

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2020–21 BUDGET ESTIMATES AND  
2019–20 ANNUAL REPORTS**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2020**

**SESSION TWO  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES — DISABILITY SERVICES**

**Members**  
**Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)**  
**Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)**  
**Hon Diane Evers**  
**Hon Aaron Stonehouse**  
**Hon Colin Tincknell**

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**Hearing commenced at 11.16 am**

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON**

**Minister for Disability Services, examined:**

**Ms MICHELLE ANDREWS**

**Director General, examined:**

**Mr MATTHEW RICHARDSON**

**Director, Management Accounting and Financial Analysis, examined:**

**Mr MICHAEL CREVOLA**

**Chief Finance Officer, examined:**

**Ms MARION HAILES-MacDONALD**

**Assistant Director General, examined:**

**Mrs RACHAEL GREEN**

**Deputy Director General, examined:**

**Mrs SHARON WEBB**

**Senior Policy Adviser, Minister for Disability Services, examined:**

**Mr NILUSHKA WIJAYADASA**

**Chief Finance Officer, examined:**

**Mr PHIL PAYNE**

**Executive Director, Regulation and Quality, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing.

Please state whether you have read, understood and signed a document titled "Information for Witnesses".

**The WITNESSES:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on Parliament's website.

The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question.

Members, before asking your question, I ask that you identify whether it relates to the budget papers or annual report and provide the relevant page number.

Minister, do you have a brief opening statement?

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**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I do not, thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** For members who have indicated that they will be asking questions, I will allocate approximately 20 minutes for the first two speakers and the remaining time for the rest of the participating committee. We will start with Hon Peter Collier.

[11.20 am]

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Thank you, Chair. This is just a generic question on funding with regard to budget paper No 2, page 532. I will just give this a go once again, minister. The functional review—how is that going?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I know it is a favourite issue of yours. Obviously, as you know, honourable member, in March 2018, the Expenditure Review Committee of cabinet approved the establishment of a functional review into the Department of Communities, particularly disability services, to work out what the future of service provision and our state's future role in disability services was in the context of the NDIS. ACIL Allen Consulting was engaged as the independent consultant for phase 2 of that review in May last year. Between May and August, ACIL Allen undertook a series of stakeholder consultations to build a strong evidence base for the identification of the critical issues that required consideration. ACIL Allen held about 36 consultation sessions, with over 60 individuals and organisations.

Four main issues emerged from the consultations: there were risks associated with potential loss of specialist knowledge, skills and expertise in disability within state government, especially an understanding of the important role of early intervention and coordination when crises occur; the NDIA's understanding of the market and disability support system still required development; there were financial sustainability risks within the sector—mostly related to the transition to the NDIS; and that markets for some disability services in Western Australia were deep and thought able to be able to function effectively under the NDIS framework, however, where they were thin markets, there was a possibility of market failure.

They developed an options paper in December last year which then informed the state government's response to the ERC. The functional review is in four phases. Phases 1, 2 and 3 have been addressed. Phase 4 is to be addressed as part of the midyear review. That is upcoming very soon. What you will see from the budget papers, though, is a provision of about \$237.5 million for disability services over the forward estimates—from 2021–22 to 2023–24—on top of the \$900 million linked to the NDIS.

You will see from budget paper No 2 a drop in appropriations from the commonwealth. Previously, the commonwealth gave money to the state. Obviously, now, as part of being in the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we give the money to them. In terms of the spend, this is the most that has been spent on disability services in the history of Western Australia thus far. A total of \$1.137 billion is being spent on disability services over the forward estimates, so it is pretty significant.

Noting that I am still in this cabinet phase, honourable member, the types of services that we have focused on, as you will see in the budget, is we have focused on providing assistance to getting people into the national scheme. That included money for advocacy, for example. It also included some money for assessment of people. We are in this phase now. Since we came across, 36 900 people are now part of the national scheme.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** That was my next question.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It is estimated that by 2023–24, what we have been working on is about 48 000 people. That is significant. I do not know whether those people exist, but certainly we are

working with the commonwealth to make sure that those people who we knew are going across—there are still a few hundred of those who have not transitioned across to the national scheme—so we are still getting —

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** How many did you say?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It is just under 1 300. We are working with the commonwealth to get those across. What we have seen over the past few months in particular has been an effort by the NDIA, but also by the WA Country Health Service and various service providers, particularly in the Kimberley. They have been doing access clinics. They did one in Fitzroy Crossing a few weeks ago, where as a group they went out and spent a few days there. They got 30 people who were not connected previously into the system—into the planning process. All of those are on course to get their plans. There are a significant number of people in the Kimberley and Pilbara whom the NDIA has struggled to connect with. From my perspective, the NDIS has to work regardless of whether you are black or white or where you live in regional Western Australia. There has been particularly an issue in the Kimberley and Pilbara of them not being able to contact people with disability who were known to us over a period. “Known to us” may mean they have always had service provision, or it may mean that they had service provision at a time over previous years and not an ongoing package, but even so, we are counting on those people as part of the 48 000 people that we get to, if we get to it. At my request, talking to the federal minister, the NDIA is putting significant effort into tracking down those people and getting them into the scheme, because people in those communities well and truly should have access to support and services if they have a disability. I think that answers the member’s question in a roundabout way.

I have a bit more information that I can give you. I know what you are trying to do and what you are trying to get, and I am trying to give it to you within the constraints of the process.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Thanks, minister. Just a couple of things —

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, honourable member. I think the minister is still trying to answer the last part of the question. He is just after some more information, so if you would not mind just giving him a minute.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Chair, can you just tell me the process? Did you mention that I get about 20 minutes, and Hon Alison Xamon gets that, too? Is that what you said? Is it 20 minutes en bloc or do you want to sort of share the love?

**The CHAIR:** I would prefer it en bloc; it is just easier for the flow.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Generally, the types of services that we will stop doing over time are obviously the sector transition fund. We have \$14 million this year and there is \$9 million next year for the budget, because we will have transitioned into the National Disability Insurance Scheme by then, so there is no money in the out years for a sector transition fund. There is still ongoing funding for advocacy in there. There are things we do now that we will phase out of, based on the fact that services that we provide now are captured in the National Disability Insurance Scheme, so there is no longer a need for us to do stuff. There is some early years’ stuff in the metro area that we will continue to do this year, and then next year we will not. It is basically about us trying to get as many people into the federal system as quickly as possible, so we are putting more effort into that for another year. There is behaviour support stuff that we will continue to do.

