was that, certainly in regional Western Australia, it drove tendering and competition to such an extent that it pitted agency against agency. That, coupled with short-term contractual arrangements, meant that those agencies could not strategically plan their future. There was also an absence of any sort of strategic policy from the previous government.

Mr P.J. Rundle interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Roe!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The impact and legacy of that has come up time and time again, because it is still washing through in the contractual obligations that we inherited.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: If the member for Warren–Blackwood listened, he might actually learn something for a change. The member is very quick to offer an opinion, but he has acknowledged that this area is not his highlight, but economics is.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: One of the tragedies of that eight and a half years is that the National Party had over \$8 billion to spend. I remember the instructions were for “transformational projects”, which stood for glossy projects. The Minister for Regional Development was not far off the mark when she said that a significant amount of that money went into the petunia building, but when it came to services for the community services sector, very little money was provided. As a point of fact, if I can find it in my notes —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Bunbury. Can we stop now, members.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: They do not like the truth, Madam Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Bunbury!

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Mr D.T. PUNCH: The reality is that royalties for regions did fund the construction of Indigenous visitor hostels—short-stay accommodation in Kalgoorlie and Derby.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This government funded it in Broome. Interestingly, I can recall very little in the way of funding for homelessness support in the southern half of the state.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I think this is a very important motion, but your continued interjection without listening is not helpful. You will desist from interjecting. I call you for the first time.

Mr A. Krsticevic: I am listening!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I call you for the second time.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will move on. I commented earlier on the importance of getting agencies to work together within a strategic framework that has clear objectives. This is what this government's Housing First initiative is about: working individually with people, linking them to an appropriate option for accommodation and then providing the wraparound services to give them the best chance of success. It includes things like specialist services for alcohol and drug issues, or health issues, because often people's health has declined, particularly if they have been homeless for a considerable time. It includes specialist services for income management issues. I mentioned that trying to survive on a Newstart arrangement is particularly difficult. If that is compounded with issues of mental health, drugs, or even contact with the justice system, it becomes even more difficult. Transport support, residential rehabilitation support, life skills and mentoring services are also included. In fact, one of the things I noticed in the previous eight and a half years of the Liberal–National government was that it became so complex to access services that it was beyond the skills of everyday people to actually manage the organisation of getting to appointments, with transport and all the different criteria that were reflected in different key performance indicators from contractual arrangements that lacked strategic focus. That is what this government is bringing with this initiative.

In my own electorate, I have talked regularly with the not-for-profit sector. We had telephone link-ups every week to touch base on how things were going. By and large, the sector really responded strongly. It rose to the occasion, as did Western Australians generally. The Salvation Army, Accordwest, Alliance Housing and community health care all looked at ways to deliver and adapt services to meet the needs of people in the area. Another issue I want to mention is that this government does not look at these services in isolation; we have also put the infrastructure in place. The Minister for Health has stood in this chamber on a number of occasions and talked about step-up, step-down facilities. The previous government talked and talked about those services but failed to deliver them. In Bunbury, I remember that those facilities were announced in 2013 and re-announced just prior to the election in 2016, but were not actually acted upon and delivered until this government came into office. Those are now open. That is a good example of building the infrastructure network so that when we have our Housing First strategy, and when we start talking about the vital role of case management in addressing these issues, we can link people into very opportune support services.

Tiny housing is another initiative I wanted to mention that I think is particularly innovative. We know that within the housing agenda, one house does not fit all. There is a need for a diversity of housing, particularly to suit the needs of single people. In Bunbury, one of the commitments we took to the election was to pilot the concept of tiny housing. I am very pleased to be able to say that that project is now balancing. It will be located with the Salvation Army on land that it owns. It is being built by the local community, and the Rotary Clubs of South Bunbury and Bunbury–Leschenault are contributing to make it happen. Challis Builders is the builder and project manager, but, importantly, Accordwest, the lead agency in the Bunbury area and for the south west, is going to be providing those support services, because to simply house people without those support services would be to repeat the mistakes of the past. People have different special needs, and we have to tailor the response to support those people individually.

