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Department of Seniors

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Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Seniors

Chair: Joseph Power, MHA

Members: Paul Pike, MHA
Jim McKenna, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Hal Cormier, MHA
James Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Emily Gushue (A)

Appearing:

Department of Seniors
Hon. Craig Pardy, Minister
Jeannine Herritt, Deputy Minister of Seniors
Chad Antle, Departmental Controller
Adrienne Luther, Director of Communications
Curtis Knee, Executive Assistant

Also Present
Dave Hamlyn, Official Opposition Caucus
Margot Pitcher, Official Opposition Caucus
Eamon Carew, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, substitutes for Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

The Committee met at 9 a.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

Just some opening comments, the only substitute we have today is that the MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi is sitting in for the Member for St. John's Centre.

That was good timing on your announcement, Ms. O'Leary.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: No, you are Committee Members.

It's 9:01; normally what we do is go for three hours, so an hour and a half in, 10:30, we'll look at taking a 10-minute break. Just a reminder for departmental officials, wave your hand to identify yourself when you're ready to speak. Wait for your little red tally light to come on in front of you, and then say your name and position. That's just for transcription purposes. Do not make adjustments to the chairs. The water coolers, two at the back and two at the front of the room. There are no unaffiliated MHAs.

I now ask the Committee Members, substitutions and caucus employees to introduce themselves, starting in the front row closest to the Chair.

P. PIKE: Paul Pike, MHA, Burin - Grand Bank.

D. HAMLYN: Dave Hamlyn, Research, Opposition office.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

M. PITCHER: Margot Pitcher, Researcher, Opposition office.

S. O'LEARY: Good morning.

Sheilagh O'Leary, NDP, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

E. CAREW: Eamon Carew, Outreach Assistant, Third-Party, NDP.

J. MCKENNA: Jim McKenna, MHA, Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

H. CORMIER: Hal Cormier, MHA for the beautiful District of St. George's - Humber.

J. POWER: Joe Power, MHA for the best district in the province, Labrador West.

CHAIR: A.k.a. Fozzie Bear.

I'll now ask the departmental officials to introduce themselves, starting with the minister.

C. PARDY: Good morning to all.

Craig Pardy, Minister of Seniors.

J. HERRITT: Good morning.

Jeannine Herritt, Deputy Minister.

C. ANTLE: Chad Antle, Departmental Controller.

A. LUTHER: Adrienne Luther, Director of Communications.

C. KNEE: Curtis Knee, Minister's EA.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, everybody, for being here.

Before we start with the Estimates review process, the Committee will now consider the minutes of the previous meeting. If there are no errors or omissions, I ask for a mover for those minutes.

J. POWER: So moved.

CHAIR: The minutes are moved by the Member for Labrador West.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: I should say, I guess when we do introductions, I never ever say I'm sitting in, actually, for Joe. Joe is supposed to be in the Chair, but his throat is hurting.

I'm Jeff Dwyer. I'm the MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue and we never say that when we're in the Chair. For transcription purposes, I'm going to do it today, and we have the lovely Emily as our Clerk today.

We will now proceed with the Estimates review process. Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping for this head of expenditure, I will proceed to recognize the minister, who will get 15 minutes for opening remarks. Then I will proceed to introduce the first responder or questioner from the Committee, who will get 15 minutes for questions in the first round. After the first round, questions will proceed in rounds of 10 minutes each, alternating between Members of the Committee.

I now ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK (Gushue): 1.2.01, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.2.01, Executive and Support Services, carry?

I now recognize the minister for opening remarks.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure to be here this morning to discuss the very important topic of seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador. I do look forward to the discussion and to the questions that will be coming. So I do thank the Opposition Members for doing your due diligence and homework on this matter and I do look forward to engagement.

I do want to thank the Committee, the Social Services Committee that are here. Lots of times for those viewers and those listening at home, they're not aware that these Committee Members are present at every social services topic that we have, like the Health Sciences or the Health and Community Services, Justice and so on.

So to the Members for Labrador West, St. George's - Humber and Fogo Island - Cape Freels, I thank you for your diligence and for your duration, knowing that this is the last set of Estimates for this budget.