There is also local coordination stuff. As the member would be aware, because we are not running the scheme, we no longer need to have local coordinators right across the state. In fact, we continue to push the NDIA to have office locations in the locations in which we have had offices historically in the state. As people have moved from the state scheme into the national scheme, we have started

to reduce the numbers of local coordinators that we have employed by the state. But certainly over the next couple of years, we will be out of local coordination, because that is done by the feds, and in fact the feds do it through partners—so, people like APM, Mission Australia and Wanslea. They are the types of things that we will keep doing. We will keep doing general non-NDIS stuff, but we will start phasing out of the stuff that is captured by the NDIS over the next two years.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Just with the functional review, I have a couple of quick questions. The minister has answered a lot of my other questions with regard to the NDIS; I will have some specifics in a moment. I gather from the minister's comments both in the Parliament and today that he does not intend to release the functional review.

[11.30 am]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** No, I cannot release it yet. I am hopeful that it can be released post-phase 4. As I indicated, the phase 4, we are due to report back as part of the midyear review. I do not see a problem after that, but it will be a decision of ERC and cabinet. From my perspective, I do not have an issue with it.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Have you had any concerns raised with you about the, dare I say it, amalgamation of those five various sectors into the Department of Communities from the disability sector, in the fact that they feel they do not have a voice anymore?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Not that they do not have a voice anymore. I have an exceptional person, Marion Hailes-MacDonald, sitting behind me, and Marion has been undertaking consultation over the past few months on the office of disability. That will be the go-to area in the Department of Communities for the sector. Marion has been consulting with the sector over the past few months in relation to that, and she has undertaken consultation right across the state. She has done a road show, she has been to regional communities, she has been in the metropolitan area, she has spoken to service providers, NDIA, ministerial council, everybody, about what the office of disability should look like into the future and what services it should provide. From some quarters there is a sense of fear because obviously people do not want the disability part of the portfolio diluted in the Department of Communities, and I am very alive to that. There is a fear from some quarters that there will not be a Minister for Disability Services, for example. I keep saying to people, "Of course there will". We will still need to have a Minister for Disability Services, and that is an absolute commitment. In terms of what the office looks like and what services it will provide, we hopefully will come to a landing on that in the next couple of months.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Okay. The reason I ask is because I have had concerns raised about the fact that what they have now is inferior to what they have come from with DSC. They felt that we were the Rolls-Royce of disability services throughout the nation, and at a time when you have one of the most marginalised groups in our society that desperately needs that arm around them and to feel that—I am not saying that the department does not have their back; what I am saying is that it is a period where we have without a doubt the most fundamental shift in reform in disability services that this nation has ever known, and the fact is that in a lot of instances they feel disempowered because they have to make phone calls to the east, or whatever. They would have preferred to have a discrete department of disability services, a standalone department of disability services, and that the services have diminished as a result of the amalgamation into the Department of Communities. That is not a political statement. I interact with the disability sector relentlessly, and I get that constantly. It is probably more a point than a question, minister.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Obviously, we talk to the same people and I am very alive to that. We have not stopped delivering the same services that we have been doing forever; we are still doing them now, at the moment. However, thousands of people have moved across to the national scheme.

There will be a time in the next few years when we will not provide disability services per se because they will be delivered by the commonwealth. We are ceasing that duplication, but in terms of support and the money that is in the system now, there has never been a time when there has been more money in the system. There has never been a time when we have been spending money on such things as advocacy ever before. I am alive to the concerns that people have been raising with me—fear of the future more than how they feel now. Certainly, there are some people who are frustrated with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and wish things would go back the other way, but there are also so many people telling me that they are very happy that we made the move across and that their plans are better and the response is better. It is swings and roundabouts, but something that we need to be alive to.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Let me tell you as a former education minister that resourced our schools better than any state in the nation, you are still going to get smashed, mate! It does not matter how much money you put in!

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** You can never keep everybody happy.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Exactly my point. But the issue is the empowerment component, and I am getting it relentlessly, so that is just for your benefit.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Okay.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I am sure, as the minister, they would not be saying one thing to me and a different thing to you.

This is again connected to the NDIS, but with regard to providing services for individuals with a disability who are not captured by the NDIS, what is their future?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Essentially, we are committed to continuing to provide services to —

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** By the state government?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes, by the state. We will continue to provide that. In the budget before us there is about \$237.5 million for both the ongoing and transitional costs to continue the delivery of non-NDIS services over the period of 2021–22 to 2023–24. We are continuing to do that, as I indicated; we are not moving away from that.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Do you have any idea how many that will be?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** How many people?

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Yes.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It will not be to individual people per se. We do not have those figures, no, but it is the services we have provided. It is not necessarily support services; it is more kind of group stuff. There has been some intervention stuff. Regional intensive support coordination will continue and emergency respite will continue. We are not providing individual services to individual people, so it is not tracked that way, but certainly we are committed to doing it. The other cohort that is not currently captured by the NDIS is a cohort of New Zealand citizens and others—approximately 130—who are not and never will be captured by the National Disability Insurance Scheme because they are not Australian citizens or they have come from somewhere else. We continue to fund packages for them. At the moment we are still funding the various organisations to deliver. We are in a conversation with the commonwealth to see if the commonwealth might take over that on our behalf on a fee-for-service basis. Essentially, the commonwealth is funding service provision for everybody else in the scheme; we are funding very similar packages for people who cannot get into the scheme. My view is that it makes sense for one organisation to deliver those services, so if the commonwealth did that on our behalf, we would just pay them for doing it. Rather than us having

to duplicate a group in the department solely to deal with those 130 people, we are trying to see if the commonwealth will take our money and provide the services through the NDIS on our behalf.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Never hand anything over to the feds, mate—it is destined for disaster, trust me!

As we move forward to the NDIS, who will be the service provider of last resort?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The state will still have a role in it.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** We are?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Do you actually keep data on critical unmet need? It was previously collected by DSC; that is all.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will ask Marion Hailes-MacDonald to explain how we captured it previously.

**Ms HAILES-MacDONALD:** It was previously captured when we had the combined application process through which families and individuals applied for funding packages, either for intensive family support or accommodation services, or alternatives to employment. Effectively, the unmet data was captured by virtue of the applications that came forward, minus those that were actually funded. Consequently, just to give you an example, if you had 500 applications for accommodation services and you might have funded let us say 60 of those in a round, you knew that you actually had 440 people who were in need of a service of some sort, although they might be getting a particular sort of service. That was really how we built knowledge of our unmet need. Because people now go to the NDIS, we do not have a register of unmet need.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Certainly, those people who would have been captured by the capped process previously can now access NDIS plans. Previously, it was essentially capped. You only had a certain amount of money, so someone had to die for someone else to move onto the list to get the funding. With the NDIS now, all those people previously on that list are entitled to an NDIS plan.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** And no-one is falling through the cracks?