Homelessness is a serious issue and deserves serious debate, but it is an issue right across the broader community services sector. We can add money and add money, but we have to stop and ask the questions: What is the evidence? What is the best way of delivering the service? We need to build a strategic framework around that. We need to build collaboration and then look at the individual components of the service network so that we can make sure that it is seamless. We need to make sure that when a person is identified and supported into housing, they have access to the right kind of support services and case management services and are assisted in the organisation of their contact with those services. That is the difference, and that is what this minister has been working on. That is the difference that this minister is bringing to the community services sector. I know it takes time, and I know there might be some impatience out there, but it is important that we get it right. Otherwise, we will be in the scenario where we are simply adding money to the pile and not seeing a difference in people's lives.

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I would like to finish by thanking all the community service organisations, certainly in my electorate. There are far too many to mention. I also think that this house should be giving a vote of thanks to organisations across the whole of the sector for the work they have done. They worked in incredibly difficult circumstances during the COVID-19 crisis. There have been discussions with those organisations and they have been supported as far as it is possible to do so, but they have made a unique contribution to help people who are most vulnerable in our community. There is no doubt that the COVID pandemic will add to the number of people who need support and to the challenge of how we can effectively support those people. But the best thing this government can do, aside from that direct support for the community services sector, is to flatten the curve, make sure this state is safe, proceed with phase 4 of the lifting of restrictions and ensure that our economy can function as much as possible to support people to get their businesses back on track and stay in jobs, and to build up the financial capacity of the state to support the community services sector. If that means that we need to retain the hard border to stop the infection and the second wave coming in, so be it. This government is strong and it is resilient on that issue, and it is supported in my electorate on that issue. My electorate has worn the pain, in the same way as every other electorate, but the people of Western Australia and the community services sector have risen to the challenge and responded superbly.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [6.20 pm]: I rise to support our leader's motion, which states —

That this house notes the increase in homelessness and vulnerable members of the community seeking assistance in regional Western Australia and calls on the McGowan government to deliver an immediate funding increase to provide the community services sector with the capacity to respond appropriately to the additional pressures of COVID-19.

I will cut my contribution a bit short tonight because we want to hear from the minister on several issues. I would like to focus a little more on a couple of examples of some of the good things that are happening and some of the things that I am worried about in my electorate of Roe. It is not all negative; some good things are happening and I would like to draw the minister's attention to those. I also note the member for Carine's contribution. As I said to him, I look forward to him leading by example when we get to see him sleep out with many CEOs and the like in time to come.

Today the member for Central Wheatbelt talked about unemployment, and I think the real worry is the flow-on effects of COVID-19, including the 112 000 jobs that she spoke about; the effect on families and young people who will not have jobs in not only the next few months, but also the years ahead; the lack of confidence that is going to flow through, and that is where the government will really need to step in; homelessness issues; and other social issues such as domestic violence and the like. Homelessness takes many forms—couch surfing, overcrowding in family homes and people living on the streets. Another element of homelessness is people who present to hospital emergency departments on successive multiple occasions knowing what terminology will get them admitted for a few days. I have a few other examples, but Esperance is the main area that I want to highlight.

Since becoming the local member, I have noticed that some fantastic community members and some fantastic community support services have sprung up in the Esperance community, and I will name some of them—Escare and its leader, Jo Aberle; Esperance Care Services and Sue and Chris Meyer, who do a fantastic job; Hope Community Services; Centrecare Esperance; Bay of Isles Community Outreach; Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service, Lachies House and Christine Smith; and Esperance YouthCARE. Those groups do a fantastic job and some of the leaders in the community lead those services.

The Shire of Esperance has been leading the charge, Minister for Local Government. It has created two groups—an economic recovery group and a community service recovery group. One area of concern that an Esperance community member raised with me, Minister for Community Services, was that when the community group was established at the start of this crisis, the Department of Communities representative stood up at the community meeting and told everyone that the department was the contact point for community issues such as housing, homelessness and access to food, and then they went missing. The local office pretty much deflected everything to Perth, which turned out to be a black hole. As an example, the shire sought to collaborate with the Department of Communities on the backpacker accommodation issue, but it ended up having to fund a facility and the operating costs in the absence of any response from the department. That is one matter that the minister might want to look at, because it is concerning to the people of Esperance. The recovery group, which is a fantastic initiative by the council, is concerned about that response from the Department of Communities.