I also want to recognize the CEO of SeniorsNL in our gallery today, Kimberly Leonard. I've had the pleasure of having a couple of meetings with Kimberly, and the organization is doing yeoman work. There's no doubt about that. They play a vital role, and I think that'll be some questions that we will have throughout as well. Kim has been a leading advocate of senior mediation services, bringing them to the province.

In a short conversation before starting Estimates this morning, she just came back from a presentation and being one of the keynotes in Ireland on the senior mediation services. Basically, it's a respectful way to resolve conflicts that would occur. Newfoundland and Labrador is on the cutting edge of this, again, thanks to Kimberly. So well done and pleased to have you with us, Kimberly.

Seniors are very, very important and critical to Newfoundland and Labrador, and I would hope that the budget that we just presented would indicate that that would be front and centre. It would be indicative in the budget

of the improvements and what we have rolled out in relation to seniors in our province.

As a province, we have, I sort of refrain from using the word “oldest,” but the most senior population in the country. We are approximately 25 per cent. I know that I look at the regions and my Opposition Members that will be engaging us, the greatest number of seniors that we would have by Economic Zone – knowing that we have 20 Economic Zones in Newfoundland and Labrador – would obviously be St. John’s. The Member for St. John’s East - Quidi Vidi then, she would have, basically, in that catchment area, not in her specific, but 47,000 seniors. Per capita, it would amount to 19.3 per cent seniors in her catchment area.

The one with the greatest proportion or percentage of seniors per capita would be Port aux Basques. Port aux Basques would be number one of all Economic Zones, followed by the Northern Peninsula. For those Members who would be here in the House then, I know in my district I would be sixth with 32.8 per cent of my population in the District of Bonavista and Terra Nova in the Economic Zone 15. As I look at the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, down in his, along with Marystown, would be 33.2 per cent, which would be a little over 6,000. The Member for Placentia - St. Mary’s would be 36.6 per cent, which would be a little over 2,400 seniors that would be in her catchment area.

Seniors play a vital role in our communities. I think we’re all aware of that. They are volunteers. They’re caregivers, community leaders and, what we all know to be true, they are the ones who built our province. We want to make sure the things that we would offer in the budget, whether it be the increase in the Seniors’ Benefit, whether it be the no fees for nurse practitioners or whether it would be the enhancements to the provincial home repair to double what’s available to them and to shorten the term of which it is – we know in rural, which is the greatest uptake of these programs, that’s very significant.

The Home Modification Program, the doubling of what’s available for that, and the reduction of the red tape to know that, for many of us in rural Newfoundland, as MHAs, we often find that getting the occupational therapist to catch up with what the needs would be in a senior’s home that would need modifications sometimes took too long; not a fault of them, but a fault of the resources that would be available. We’ve streamlined that for low-cost renovations or modifications now. We do not need the occupational therapist in order to do those.

So we think that we can streamline and make the system more efficient so that seniors can age with dignity, respect and security at their rightful and desired place, which more often than not is their own homes where they wish to remain.

In this sitting of the House, seniors related – well, this fall – we will see the Adult Protection Act that will come to this Chamber for debate and for Committee. This sitting in the week or two or more that is remaining then, the *Seniors Advocate Act*; we’re going to strengthen the protections and accountability in that act. We’re looking at new legislation or legislative approaches to continuing care. I think we may be the only province without continuing care legislation in the country. That will change this year. We’re also developing an aged and Dementia-Friendly Communities pathway and supporting communities to be more inclusive and accessible.

At the risk of naming somebody, because I know that when you name somebody you leave others out, I come to think that we’ll all be aware of Leo Bonnell out in Clarenville and the tireless work that he’s done since retiring as bank manager with making sure that seniors remain safe; they’re not

exploited by scams, in particular, with his background, financial. He's done great work in that. He's just one of many seniors that are out there working to make sure that seniors can, again, age with dignity and security.

The Department of Seniors, we administer and we write policy. That's the bare bones of the Department of Seniors as we have. We are the policy arm and the administration of seniors. Operationally, Health and Community Services would be those that action and materialize a lot of the programs that would be offered. The financial components of delivering those programs to seniors, far more often than not, to the vast majority, again, would be Health and Community Services. Our job is policy and administration that would direct actions and programs to serve seniors. That's our role.