[11.40 am]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Not that we know of. Certainly, we hear from people; my ministerial office hears from people who feel aggrieved with plans, but we have certainly not had —

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** They all come to me!

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** And we work together on that. Neil in your office is fantastic. We hear of people aggrieved but we are not hearing of people falling through the cracks because the money is there. The issue, though, at the moment is finding the people who are out there and doing things like that clinic that happened in Fitzroy Crossing a few weeks ago to get those people into the scheme—people who have never had any funding, so have never been on any list that we know of, but who are out there. It is particularly challenging in Aboriginal communities because no Aboriginal language uses the word “disability” so they just got on with it for a long time. The NDIA has engaged with the Aboriginal health services, so the Aboriginal health services are doing community connector stuff. They are in those communities week in, week out. They are trying to put people in communities in touch with the NDIS to get them plans in the first place.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** In budget paper No 2, volume 2, page 520, item 8 highlights that the Department of Communities is delivering a \$319 million social housing economic recovery package.

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Can you confirm whether or not any of this funding will be used to address the long-term shortages in accessible and affordable housing for people with disability?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** We do not have the housing people with us today. In terms of the SHERP stuff, Michelle might be able to give a general comment on it.

**Ms ANDREWS:** I can certainly respond in general. I have literally just come from an event down at the Perth convention centre where a number of DGs were presenting on the broader recovery investment program. I was speaking to the SHERP program. One of the main points I was making—it goes a bit to the point about who is the Department of Communities—in everything we do, such as this housing investment program, we bring to that the voice of those vulnerable cohorts that we are there to represent. In the case of the social housing program, absolutely we are working really hard ourselves and with all of our partners and across the regions to maximise the value out of that for the very people who have been impacted by COVID, whether it is people with disability, youth, Aboriginal people, women. I was there, head of Training and Workforce Development, head of Transport; all of us speaking to those same principles. The answer is yes. We already have examples of companies, in this first phase, that have been awarded contracts because they have been able to demonstrate that on their books is a person with a disability who is an apprentice, a trainee and so on. We are using the reform procurement procedures that the Department of Finance has been leading on and implementing those in a very purposeful way with this important investment program that is being delivered.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** In terms of the houses and the standards we are rebuilding to; we are building to silver standard. Every house needs to be at least silver standard. Silver standard then allows for different things that benefit people with disability or mobility issues. There is that.

**Ms ANDREWS:** There is mobility accessibility and the environmental footprint as well, which the minister is interested in.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** In terms of the houses that the state government is refurbishing, so the Housing side is refurbishing almost 4 000—3 800 regional social housing properties. As part of that, some of those will be upgraded to a standard. It is a Housing question. There is that happening. Separately, there is the SDA stuff—the specialist disability accommodation scheme of the National Disability Insurance Agency. It is estimated about six per cent of Western Australians who will have an NDIS plan or package will be eligible to have SDA in their plans—about 2 000 people from memory. That is people with significant disabilities. That part of the plan will allow for them; there will be funding for them to live appropriately. We are already seeing in Western Australia private sector, so the standard of living is an example of that. Former federal minister Michael Keenan is the CEO of that. They have opened a few SDA houses. They are fantastic; the quality of them is sensational. We are also working with the spinal cord association, which is another service provider, to deliver 12 homes as part of the SDA. We are also looking internally as well at how we might transition our existing group homes into SDA, to enable SDA funding to be attached to that. Separately, we are working with service providers who at the moment have state housing, essentially. They provide services through those facilities, essentially group homes, working with them about we might transition their homes into SDA too.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** This is a very quick one. I know I have plenty more, but it is time to move on.

**The CHAIR:** You are right; this will be your last one. If we have time to come back to you, we will.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Thanks, Chair. This came to me just yesterday. It will be a very quick answer, I am sure. For someone with a disability who has a carer, if that carer does not have a formal guardianship over the person, who is authorised to give consent for the carer?

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**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** This is an issue that is before the State Administrative Tribunal at the moment. It is an issue that has just raised its head in the last few weeks. Historically, there has never been an issue with it. It is before the SAT for a decision. Marion Hailes-MacDonald, my office, the Attorney General and his office have met with the sector in the last few days and continue to meet with them. Where to from here hinges on what the SAT decides. There is the potential that we might need some legislation early next term to fix the problem. We think there is a fix around it, but it really hinges on what the SAT decides as to where we go from here and whether, in fact, it is an issue for people. It is a live issue at the moment.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** It is an issue, yes.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I know you have run out of time. You do not get much time today, but if you want a briefing on any of the elements, I am very happy to organise it.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** A few have mentioned it to me.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Minister, I will just pick up on a few of the questions that were just asked by Hon Peter Collier and just get a little bit more detail. You talked about the number of people who need to be reached out to in order to be able to access the NDIS and you made a lot of reference to Aboriginal people. I am particularly interested in what efforts are being made to support people with psychosocial disability, particularly those who are in our hostels. I refer of course to the Chief Psychiatrist's most recent report that identified that a number of people are falling through the cracks who need support. Can I ask what is proactively being done to try to engage these people so that they will get the necessary supports?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** This body of work is really being led by the Mental Health Commission. The demarcation at the moment is still the kind of traditional: I deal with the physical disability, essentially; and the psychosocial stuff still falls under the Minister for Mental Health. I am aware that the Mental Health Commission has funded a project to support people with PSD, for example, to access the NDIS. That started in May and has been going until September. They have been doing some work generally to support people with psychosocial disability, and at mid-August they connected 180 individuals to the NDIS who had not been before, and 31 of those were found eligible. Between the Mental Health Commission and the local WA NDIS office, there has been a body of work happening.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am hearing you say the Mental Health Commission is effectively the lead agency for that particular project. What sort of interaction with Disability Services is occurring? How close is that arrangement occurring?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I have established an NDIS interface steering committee. On it, obviously, is my agency—the disability section—but also community representatives. It has representatives from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Education, Justice, HADSCO, the Mental Health Commission, the Department of Health and Treasury. That has been meeting at least quarterly since 2018. That body shares the issues that all of the agencies have in relation to the NDIS, including accessing it. That body has been working together.

[11.50 am]

As part of that, there has been a body of work happening to get people into the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The commission sits on that. It has been leading the work, but it has been doing it in conjunction with the state manager of the NDIA, Ed Duncan. There has been a mental health reference group established in WA, again, not under me, but to help get particular cohorts in the psychosocial disability space into the scheme.