One of the issues that some of the people who work in those care services and support groups have pointed out to me is the lack of affordable housing. That is not in the minister's portfolio, but it flows through and can create homelessness and, potentially, domestic violence. Of course, there is a long waitlist for Department of Housing housing. Two groups of people who are particularly vulnerable in a tight housing market are families in crisis and those who need supported accommodation, which they feel is available more so in Albany, Geraldton and Bunbury. That was pointed out. Obviously, there has been an increase in domestic violence due to COVID-19 restrictions,

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which has made the situation worse. Certainly, they pointed out that Esperance would love to get some of the \$97 million that has been earmarked for housing. If the minister could point that out to the Minister for Housing, that would be appreciated. Of course, other issues include the normal flow-on effects, such as drug and alcohol use, domestic violence, health concerns and—this is the one that I think will be a worry—the fallout at the end of the JobKeeper and JobSeeker scenario at the end of September. There is a concern about that. Those are probably the majority of issues in Esperance that I wanted to raise.

While I have the opportunity, I also want to point out that the Activ Foundation has been in Esperance for about 40 or 50 years. It supported about 18 or 19 families and was doing what I thought was a good job. Recently, for unknown reasons, it pulled out of Esperance and created a real disruption in the community. I went to the community meeting, which was chaired by Ian Mickel, the shire president, and those families were distraught at the way that Activ just pulled out. Those families were not given any notice. As members can imagine, the young people in the 15 to 25-year age group who went along every day were distraught at the way the rug had been pulled out from under them. To top it off, the building that Activ occupied had received a lot of community contributions over the last 30 or 40 years. Activ, which somehow had its name on the title, gave a bit of money back to Rotary and the like that had contributed and said, “Thanks very much. We’ll sell the property and take the proceeds. We’re off back to Perth.” That has been a real frustration to the community of Esperance. The shire president and councillors are also very upset about it. Quite frankly, I think Activ has a lot to answer for in that space. They are just a couple of the things that are happening in Esperance.

We seem to be going along not too badly in Narrogin. There is a women’s shelter in Narrogin for victims of domestic violence. However, there is no men’s shelter or emergency accommodation available, so that is an issue. Once again, there are some support services in Narrogin that are doing a good job, and I certainly compliment them.

One place that I would like to point out to the minister is the Katanning Regional Emergency Accommodation Centre, or KREAC, which is a fantastic model. I would love the minister to come to Katanning one day to look at that model. The centre has cubicles that are accessed with biometric sensors. It is open to families with children and single males and females over the age of 18 who are registered. Their fingerprint information is collected and can be used to open the door and give them access to a bed and a bathroom that are lockable. That is funded through Lotterywest and run by a committee in Katanning. The centre has a three-night limit; however, it is available 24/7. The committee also provides people with advocacy to access housing and referrals to other agencies as required. This model is great for people in a domestic violence situation or who need refuge. People take to the centre a lot of their furniture and other good-quality goods that they may not need. When my wife and I had a recent clean-out and decided to do some renovations, we took quite a bit of furniture and other things to that group. It is great that they also help domestic violence victims or young mothers with young kids to set up a new house. That is a really good community model. As I said, I urge the minister to come to Katanning and look at it one day, because it is quite a good model that she could use further down the track. They are probably the main elements that I wanted to talk about.