Adult protection would be ours. The legislative changes to the *Seniors Advocate Act*, ours. That's what we would do. We have a federal-provincial-territorial meeting that we have, and these occur as well across the country in every portfolio. These are dedicated to enhancements, providing nationally, that often help direct us provincially. One of the most recent ones now that came out of the meetings with Iqaluit was, again, the safety and security of seniors financially. That was one of the main focuses that came from that recent meeting which was last week.

So without further ado, Chair, in that very brief overview, maybe we can commence the proceedings.

CHAIR: Perfect.

Thank you very much, Minister. That was a very nice opening.

Just something that I'll add to the people that you mentioned, I know that you always forget someone, is the 50+ Federation, as well with Linda Oldford, Amy Farrell and their executive. They do great yeomen work for the seniors in our province as well.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Just a few opening thoughts and some questions right off the top and then we'll get into the sections.

The budget for Seniors for this year increased by $75,000 for a department responsible for serving the fastest growing segment of Newfoundland and Labrador's population. Currently, as you know, and as you've already said, the province's largest cohort are individuals aged 60 to 64, but if you project that into five years' time, 65 to 70 will be our largest cohort of seniors.

According to the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, the province's senior population is expected to grow to 162,000 by 2034. That's an increase of 21 per cent over 10 years.

During the same time period, the number of residents aged 80 and over is projected to rise by 64 per cent to more than 44,000 representing 8 per cent of the total population, up from 5 per cent in 2024.

This demographic shift highlights the growing demand for programs and services for our seniors. Their needs and challenges certainly differ significantly from other segments of the population. I guess, Minister, you'll agree with that.

With that in mind, does the minister feel the budget allocated enables the government to effectively address the needs and services required by the ever-changing senior population, realizing that with increasing age, obviously, comes increasing demands?

C. PARDY: Thank you to my hon. colleague for the question.

Every one of us in the House, all 40 of us in the House, would like to do more, absolutely. Is the need there to do more? We're all aware that we certainly could. We would find that we've got to work within budgets.

I know that if we had children on the agenda, you would find that there are a lot of needs within the K-to-12 system, with children in care that we have.

There are a lot of needs out there. We know what the needs would be for seniors and we wish we had the financial ability to be able to do more than what we've done, whether it be the past government, whether it be this government. We work within what we have and the capacity that we've got to do.

We're pleased with the initiative that we have rolled out this year. Do we know that there still remain affordability issues? Yes, we do.

I would think we work within what we have. We have organizations that are doing great work within Newfoundland and Labrador that help us provide services in a very cost-efficient manner in Newfoundland and Labrador, and they're often generated by seniors themselves that would do that.

When we look at the financial allocation, we talked in our two platforms about spending smarter and planning efficiently. I would think sometimes we equate service sometimes to the money that we put in. You can develop and roll things out fairly efficiently, as long as you've got the oversight with it. I would think through the organizations that we've got in Newfoundland and Labrador that are helping to serve seniors, we are getting good value for the money that we spend and to do that.

Legislation that needs to be updated. I would say to you that we're looking at the Seniors' Advocate. We want to increase the ability of the Seniors' Advocate to become more involved in individualized matters in the province because we think that voice is going to be an integral one in bringing attention to issues that we, as government, would have to respond to.

I know that my first meeting with, then Seniors' Advocate, Susan Walsh, and my deputy minister was with me when we sat and I said in my conversation: Please make sure you remain vocal on issues that you feel ought to be addressed in Newfoundland and Labrador. I promised her that I would never take it personally. But I'd be disappointed if she didn't raise the issue with us, that we can do that.

She was appreciative and stated so, that she was appreciative that I had stated that to her because sometimes we create relationships that might stymie voices from occurring. I respect the Opposition that would challenge us. That is your role to challenge us government on matters which affect the seniors or impact the seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So I'm not sure if I really addressed the answer. The only thing being, I wish we had more to provide more services. I would think that within our envelope that we've got, and we strive to do more, I think we have more plans, in other words, to come forward. But in the seven months that we've been in, what we've rolled out, we're pleased with offering this to the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador with the goal that more will follow in the years ahead.