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**Hon ALISON XAMON:** That sounds like a particularly interesting reference group. Is that only dealing with the NDIS? I have other matters pertaining to that overlap.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes, it is.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I will come back to that in a moment. Do you think you are still on track for the transition to the NDIS to be completed by 30 June 2023?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes, I think we are, but with this qualification: I still keep pushing the feds, the agency, to deal with that cohort in the Kimberley and Pilbara who have been known to historically not come across. I keep pushing for things such as this access clinic to make sure that we go across. Certainly from everything else, I think we are on track.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** The great sadness is that often that cohort of people do not come to the attention of Disability Services until they come to the attention of Justice. We are aware of the importance of early intervention.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Justice has been a really valuable contributor on that NDIS. I am not sure whether you are aware that I chair the Transition Governance Advisory Group. It has key representatives of the sector—the disability sector, the mental health sector, so WAAMH and CoMHWA are on there as well. We meet quarterly as a group and that body shares concerns or comments about the NDIS. At every meeting we have a different agency give a presentation. Justice has presented to us about the work it is doing in the prison system; that has been really good. Also, that has been another opportunity for CoMHWA and WAAMH to raise things so that we know what is going on—everybody in the sector, because it has advocates and everybody on it—but also the NDIA is there, too. That has been a really important two-way flow of information. That is something that I have overseen, where I know that the interactions have been between the mental health sector and the NDIA. The other stuff is happening in Roger's portfolio.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I might continue with this theme. I have a range of questions. I refer to general appropriations on page 517 because otherwise I cannot find where it is specifically. Is there any work happening, not necessarily under the guise of transition to the NDIS but more generally, to increase prison outreach and also to look at transition from prison support?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The disability justice service is doing the outreach support.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** In terms of the disability justice service, how many FTE are current working in that area? Historically, that has been one of jewels in the Disability Services Commission and I am interested to know the work it is still undertaking.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Over the past 12 months, the service provided support to 213 individuals in the community and in various custodial settings.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** How many FTE are currently employed?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I am trying to find that information. It is not in this.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am happy to take that on notice.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** We will probably have it here.

**The CHAIR:** Just give the minister a bit of time to try to find it.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** If I can just clarify, Madam Chair, what I was going to say: I am happy to take that on notice if need be because I am also interested in getting it for the past couple of years as well, and also forward estimates in terms of estimated FTE.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I am happy to take that on notice. We do have a breakdown of salaries, but we do not have the number of FTEs. I am happy to provide by way of supplementary figures—you asked for the last five years?

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I said the last couple of years and I am interested in this financial year and also in the forward estimates, and I am specifically interested in the FTE.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, can I get a summary of what you are able to provide?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** We will provide the FTE figure for the disability justice service for the past two years and into the forward estimates.

*[Supplementary Information No B1.]*

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I was going to make the point that there is some work happening across government in relation to the CLMIA act, which the member knows about. It has taken longer than we anticipated. It has been led by the Attorney General. If legislation goes through Parliament, there will be a need to further increase the funding of the disability justice service. Those conversations have taken place, but, obviously, we have not landed on legislation so you will not see a corresponding amount in the budget yet until the legislation is dealt with.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** That is a good qualifier; thank you. Are you including within the disability justice service the staffing for the disability justice centre?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It will. I think the breakdown can say —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I please have the breakdown because I am aware of the operations of the disability justice centre but what I am interested in are the additional support services for those who are not residents of that centre.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** That is how I took your former request, so there is no need to change that, Madam Chair.

**The CHAIR:** So the current allocation still stands and will include that information?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It does, and I will provide that.

The other information worth providing to you as well is that the latest figures I have, which are from 15 October, showed 8.6 per cent of the current NDIS cohort in WA had a psychosocial disability out of 36 000-odd with approved plans. Nationally, 10 per cent of the total participants in the scheme have psychosocial disability. That is a 1.4 per cent gap. We are aware of that, as is the Mental Health Commission, and that gap forms the basis of the Mental Health Commission's work to try to ascertain who else is out there, why there is this differential between that 8.6 and 10 per cent and whether we have to do more to find people to bring them into the scheme, so that work is happening.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Is Disability Services involved with the Mental Health Commission's forensic mental health review?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** We do not think so, but my officers here are not aware. That is not to say that junior officers lower down in the department might not have been involved in conversations, but from our perception, we are not sure.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** How much money has been allocated to the disability justice centre and also in the forward estimates, although I am hearing loud and clear and for good reason that the forward estimates may change—I presume with increased amounts—subject to the successful passage of a revised CLMIA act?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Noting that comment, in the budget before us we have an amount of approximately \$4.8 million moving forward in the forward estimates. That \$4.8 million includes funding for the disability justice service, so it is both the centre and the service captured in that amount.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** How many residents is that premised on?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It can hold up to 10 residents, so it is staffed to have 10 residents there. Obviously, we have a lot less than that at the moment, but the workers are put to good use, essentially through that disability justice service. Just because there are only a few people in the facility, the workers are out doing the disability justice service work in the community, so both outreach services and in-reach services.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I refer to page 521, paragraph 15, and disability services outside the scope of the NDIS. Are you providing bloc funding to any community organisations and services such as SECCA—you know I have a particular interest in that—that provide services that may sit outside of the NDIS? If so, which organisations or services and how much has been allocated in bloc funding?

[12 noon]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** In relation to SECCA in particular, which is obviously the Sexuality Education Counselling and Consulting Agency, they will receive \$368 642 from the state for that service.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Is there anything in the forward estimates for them?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** In terms of future budget projections, they are linked to the functional review.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Are you looking to longer funding commitments or contracts for those sorts of services in order to provide stability, or is it all just open until the functional review has been completed?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Until the functional review is completed, we cannot give anybody any certainty.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. I did ask, please, if I could have the list of all the community organisations that are receiving bloc funding and how much.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Just bear with me. I think the information is actually in the annual report.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** All of them?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It is all right; we will find it.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, that is fine.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Pages 92 and 93 list the various organisations that get funding from Communities. It lists the name of the organisation, the 2020 financial year and the 2019 financial year, so it is a comprehensive list.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I want to go to Communities' annual report, page 51, the last paragraph, "Office of disability". Could you please provide some more information about the office? What I am after is how it is going to be different from the current model; what sort of work it is going to be undertaking; and when it is anticipated to be operational?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Sure. Again, that is a live issue. I alluded to earlier on the work that Marion Hailes–MacDonald, in particular, had done. A team have been around the state talking to absolutely everybody with an interest in the office. The final landing has not happened yet, but I anticipate