I will continue for a couple of minutes. The member for Warren–Blackwood brought up the community resource centres, which are a fantastic model for our regional communities. I honestly believe that the Minister for Community Services could look at incorporating or using the CRCs much more. We have recently had advocacy from Karrina and Donna in Hopetoun, Gabrielle and Kylie in Ravensthorpe and Jess Hamersley in Wagin. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the CRCs in these and many other communities have done a great job. They are the link, especially in smaller communities like Hopetoun and Ravensthorpe. The communities look to them. I think this is a great opportunity for the Minister for Community Services to talk to the Minister for Regional Development to see how she could become involved in advocating for her portfolio. I agree with what the member for Warren–Blackwood said about Linkwest. I think the Minister for Regional Development has taken a divide and conquer attitude to this one. Linkwest has been doing a great job in providing overriding communications for the whole network of CRCs, but that has now been swept away from it. The minister has said, “Here’s a couple of thousand dollars. You go and worry about it yourself and I’ll be on my merry way.” That is a network that the Minister for Community Services could use. I, once again, agree with what the member for Warren–Blackwood said about regional men’s health: I think that is a real feather in the cap of that group. It does a great job. Once again, we have a pretty tough winter with not a lot of water in the dams. A lot of our farmers and regional men are struggling mentally. There is a lot of pressure on people who have to cart water in the middle of winter for their livestock and the like. That group does a great job. People like Ross Ditchburn and Justin Taylor, with his football training group in Tambellup, do a fantastic job in keeping the morale of local men and farmers up to speed. I congratulate them and certainly encourage the minister to come and take a look in the electorate of Roe to see some of the good things that are happening as well.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Community Services) [6.34 pm]: I take this opportunity to address some of the issues that have been raised this afternoon, some with good intent and some a little more mischievously.

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I would even go so far as to say that some were raised maliciously. I note that, overall, members are very connected to their communities. We have a number of country and regional members who I know see disadvantage in their local areas, as we all do, and are frustrated by that level of disadvantage. In a state such as Western Australia and a country like Australia that have so many resources, both material and human, we still often have poverty, disadvantage and intergenerational challenges. It seems that it should not be beyond us to try to resolve them, but these challenges beset the modern world in many ways.

I know that I am not the first to make this observation, but during the pandemic our state and country had world's best practice in accepting the science and good advice, and in having discipline, good governance and good communication between the state and federal governments. Western Australia had a good budgetary situation, which we had worked very hard on for the last couple of years. We also have good public services, including a fantastic public health service. We have been able to draw on not only state services, but also not-for-profit community services. We have had some incredible results in dealing with this pandemic. Many observers have said that we have been able to make changes to work arrangements, get the public messages out far and wide and get people on board and to understand that they need to adhere to the public health messages. As a result, our state has done incredibly well. We should be very proud of not only our government, but also the whole system and the public itself. If we can apply that sort of discipline to other challenges and wicked problems, as they are often described, I think we could overcome some of them.

When I talk about the strategic approach that the government is determined to take, I mean that very sincerely. Members have given examples of disadvantage in their electorates. I know that they are aware that those problems have been around for a long time. They might peak and trough—they might be more extreme at the moment because of COVID-19 or the economic downturn across the state or in particular regions at different times, and be less visible at other times—but we know that they have not really gone away. We need to take a strategic approach and look at the best evidence to resolve some of these issues. I believe we will be able to make a difference. That is the approach that has been adopted in the homelessness strategy. I have been taunted in this place—the member for Carine could not resist having another poke this afternoon—for taking the time to work with the sector and researchers to properly understand what is best practice in addressing homelessness. That is what we have adopted in “All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness”. I know that a strategy will not keep people warm at night or give them a bed, but it does mean that we now have an approach that I think will result in some good outcomes.

I will briefly speak about the Housing First approach. There are examples of the Housing First approach in the United States and Ireland, where it has been very successful. It has also been adopted in Western Australia through the 50 Lives, 50 Homes project. That is a much smaller project that used the Housing First approach. Its latest figures show that it has been successful in housing 237 people through the Housing First approach, and 92 per cent of those people are still in that housing one year later. These were street-present people. This was not low-hanging fruit—people who were perhaps at risk of homelessness. These were the most disadvantaged—these were street-present people. They are very good results.

One of the reasons we have those sorts of results is that the model says we have to track our efforts. We have to have a fidelity—a discipline around tracking our efforts. An example that 50 Lives 50 Homes gave in its most recent report on the Housing First approach was of Ben, who was first approached through its outreach workers in August 2019. He was housed in October. Between May 2018 and September 2019, Ben had had 42 emergency presentations and 12 nights in hospital. That was costed at about \$70 000. Since being housed, Ben has not needed any emergency accommodation—no ED. The costs are clear. I understand that Ben now has a vegetable garden and is happy. He will require some ongoing support and that is appropriate. We know that they are dollars well spent; it is probably cheaper and it is certainly better for the individual.