P. PIKE: Like you and like other Members of the House of Assembly, we certainly have a lot of conversations with our seniors, especially when we're out in our districts and visiting with them and going to various events. One of the things that they talk about is funding, especially when it comes to 50-plus clubs and other seniors' groups. They feel they don't have enough help when it comes to funding, just for the upkeep of heat and light bills and other bills they have; upkeep to the buildings is certainly an issue.

I was hoping in the budget for more than a $75,000 increase. I was hoping for an increase that would directly impact our seniors with more programming and with monies available to carry out necessary repairs and so on to their buildings.

There is a federal grant that they apply for each year. A lot of the 50-plus clubs in my district were not successful in getting those grants. It means a big difference, especially when it comes to heating these buildings and so on. As we know, seniors tend to like it a little warmer than a lot of people.

Anyways, that's what I've been hearing out there, Minister, and I'm sure you're hearing the same thing. It's not lost on you or anything like that, it's just that we have to be very careful.

How did you come to the decision not to have a stand-alone minister for seniors, but added to a busy portfolio for yourself? My brief time as the Minister Responsible for Seniors it was probably the one thing I enjoyed the most was working with seniors, I have to say that, and the various organizations that we have associated with seniors.

I was a strong advocate for a stand-alone minister at the time, given the fact of the sheer numbers that we're having, the sheer numbers that we have in these 50-plus clubs now. They are 7,000 plus, probably even more now. I was just wondering how that decision was arrived at to put that in your really busy portfolio.

C. PARDY: You referenced the $75,000. When we look at what we invested into seniors, just to give you a couple of examples. We talked about the self-managed care of which seniors for the home support and the care providers that would be hired and we look at the discrepancy between the wages. I think we all concurred and we all talked about that. That is $12.7 million that we would have provided to make sure that they have close to parity with the agency workers. We would like to have gone and added another over $6 million to bring parity, but that's where the budgeting piece comes in.

We're looking at, for the changes in my conversation or my opening remarks when we look at the home modifications, the Provincial Home Repair for seniors and their homes, doubling the grants. When you mention $75,000, that alone is $7.2 million annualized per year. I'm not talking about the increase that would be in personal care homes, the cost of inflation, the 2 per cent index that we put in in personal care homes. We've spent many, many millions on seniors and addressing the needs that would be.

The demand of the department, our goal would be to be as lean and as efficient as we possibly could. Why wouldn't we have a stand-alone department? Well, there are all kinds of figures out there to know that if you have a stand-alone department, then a stand-alone department is somewhere between $700 to $1 million operational money. Our goal was to have a smaller Cabinet than what our predecessors had in order that we would have the freedom of some extra money that would be able to go directly to the seniors and directly to the residents of the province. It was a budgetary item.

The Premier is very high on seniors. I would think that it wasn't by chance that it occurred that someone taking the Finance portfolio will have the Seniors portfolio. I know that that was one that we discussed with the Seniors' Advocate as well. She wondered about the demands that we would have and you know that we have large portfolios.

The residents of Newfoundland and Labrador will determine as to whether we do justice to what we provide. It wasn't a fleeting thought as to who went in different departments and so on. All I know is that I've been trusted with a department, of

which the Premier holds dearly and, while in Opposition, had spoken many times about seniors, in order for seniors to make sure that they get the resources and the financial resources for their programming, it still comes down to the budget, the revenues of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

If our expenditures exceed the revenues over a prolonged period of time, you'll find that we're probably affected by interest rate charges on our money and our debt that we would have. We've got to make sure that we remain on solid footing budgetarily, within the province, to make sure that we can offer the programs with the financial ability that we can do with the lowest credit rating and interest rate that we possibly could, and that's the connection.

P. PIKE: Okay.

C. PARDY: I just know that I don't have far to go in my office and Finance office. In between myself and the deputy minister of Seniors, there is the administrative secretary. We're as close as we possibly could without sharing one office space.

I would say that there's a lot of people that could have came within that chamber and that suite of offices, but again it was the seniors that we were going to make sure that was within that Finance Department that we see each other probably a dozen times a day within, so constant.