over the next coming couple of months that we will officially create it. There were 59 consultations that happened across the state. They were forums and interviews with stakeholders, and there were a further 358 people engaged in face-to-face conversations and then 56 written responses were received. An analysis has been done of those. What we sought from people was their view about what it should look like. In terms of a landing, the landing on it will be very, very soon.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** How many FTE is it, or approximately is it, anticipated are going to be part of that office?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I cannot give you that data at this stage.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** But I am assuming that you will be seeking to also employ people with disability for that office, and people who are Aboriginal?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Okay. Good. You have already touched on some of this with the previous questions and that is the annual report, page 63, "Providing services to people ineligible for the NDIS". I did not hear, and if you did say this, I apologise: how many people in WA have been found to be ineligible for the NDIS? Do you have numbers?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** There is something in the folder that I have seen. We are just trying to find it again for you.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** And specifically what I would like to know, then, is how many of those people are you aware of that are now accessing state services? I suppose this is a little bit of trying to get an idea of the depth of people who have fallen through the cracks in both instances.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Sure. Some of that stuff we do not have, the NDIA might have. At 30 September, there were 126 people with disability who were known to Communities who were accessing the continuity of support services. The total number in this cohort will not be known until the transition is complete. Current estimates suggest that there will be approximately 250 people under the age of 65 accessing continuity of supports from the state at NDIS full scheme.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Sorry, can I just get clarification just so I understand it: are you saying it is 250 people, and of that component it is anticipated that all of them will not be eligible for the NDIS or it is still unknown?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Sorry, it is 126 who we definitely know, and we anticipate that it could get up to 250. That was based on, I guess, some modelling on the overall number of people who we anticipate being in the NDIS scheme at that 23 date. We think it might get up to 250. It is 126 that we know of. It consists of two groups. There are New Zealand citizens who commence residing in Australia after 26 February 2001. They hold a special category subclass 444 non-protected visa, which is non-protected New Zealanders, and then there are non-permanent residents, such as people on temporary bridging visas who have received support from Communities via out-of-policy decisions to waive their residency requirements for eligibility.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Would those non-permanent residents include refugees and asylum seekers who are currently in limbo with their visas?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** That second category would do that, yes.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** How many of those people are currently —

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Sorry, it is an individual out-of-policy decision. Because it requires a waiver, it requires me to sign off on them receiving a package from the state.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Do you know how many of those people are currently receiving services?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** So those 126, all of those —

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Yes, I am thinking particularly of asylum seekers.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I do not think we would have a breakdown, to be honest. We properly do not capture that level of detail on an ongoing basis. They would have to tell us in the first instance; a decision would be made, but then I do not know if it is kept anywhere.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I would like to thank you, minister, for being open to providing those services for those people. I am really, really pleased to hear that. I want to thank you for being open to ensuring that those people have services, because they are desperate.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** You have to do it. It is the right thing to do.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** It is the right thing to do and I am acknowledging that and I would like to thank you for doing that.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** That was the cohort that I spoke about with Hon Peter Collier earlier on, in that it would make sense for the services—not to lose services—to be provided by the NDIA rather than us duplicate a system. But we would pay the NDIA for delivering the service, essentially.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I would like to refer to the annual report, page 67, “Community Aids and Equipment Program”. It talks about a proposal for a future assistive technology scheme. Could you please provide an update on this work?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Sure. There is \$10 million in the budget for 2020–21 that is focused on assistive technology. That is essentially to allow individuals to maintain and improve functioning and independence, and it promotes health and wellbeing, and supports participation in education, work and the community. There are some CAEP users who have not received assistive technology funding through the NDIS or indeed the My Aged Care process, so that money will help those people. It is anticipated that some of those people will in fact get assistive technology as part of their planning with the NDIS, but, certainly, that \$10 million is there and available at the moment.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Can I just confirm: are you anticipating that that will be available for people who are struggling to get with the NDIS or who are waiting for the NDIS to get their act together to be able to get some early supports? Is that what it is intended to do?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will ask Ms Hailes-MacDonald to provide a comment on that one.

**Ms HAILES-MacDONALD:** The community aids and equipment program is, at the moment, where people move to the NDIS, then they get their aids and equipment through the NDIS. The community aids and equipment program has always provided aids and equipment to people from zero to death, apart from if they are in a commonwealth program. With the change to the NDIS, people over 65 will access their support through a commonwealth program, through My Aged Care program. Those who are not eligible for the NDIS or the commonwealth aged care program would have access to a state aids and equipment program, which is currently the point of discussion between the Department of Health and the Department of Communities.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I am trying to identify where that gap actually lies. For example, let us say in theory you have got a 14-year-old boy who discovers that he is going blind and the NDIS is taking its sweet time to get approval for the necessary technologies. You are saying that, potentially, that child might be able to access those early technologies or would they still be expected to wait until the final NDIS program had been signed off on? I am really trying to understand the scope of the gap it is trying to fill.

[12.10 pm]

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**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will ask Ms Hailes-MacDonald to reply to that.

**Ms HAILES-MacDONALD:** If the 14-year-old boy is eligible for the NDIS, he would be expected to have his equipment through the NDIS because the Western Australian system is contributing funds to the NDIS for his supports. It might be through non-government organisations such as VisAbility Australia that there may be some temporary loan equipment, but specific equipment would be expected to come through the NDIS.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** But you are saying that that equipment could effectively, via VisAbility for example, be made available to those people who are caught in the limbo of the time frames?

**Ms HAILES-MacDONALD:** Quite possibly, yes.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** In fact, I am aware of some of those organisations loaning people equipment until it comes into their plan.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** Can I take you to page 532 and service area 10? There is the heading, “Supporting People with Disability to Access Services and Participate in Their Community”. That is a huge topic, but I wonder whether the minister could outline what measures are being taken specifically in relation to my electorate—the South West Region. What is included in that line item?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Obviously, we are committed to delivering services for people with disability right across the state. You are not alone in the South West Region, but I appreciate your interest in that area. We undertook community-wide consultation last year to create a state disability strategy, which essentially is a document for the next 10 years for people with disability. What it is supposed to do is commit to support and to achieve better outcomes for all people with disability. Certainly, from my perspective, it is the next step in ensuring substantive equality for all. An important component of the process that we undertook was the establishment of a co-design group of people with disability. That was led by People with Disabilities WA. I want to acknowledge them and the fine work they put into it. The development of the strategy has involved quite a great deal of consultation with a very wide range of groups of people, including Aboriginal communities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with specific needs, families and siblings. Within the south west, there was a large number of organisations, including Albany Child PT, Escare in Esperance—that is outside your region—Bridgetown CRC is yours, Denmark CRC, Donnybrook CRC, Dongara CRC and Greenbushes CRC. We also spoke to groups like Anglicare and My Place.