I wanted to quickly paint the picture that is the cornerstone of our homelessness approach. We understand we have to do a range of different things. We also understand that there is demand across the state, as there always has been—this is not new. The member for Carine particularly riles me when he says that we are doing little, because he said nothing about homelessness before he got the shadow portfolio—not one word! He had some interest. In 2009, he had a view about a particularly challenging large family in his electorate who had some foster care kids. He was in favour of evicting them and selling the house from under them. That is what his record is.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have a strategy now.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not taking any interjections from the member for Carine.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine, you are on two calls!

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Ms S.F. McGURK: Homelessness is a complex issue. We have a strategic approach and an evidence-based approach. We have brought through the funding. We went down to Bunbury and spoke to the stakeholders, who fully understood this approach. We will be partnering with all of them to do the work that is centred on those people. The member for Geraldton asked whether anyone has actually spoken to homeless people to ask them what they want. That is exactly what this approach is about. The approach is centred on them: What sort of accommodation are you interested in? What appeals to you? Is it in a shared house? Is it by yourself? Does it have to be near transport? Do you drive? What is this sort of accommodation? It is permanent accommodation for them, not transitional. Working with those people to understand their needs is crucial to this approach. That is why they get those sorts of results. It might mean getting people's identification, organising their Centrelink payments, stabilising their mental health and organising their meds. It is very difficult work. It does not always come off, but that is our best chance of getting those people off the street and into stable accommodation. The evidence shows us that that works.

As the member for Bunbury said, the first thing we can do during a pandemic is keep those people safe. We are very focused on that. As a state, we should be incredibly proud of what we have done. Under the leadership of the Premier and the McGowan government, all the community has been on board to deliver these good outcomes. I am not the only one who is incredibly grateful that the Liberal Party is not in power, because the borders would be down. It would have got a second medical opinion when it did not like what the Chief Health Officer said. We would have had no money to rely on in dealing with the emergency before us. We need to prevent homelessness. I spoke at question time about the need to provide jobs. We need to keep people safe and then we need to provide them with jobs. We have talked about investing millions and millions in roads. We are partnering with the federal government to do that. The transport minister has done an incredible job in delivering that for Western Australia.

The government is pushing through planning reforms to stop any sorts of barriers to projects going ahead. We are encouraging people to avail themselves of local tourism opportunities. People have an incredible chance during the pandemic to travel within Western Australia, and of course there is our emphasis on local procurement. That is backed up with supporting TAFE, supporting skills development and making sure TAFE qualifications are affordable. We inherited a terrible legacy from the current Leader of the Opposition. She had absolutely no regard for TAFE training and the importance of it. In fact, she racked up TAFE fees to an astronomical amount.

This is all being backed up by \$159 million in a COVID relief fund, which we are now starting to get out to the community sector. We have introduced residential law reform, particularly related to COVID, but also in relation to people experiencing domestic violence. We are ensuring that people understand what those reforms mean, so good communication about those sorts of protections is important. We are investing significantly in housing. The Minister for Housing is responsible for putting in place a \$444 million housing stimulus package. The vast majority of that will be in public and social housing. It will make a huge difference to some of the more vulnerable people we are talking about in this motion today. It will also include people accessing affordable housing. That will take the pressure off social housing and the public housing list.

An element of the Housing First approach that we have brought into the Fremantle 20 Lives 20 Homes project and into our current announcement is an ability for those people who are being housed to access the private rental market. The state government will pay the difference between what those people would have paid as public housing tenants and what the private rental market is asking. In turn, the tenancy will be managed by a community services provider such as Foundation Housing or Access Housing. It is good for the landlord because they get a secure tenant for at least 12 months. They get what they would have got anyway in the market, and they have someone to help manage the tenancy. We would like to get that information out publicly. We need ethical landlords—people who might be interested in saying, "I'd like to do my bit for homelessness or people at risk. I'd like to put my hand up to support that sort of scheme." But also, when the rental market comes and goes, this is a good, secure tenancy that is available for the private rental market. We are doing some innovative things with the housing that is available and not pushing into the queue. For instance, if we are housing street-present people, obviously they are a priority, but if they push out someone else and displace people in the queue, that can be challenging.