Financially, we wanted to make sure that we had a smaller Cabinet, for cost efficiencies. The cost efficiencies will enable us to do what we think we've provided in this budget for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

P. PIKE: Do you want to disclose any new areas of concern that the department is now working on? Basically, with the demographic shift, what do you see as something that you as a government will be looking at for seniors? Because I have a lot of ideas as well. But I'm sure you've been working on some things and talking about some things that we can improve the lives of our seniors.

Are there any examples that you have there that you're working on now that you could share?

C. PARDY: We've mentioned the capacity issues that we have. Number one, we've got to make sure that we have capacity for seniors when space is needed. We're looking at 26 per cent to 30 per cent of capacity in our acute care, our seniors that would be better served in an area that would have better service. Not to say that the service in the acute care is lacking; it just was not meant for the senior provision of care. It would be long-term care home or personal care home that would be best served for the seniors.

So we have a capacity issue in Newfoundland and Labrador. We think we've made a good investment this year in capacity. That's something we're going to have to do in the following years of our government's term, is we're going to have to make sure we have the capacity.

If we said right here that we know that the Provincial Home Repair Program, that helps, it sure does help. But we would know that it's probably still going to fall a little short going forward. That would be something that we're going to have to make sure we monitor and address as best we could.

We think that the amendments to the *Seniors Advocate Act*, the Adult Protection Act, will make a difference as well, going forward, because I think it is through the legislation that enables everything to happen, and we're going to be pleased to bring that forth as well.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and to your mighty team. I really appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions and certainly I'll provide some of my own opening comments, and I'll start with respect, which is an all-encompassing concept. But specifically to our Seniors Estimates discussion here this morning, seniors deserve respect and dignity.

Unfortunately, in the systems that have continued to build, we haven't reached that pinnacle yet, so we have a lot of work to do. As the minister, you have mentioned the job is to create policy and make choices that impact the lives of seniors in our community.

I thank the minister for itemizing the grand number of people that actually reside in my District of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi: 47,000 – 19.3 per cent is quite a number. Of course, only ever increasing as my colleague has mentioned.

I will begin just to state I don't have experience as a former Seniors minister or I'm non-existent. But I grew up with a mother who was a highly respected nursing administrator as St. Patrick's Mercy Home. So I grew up in an environment where I learned first-hand how important it was to care and respect for individuals who were certainly in a home scenario.

But it was also a day and age where we had larger families, where we had a lot more family supports for people. Now we find ourselves with a smaller population, lower numbers in our families, less elder care happening. So it is the responsibility of government and community to co-operate and to try to make sure that we uphold and support seniors in whatever capacity that we can.

Unfortunately for me, in my constituency office, I hear on an ongoing basis emphatic calls from seniors. It is primarily seniors who contact me crying with serious, serious needs of the lack of affordability. Many of the issues that certainly are enveloped in all of that are fixed incomes, rental increases and no way to deal with it, and people who are going to find themselves ousted out of their rental scenarios or their homes otherwise.

So, not unlike my colleague here, I believe that there's an obligation, a responsibility, for the respect and dignity of our seniors to actually invest more in this particular area.

I will continue to speak to that from a general, kind of, vantage point that there are choices to be made about how much money we invest in this very significant sector of our population.

Government makes choices whether or not to invest in multi-billion dollar oil companies or to put money into seniors' funding opportunities. We have models across the world of dementia villages where we can have people safely housed together. We have co-operative living models that have been seriously neglected to date. We have the option of trying to ensure that seniors are able to age safely in place with the support of community and, of course, the support of government, and we are not there yet.

I certainly reached out to many members of organizations in the seniors' community, heard back from some, not from others, but the feedback and the questions that I will be presenting here today are based upon some of those.

I just wanted to open up with that. I have a healthy understanding of the importance of this portfolio. I do agree that it should be stand-alone and I will proceed with some general questions.

Thank you.

My first question here today is, first of all, how many positions are there in the

department and how many are currently vacant?

Thank you.

C. PARDY: I'll defer that to Deputy Minister Jeannine.

J. HERRITT: Currently, there are 18 positions in the department. There are two vacant positions.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Seniors.

C. PARDY: In your wonderfully comprehensive address that you had and your preamble, you mentioned a couple of things. I think we all agree with the respective dignity. I think all three of us have used that in our remarks, what we have.