Consultation also occurred through the state disability strategy reference group. That had members of my Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability, as well as board members from the Disability Services Commission. They provided guidance on the development of the strategy. Communities then undertook engagement with the state government agencies to identify what commitments they could make for inclusion in the action plan. The consultation has occurred across five stages, with input from a range of stakeholders. We sought community input in the form of a public survey. We had 362 survey responses. The findings have contributed to the hopefully soon-to-be-released strategy. We did workshops and had conversations across the state. Stage 3 was workshops in August and September last year on the themes of housing, health, rights and justice, and also transport, support services, employment, education and local community. We had a really big cross-section of groups and individuals at those workshops, including state and local government service providers, businesses, Aboriginal groups, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with specific needs or disabilities, and families and siblings. Stage 4, which happened this year, saw us do some more consultation to assist with refining the strategy. Stage 5 was known as “Engaging for Action”. Between July and August, a draft of the strategy was distributed for targeted consultation with the sector, community groups, industry and other

stakeholders. Over the next little while, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, there will be a strategy in place. Certainly, your constituents in the south west I think will benefit from not only the strategy and action plan, but also some of the other things that are happening in the sector at the moment.

**Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT:** That is a very thorough process, minister. Thank you for that explanation. Can I take you now to a couple of pages earlier—page 521? It is significant issue 15 under “WA Recovery Plan and COVID-19 Pandemic Response” under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Specifically, it is paragraph 15.3 where we read that a further \$23 million has been made available for the government’s sector transition fund. I wondered if you could give me some information about that, again, if you would, minister, particularly in relation to my electorate—the South West Region.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I can do that. The sector transition fund really came out of conversations with the sector. It was not only service providers, but families and organisations, as we embarked on the NDIS journey. We put money on the table and we have funded it for the last two years. We funded a range of services and a range of processes. Most recently, we put some money on the table that went to three big organisations across the state—NDS, WAI S and WAAMH. That was to provide readiness grants to help them get ready for preparations for the state Quality and Safeguards Commission that starts on 1 December.

In the last two years, in May 2018, there was an allocation of \$20.3 million, \$11.875 million in 2018–19 and \$8.4 million in 2019–20. It was allocated in two phases. In phase 1, \$5 million was allocated. That targeted providers who required assistance to adapt their business practices and operations to meet the requirements of the NDIA, and 54 grants were made to 46 organisations. This included grants awarded to 11 organisations whose geographical coverage and therefore reach from their respective projects funded through phase 1 included the South West Region. Some of those organisations that got phase 1 money were groups like Enable, which I know you are aware of—Rob Holmes does a great job at Enable in Bunbury. They got \$63 637 for a project to develop and implement a self-managed team model pilot to assess service delivery costs, client capacity and staff satisfaction, including for coverage in the south west, the great southern and the wheatbelt. Enable also reported outcomes of \$30 000 in savings due to the cessation of on-call services. That function is now managed by discrete teams. In the wheatbelt—not really in your area—the Avon Community Employment Support Centre got some money. Certainly, there are other state-wide organisations that would have got some funding. The phase 2 program had \$6.82 million allocated to 28 accommodation and respite service providers to ensure the sustainability of those key services. Again, there would have been state-wide service providers who are providing services down in your neck of the woods.

In terms of looking forward, we will be guided by the sector as to how the spend should happen. There is \$14 million in this financial year and \$9 million in the next financial year. Marion Hailes-MacDonald has been involved in some early conversations with the sector about their view of the types of things that we should fund through that. But essentially, it is to help as we transition to the national scheme and to deal with any points that arise where groups think they need extra assistance to help them navigate the national scheme. It has been a very welcome pot of money, I have to say. Certainly, it has been one that the sector has been very happy to have, so I am glad that we have it for another two years.

[12.20 pm]

**Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD:** I have a very brief question that came out of some previous answers. I note that at page 521, paragraph 15.2, money has been put aside for, amongst other things,



advocacy. In the northern suburbs, advocacy groups have been able to advocate on behalf of multicultural groups in my region, the North Metropolitan Region, and I was wondering with regard to the Aboriginal community, particularly in the north west, whether COVID has had a big impact on how those advocacy groups have been able to operate?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Obviously, COVID has played havoc with everything over the past few months, but I have to say that I have been very proud of the way that disability organisations generally and advocacy organisations have actually pivoted to be able to continue to provide services to people with disability, bearing in mind that many people with disability did not want you in their house providing a service to them and many of the organisations did not want their staff going into houses—fearful of their staff and fearful of people dying was obviously a real concern. In the early days, this came out of nowhere. I have said it a couple of times in different sessions over the past few days that there was no manual sitting on a shelf that you could pluck off and say, “Right. Here’s how to deal with a pandemic.” It did not exist, so people really had to change how they operated.

Internally, we established a disability task force that had a range of stakeholders on it to help deal with the issue. So we put in place things like information helplines for individuals, families and service providers. We developed a website to connect employers with displaced workers from other industries, enabled online training to support work readiness and cross-infection control, and then we worked with other agencies like Health about how the disability sector could interface with them. It was a very challenging time. There was much angst in the sector, I have to say, and I am very pleased that we have done as well as we have in Western Australia in relation to it.

In terms of some of the services that have received funding, I will give you a bit of a history. We are providing \$2.5 million towards advocacy in this financial year, with an annual spend of \$5 million earmarked over the forward estimates. We have provided an initial \$1.2 million towards systemic advocacy services for people with disability. Six organisations were funded through that. The Autism Association of WA got some money. That was to adequately respond to the needs of people with ASD presenting with complex psychiatric issues. The Carers Association of WA used funding to identify systemic barriers to housing for people with disability. COMHWA—Consumers of Mental Health WA—directed funding towards the improvement of mental health outcomes for people with disability, including people with psychosocial disability. DDCWA—the Developmental Disability Council of WA—co-designed a systemic advocacy process for policy and practice improvements in education systems. EDAC—the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre—focused on reducing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cognitive and mental health impairments in the criminal justice system. People with Disabilities WA used their additional funding towards identifying the systemic barriers arising from policy and practices of the NDIA communities and mainstream agencies that interface with the NDIS. I think you came to that as well. There was some further money for EDAC, Explorability, PWDWA and Midlas—the Midland Information Debt and Legal Advisory Service—and that was to help ease short-term pressure on waitlists that they were experiencing.

Then in September last year, further money was provided through an expression-of-interest process to 12 providers who demonstrated innovative approaches to the provision of individual advocacy to vulnerable cohorts. The Aboriginal Health Council got some money. The Developmental Disability Council, Down Syndrome WA, EDAC, Explorability, Future Living Trust, Kalparrin—another fantastic organisation—the Spinifex Aboriginal corporation, PWDWA, Pilbara Community Legal Services, Regional Alliance West and the Wunan Foundation all got money.