A big part of our agenda is making sure that we prevent homelessness, but of course we have existing homelessness. Essentially, that is the nub of the motion we are debating today. I spoke about the housing strategy being backed up by research and evidence. It took some time to put together and I am very proud of it. It will be the cornerstone of a very effective approach in our state. When we announced that strategy, we also announced funding of \$72 million. Half of that will go towards the Housing First approach, which we have brought forward. We are now starting to implement it. That will include an investment in the Housing First approach in Bunbury, Geraldton and Mandurah. Some regional work will start to be done in partnership with the community services sector. A database to underpin it will be funded to make sure that people tell their story just once, and the information is there and shared between providers. There will be some data sharing between organisations to make sure we have good intelligence—a person-centred approach. We know that is the most effective. Also, the feeders of homelessness are incredibly

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important. People recognise that. It is commonsense to understand that we need to address the feeders of homelessness. Nowhere is that more the case than the need to address family and domestic violence. It is interesting that again the member for Carine could not help himself when he took a pot shot against me as the first Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

Mr A. Krsticevic: I was quite nice.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is not the sentiment I get when I speak to the sector. It is very grateful that it has a government that takes this issue seriously. Again, it is kind of galling for this to come from a Liberal member of Parliament. During eight and a half years of government, the Liberal Party did nothing about domestic violence. Actually, that is not true, it did two things: firstly, it took away the dedicated family and domestic violence courts after a very flimsy evaluation that has since been discredited; secondly, on the second to last sitting day of its term in government, we were able to get the Restraining Orders and Related Legislation Amendment (Family Violence) Bill 2016 through Parliament. That is because it was a national agreement. Hon Michael Mischin, the then Attorney General, could not back out of it. That was the Liberal Party's record after eight and a half years. It was absolutely woeful. We had Rosie Batty, Australian of the Year; Victoria set up a royal commission; and Dame Quentin Bryce carried out a significant investigation in Queensland.

For the member for Carine to criticise us over domestic violence is gobsmacking. The member for Carine has an opportunity to redeem himself. There are plenty of opportunities to support good work. A debate is going on in the upper house now about the most comprehensive piece of family and domestic violence law reform that this state has seen. I urge the member to communicate with his members in the upper house, if he ever does that, and get them to support this legislation. Again, it has had fulsome and unequivocal support from the sector because it will adopt best practice in Australia for law reform. There is no doubt that there is more work to do. The high levels of domestic violence that we have in our state and our country are an enormous challenge. It is not a situation that we can turn around overnight. I believe that we are putting in place some very good fundamentals on which we can build and turn the situation around. A good example of that is the Respectful Relationships program that we are implementing in schools. As the Leader of the Nationals WA is aware, there are many challenges in regional areas and across the state. Many people say to me that we need to speak to schoolchildren and turn things around in schools. I know that the Minister for Education and Training gets a little frustrated at that; she says that all social ills could be removed if we added another subject to the curriculum. It is part of the solution. Primary schools in Boyanup, Pinjarra, Northam and Katanning have opted into the Respectful Relationships program, along with Northam High School. We will continue to extend that program. It provides teaching facilities for schools to alter their existing curriculum and start to tackle some of those issues at a school level.

I am very grateful, as other members have commented, for the fantastic work that is done by services in the regions. The government has a lot more to do, but all layers of government—local, state and federal—need to work on this issue. We need to work in partnership with the community services sector. There are a number of organisations in the areas that we are talking about. In the great southern, we have the Albany Women's Centre run by Anglicare, and the Southern Aboriginal Corporation is doing a good job providing legal advice and support. In the south west, we have Tuart House, run by Communicare, the Waratah Support Centre and the South West Refuge. In the wheatbelt, we have the Narrogin Women's Refuge and the wheatbelt women's refuge, which has been mentioned before in this debate. We have great organisations out there. We have to support them. We have to work with the peak body—the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services—and the sector as a whole to make sure there is good information exchange.