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It has been put to good use, honourable member, and certainly a number of those organisations feature and would provide services in your electorate.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Briefly, I am looking at the annual report, starting at page 24. You made passing reference to this —

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Twenty-four?

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** It is page 24 of the annual report.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Are you looking at Communities rather than DSC? Ask the question.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** The issue is one about pathways to employment for people with a disability and the construction of a website, which was an outcome of the task force that you referred to previously. Can I ask about the effectiveness of that as a mechanism of actually placing people in appropriate employment areas and whether or not any consideration has been given to expanding that as an avenue?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will ask Marion Hailes-MacDonald to provide an answer to that.

**Ms HAILES-MacDONALD:** We have had 60 organisations register as potential employers and we had 230 people seeking employment register. What we are yet to find out is how many actually connected, so we are just doing an evaluation at the moment about how that resulted in employment. One of the challenges that service providers experienced—the minister alluded to this—is that many service providers had staff who were part time who increased their hours, so they were not at that time necessarily seeking new employees but were certainly attuned to it, particularly with the preparation for a potential COVID outbreak should it occur, which we hope it does not.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Indeed. Minister, on the broader issue of making the most of the obvious human resource, do you undertake any representations across industry in terms of probably undercutting or addressing head-on some of the sort of pernicious, unspoken biases against people with disability who would otherwise be an asset to their organisation? I draw an analogy here between people with disability and people in the veterans community who suffer from different attitudes as well, but as an impediment to employment outcomes. I am just interested to know how you address the cultural piece as much as anything else.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It is a very good question. In the last couple of years, I have hosted a number of round tables with various people with disability themselves who work in the public sector to learn from them about their experiences of working in the public sector. Many of them joined the public sector at a low level and have stayed there, to be frank. We did one round table on that to work out how we might change the attitudes in the public sector.

We also announced last year a target of five per cent—so, five per cent of those who work in the public sector. I am trying to explain how it is, but it is a five per cent target of people with disability essentially. So for jobs in the public sector, five per cent of those jobs should go to people with disability. Some agencies do well. Historically, Disabilities has done well—they employ people with a disability—but other agencies, not so well. That process is overseen by the Public Sector Commissioner and work is happening across the government on that. A number of my agencies in particular—so, Communities, DWER and DBCA—have undergone the Disability Confident Recruiter program. That is a program run by a national organisation where they essentially train in how to go about employing people with disability—what the barriers are to people with disability getting interviews, for example, and how to do things differently to ensure that we can indeed capture the great workers who exist out there.

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Separately, I then hosted a round table with the resources sector—so, the big oil and gas companies and big mining companies. That was focused on people with autism in particular. That was really highly successful. To be honest, it was really great because we had senior people—everyone was senior from the mining companies—but some of them had children with disabilities, including autism, so they responded really well. Obviously it is a competitive place, but my message to them was that people who are neurodiverse have a lot to offer a workplace.

[12.30 pm]

We cannot put them in a box; like everybody, they are not all the same. Many people who have autism and are neurodiverse are exceptional at things like focus, concentration, maths. Some businesses in town came, including some banks. Bankwest does it well; Curtin University does it well. The exercise was basically to show those companies that you can employ people like this, that they are beneficial to your workforce and beneficial to your business, that there is a cohort out there now that you could be accessing and you could be putting into jobs in your organisation. It has been very good. Anecdotally, I have met some of those organisations or companies again, and I have heard that they have employed a few people or they have now got a unit or whatever employing people who are neurodiverse. It has been very good. It was quite a rewarding session. The mining companies—I think BHP was doing some good stuff in that space. It was good to have FMG, Rio and Woodside around the table to hear that yes, it can happen. At that time—it was pre-COVID, obviously—those companies were starting to look at growing. I was aware there was a pipeline of work in the oil and gas and mining sector of about \$100 billion over the next few years, so I knew that they needed a workforce to grow the workforce, and I knew that there was a cohort of people there who were doing work.

The last point I make; I am conscious of not taking up your time —

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I am genuinely interested; this is good.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The last point I will make is about CROWNability. Crown Resorts does a sensational job in this regard. Across the two Melbourne and Perth sites, the last time I heard I think there were about 250 people with disability that they have brought on board in every area of their business—gaming floor, reception, kitchens, warehouses or whatever. They put in a real effort. Ian Tsolakis, who runs that on their behalf, has put a real effort into getting Crown employing people with disability. They have done very well with LGBTI people and Aboriginal people too, but they have done particularly well with people with disability. Ian came and talked to those other companies about how they did it. The takeaway message was that you can start with one person; it does not have to be 200 people with disability you employ straightaway on day one. Start with one person, work out how that works, how you can fit the needs of that person—whether it is health needs or disability needs with that person—into your operation and grow it from there. Anecdotally, we have seen some good things happen.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Thank you. That has been very enlightening. I appreciate it.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** The last thing, as the shadow Minister for Environment too, we have spoken about this: with Containers for Change, the container deposit scheme, a focus of mine was to include a focus on getting people with disability, the long-term unemployed, Aboriginal people, employed as a priority. On day one, 680 people started in the workforce on 1 October in the various refund points across the state, and 44 per cent of the people employed were Aboriginal, people with disability and the long-term unemployed. It is great that we are creating real jobs with real pay under that scheme as well.

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**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** I have some questions around the impact of COVID on disability support services. Page 519 makes some reference to it in the significant issues impacting the agency. It is pretty clear that various COVID restrictions and directions issued by the State Emergency Coordinator would have an impact on the provision of disability support services and an impact on the lives of those living with disabilities—access to carers and services, the inability to travel for treatment perhaps, not to mention obviously the compounded impact of living with a disability and the strain on mental health due to social isolation and such. It seems to me that the Department of Communities does not have a seat at the table at the State Disaster Council.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** We do.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** You do—the director general?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Michelle Andrews, the director general, is the State Welfare Coordinator. She is on that body.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** You are there in the capacity of the State Welfare Coordinator. In your role on the State Disaster Council, what are you providing advice on? What are you providing information on in that capacity?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I can ask Michelle to talk about that. I might give you some stuff about COVID in a minute, but I will let Michelle answer that question first.

**Ms ANDREWS:** Under the emergency management framework, the Department of Communities and myself as director general have a formal responsibility as the State Welfare Coordinator, as the minister indicated. When the state of emergency was activated earlier in the year, an action that followed soon after was for the State Emergency Coordinator to then activate the state welfare plan. In doing so, I then took on the formal role as the State Welfare Coordinator supporting the state emergency management response. Welfare, in the context of emergency, is really about in that moment of emergency, our responsibility is a support role to whoever the lead agency is in the response to provide the welfare needs to Western Australians—food, accommodation, the things that you can expect are going to be required. Normally, if there is a thing such as a normal emergency, in this context—bushfires, cyclones and the like—our role would be around assisting some vulnerable people who might be having trouble relocating, it might be opening up an evacuation centre, running that evacuation centre for a number of days, assisting with people connecting to support services in the moment of the emergency. We play that support role across all 28 categories of emergency.