Again, the member for Carine could not help himself. He wants to make light of a strategic approach to this sort of work. It is not a quick fix; we are in it for the long term. It is important that we take the time to work with the sector to prioritise that work, and look at the evidence across the country and internationally to determine how we tackle these issues. I think we have many of the right elements that we need to tackle this. We have a government that is committed, and we have incredibly good cooperation in the ministry. I am very grateful to have worked in partnership with the Attorney General on some very significant law reform—residential tenancy and now the Family Violence Legislation Reform Bill. The Minister for Police is on board, along with the Commissioner of Police, Chris Dawson, who is providing fantastic leadership amongst his workforce—the police force. We have many good elements but we have a lot to do. We have high rates of domestic violence in this state, as I have mentioned many times. These issues cannot be overturned quickly.

Another feeder of homelessness is in the area that I have responsibility for—child protection. We have put new money into child protection through the earlier intervention and family support strategy, and we put over \$20 million of new funding into the Aboriginal in-home support service, an Aboriginal consortium led by the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation. That is in the metropolitan area. In the regional areas, we are working very hard to give some of that work to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, but also to the community sector, depending on the cohort

Ms Mia Davies; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Peter Rundle;
Ms Simone McGurk

that they are working with, to work with families whose children are at risk of entering the child protection system. We work with them to prevent that from occurring, to keep the family together and support them to stay together and to be safe, happy and healthy. The early indications of that work are looking very good. I want to continue that work. I hope that I can present some statistical analysis of that work down the track to demonstrate that it is not only good investment of public money—also, money spent now will be money saved later—but also obviously manifestly better for those families.

Target 120 is another example of new money that the government has put in to make sure that we have a person-centred approach to try to stop young people who are almost certainly at risk of ending up in the juvenile justice system, if not in youth detention or the adult correction system. We have put over \$20 million of new funding into that program. We have rolled it into a number of regional areas, and we will continue to roll it out. I have not talked a lot about its implementation because it is slow, hard work. It will help young people aged between 10 and 14 who are not in the justice system yet, but all indications are that that is where they will end up. Engagement with them and their families is slow work. To gain the trust of families and continue to work with them and their local community organisations to provide the sort of support they need to keep young people engaged at school and away from the justice system and other antisocial behaviour that is so easy for them to get involved in is challenging work. I hope I can demonstrate that we are doing good work in that area. Yes, there is more to do. There is no doubt about that. As I said, I think some of those examples will stand us in good stead in the future, importantly for those very vulnerable families.

Finally, we are embarking on significant child protection reform as a result of the bill that passed through the lower house. We are putting in place significant strengths to acknowledge the need for Aboriginal children to have a connection to their culture, their community and their country. That is an important protective behaviour for those children and gives them the best chance, if they are in the child protection system, to have a stable placement, to stay engaged with school and to stay connected to their identity and their broader family. The bill has been debated in the lower house and is now under consideration in the other place. I hope that members in the other place have a genuine debate. I know that we can say that we want better outcomes for some of those vulnerable young people but exactly what that looks like as a system design is another challenge altogether. We are committed, as I said many times in that debate, to work with Aboriginal-controlled organisations to get better outcomes for vulnerable families.

I could speak about many other things that this government has invested in. Financial counselling is another huge investment in making sure that people are supported when they need it so they can get back on their feet and continue to lead happy, successful lives with their families. Of course, we know the record that the Liberal–National government had when it came to financial counselling: it had no appreciation of it, it slashed services in the metropolitan area and then reinstated a measly half of the money that we put in place. I guess that attitude to financial counselling is also reflected in the previous government’s attitude to financial management as a whole. There was no better example of that than how it managed royalties for regions. The way it was managed was an absolute failure.

Mr D.T. Redman: You committed to it and then you got rid of it.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have not got rid of it at all. We have committed to good management of it and investment in —
Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Members, I will yell as loud as you. Stop now!

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have committed to investment in real outcomes for those people in regional areas where they need it.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.