In this moment, welfare looks different. This is a different emergency from anything else that we have had to work through. We have stood up, just as the health department and the State Health Incident Coordination Centre have; we have the State Welfare Incident Coordination Centre that I have stood up with in our department. That has provided a really important coordination role across the state around COVID, still in relation to those key things around food and accommodation, but also there were some new cohorts that we were dealing with that we had never dealt with before—you can imagine, backpackers, temporary visa holders and the like, but, significantly, returning travellers. At the airport, you are very aware that police and Health are at the airport; so are we. We are at the airport greeting returning travellers and making initial assessments on any welfare needs over and above what will be provided and activating services that might be needed. We are also providing supports around road travel as well, so travellers travelling into Western Australia, and supporting people who might be self-quarantining at those key points on the border in the south and in the north.

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**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** If I can then add: as I alluded to earlier, we established the disability task force early on. It stood up quite quickly to deal with issues around the disability sector.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Is that part of SWICC? Does that sit within the State Welfare Incident Coordination Centre?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** No. It is in our department. We have a disability-specific task force. At the height of the pandemic, I was having a daily teleconference with Marion Hailes-MacDonald and other officers from the disability agency to deal with any issue that we saw arising at the time. We set up those information phone lines, the website, whatever. It was really working hand in glove with the various organisations. People were genuinely scared. People with disability genuinely did not want anyone in their house for fear that they would bring COVID in. The service providers were genuinely scared about their workers getting sick. Many of the service providers provided iPads to people with disability. We were able to provide services online; face-to-face videoconferencing and stuff. That is not available for every disability service. It was a very challenging time. At the same time, we had the worldwide problem of personal protective equipment not being available. It was truly scary and, if I can say this, a bit crazy. We worked through it.

[12.40 pm]

In August, Michelle co-chaired a COVID-19 outbreak planning meeting with representatives from disability groups, unions, service providers, individual people with disability and organisations to work out what we learned from that phase 1 stuff, and what we learned from what was happening in Victoria at that time, so that we could be kind of ready if there was a stage 2 that ever came back.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** I thank the minister for that answer. I have one more question; I know we are short on time. What I would like to understand is at those State Disaster Council meetings, resolutions are made about directions and about impositions and restrictions placed on Western Australians' activity. Those may have impacts on not just the provision of disability support services from the perspective of an agency, but also on the ability of people living with disability to access the services and to live full lives as well as they are able to. Is input sought from the State Welfare Coordinator at those meetings before directions are made?

**Ms ANDREWS:** In my formal capacity, as do the other formal advisers into that process, we provide a situation report on current issues. There might be the data that we are collecting around different cohorts. There might be emerging issues that are developing. You can imagine, as the minister indicated, that PPE was one of those key issues earlier on in the emergency. There are very fulsome reports provided by all the formal position holders into those meetings. That process is supported by a quite extensive emergency management framework, with a formal council coordination group, in which the State Emergency Coordinator brings together different government agencies and business and other key bodies in that emergency response. We have formal reporting at the State Disaster Council and it is well informed by a number of other forums operating underneath it.

**Hon AARON STONEHOUSE:** Thank you. That is all I have for now, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Lucky last, Hon Peter Collier, if you have a quick one.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I will preface this, and I might circumvent the response by what I say first of all. With regard to emergency situations for people with disability—by that I mean, for example, if a carer is hospitalised or is incapacitated et cetera—or if there is market failure from a provider, particularly in regional and remote areas, what happens? As I understand it, it is not captured by the NDIS. So, number one, what happens; and, number two, if it is the state, do we have the capacity to deal with those emergency situations

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes is the short answer. I will ask Marion Hailes-MacDonald. She will give the member a more succinct answer than I will. I am conscious of the time.

**Ms HAILES-MacDONALD:** The disability task force works very closely in conjunction with the state welfare incident coordinating committee, and the welfare coordinating committee has access to, if you like, accommodation facilities that suit various situations. The line in for anybody in those situations is the line into SWICC. The SWICC lines are staffed by very experienced people who have come from across the disability sector, so a lot of local coordinators are actually on the call lines and able to talk through and understand what people with disabilities are seeking or carers are seeking, and hence are then able to arrange specific accommodation, isolation or quarantine requirements, in conjunction with the other state emergency bodies.

**Ms ANDREWS:** The COVID helpline is there to provide a very rapid response to any developing issue around COVID emergency across the state.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Not just COVID; I am talking generically across the board.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Forever.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Forever. It is not COVID-specific.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It happens periodically on a Friday afternoon that things fall apart in someone's life.

**The CHAIR:** It is always Friday afternoon!

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It is always Friday afternoon. So, yes, there is capacity.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** I want to ask a very quick question and I will ask for a quick response. I have two minutes.

**The CHAIR:** The minister is in the middle of responding.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** If the member is happy with what I said, he can ask his question.

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Thanks, minister—just a very quick one. With regard to the state disability strategy and the action plan, that is obviously being considered in relation to the budget?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** It has not been to cabinet yet, so there could well be implications for it in the midyear review.

Can I just take the opportunity—Hon Alison Xamon asked for figures in relation to the Disability Justice Centre and the Disability Justice Service. There are 25 FTE in the DJC, and 13 FTE who do in-reach services, noting that can be flexible. Essentially, 25 are allocated to the DJC, but many of those do services outside, and there are notionally 13 on the in-reach stuff.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Thirteen of those 25?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** No, separately.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** So 25 and 13?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes, 38 in total.

**Hon ALISON XAMON:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** That concludes this hearing.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Madam Chair, just on that, that was that earlier information that I said I would provide by supplementary, so I will no longer provide it by supplementary.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. We will withdraw B1.

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**Hon ALISON XAMON:** I also asked about the time line.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Yes, the time line. I will just give the member the extra information.

**The CHAIR:** We will not withdraw B1. We will keep B1.

On behalf the committee I thank you for your attendance today.

I remind members that due to time constraints, the electronic lodgement system will not be reopened for additional questions this year.

For witnesses, I advise that the committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which includes the question you have taken on notice highlighted on the transcript, as soon as possible after the hearing. Responses to questions on notice are due by 5.00 pm, 10 working days after receipt. Should you be unable to meet the due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met.

I ask that you promptly leave the chamber for COVID-19 cleaning after this session. Once again, I thank you for your attendance today.

**Hearing concluded at 12.46 pm**

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