One thing you talked about is the investment in the oil companies. I know in oil companies, we had an investment and you looked at that and said there was better use. What the oil companies bring in, $2 billion worth of revenue, if it comes in, to the province, that gives us the ability to be able to service seniors to a much better degree than if we had not.

I agree about the environmental issue, and I know you have asked before. I know that when we look at the 19 per cent of the revenue that we receive as a province today that enables us to offer programs for seniors, children in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, 19 per cent comes from the oil industry.

One of the indicators would be, in 2011 and 2012, it was 32 per cent of the revenue of the province that we had – 32 per cent in '11 and '12. Now we're down to 19 per cent. So when we talk about the oil companies and looking at diversification, the announcement with hydrogen, the North Atlantic that is about to go, we are diversifying, but every time that we get a new company that comes in – wind, hydrogen, North Atlantic – it's only going to enable us to better serve our programs. That's the bottom line.

When we talk about productive economies; productive economies are better able to serve those who would have the needs in our province. I know we talk about transitional; we've talked about that.

The co-operative living model, I would agree with you. I'm a fan of the co-operative living model and I would like to think that we will see advances in that within the near future. It's a great model, the ones that I am familiar with.

Affordability is an issue; there's no doubt about that. Maybe it's always an issue.

I'll yield now because you've got another question. I don't want to use up the time that you have.

S. O'LEARY: Absolutely. Thank you, Minister, because, yes, I do have a number of comments there that I'd like to make.

I just want to lay this conversation to rest about the investment of oil companies. There are impacts of climate change as well that impact seniors greatly. There's a cost to investing further in the oil and gas industry for climate change that impact people in terms of people without the ability to cool their homes, fires in communities, et cetera, et cetera. I won't go down that road. That's a philosophical divide that we have right now and I will let you know that I'll leave that aside. I think we can move onto the specific issues.

Co-operative models do work and we've seen examples of them all across the world and that is a choice. That is a choice that government can make to actually look at them and support them.

What is the role of the department in implementing the 23 recommendations from

the Long Term Care and Personal Care Home Review released in February 2025?

C. PARDY: Our goal would be to fully implement those recommendations that we would have in the long-term care. That's our goal.

I would think any time that the Auditor General would make recommendations then we take them seriously. A lot of them have financial components to them and that's where we are looking at what we can roll out and at what timelines and stage of which we can roll out those.

We do have standards that will be rolled out in a very short course that will come out in relation to long-term care.

I'll pass it over to my deputy minister now to share some more insight to that.

J. HERRITT: Of the 23 recommendations, we have an action plan that is soon to be publicly released. There are 109 actions that will ensue in a phased approach. The action plan will be available publicly like I had mentioned.

In terms of the phasing, it's based on impact feasibility and availability of resources. There are fiscal and human resource requirements that are aligned with that action plan.

Thank you.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Just to remind everyone, we do have the second subhead, which would take in a lot of the topics that we're asking questions on currently. If we want, we can close this subhead and go into Seniors and Aging, which is all encompassing, because Executive and Support Services is really about the minister's office and his staff.

Do you have questions on that?

P. PIKE: I have questions on (inaudible).

CHAIR: That's all I'm asking. I will afford you that time, but, like I said, if we're going to get into the protection of seniors and programs, then we'll go into the second subhead.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: First of all, Minister, could you provide the binder for the full Estimates?

C. PARDY: Absolutely.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

Have there been any no-fault terminations from the department since you formed government?

C. PARDY: In the Seniors division?

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: No.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you.

C. PARDY: That question was asked of me in the Executive Council, and my answer at that time was I'm aware of one no-fault termination. I know that since we've came into power, I'm aware of one.

P. PIKE: Okay.

Can the minister provide a list of all political staff associated with the Department of Seniors, their titles, and whether the positions are term or contract?

C. PARDY: We sure could.

I also stated at that same session, I think the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi was there, that all hirings for boards, agencies and commissions are fully

compliant with the Independent Appointments Commission – 100 per cent compliant.

P. PIKE: Okay.

There has been an increase of $75,300 in Executive and Support Services, the majority of which are Salaries. What accounts for this?

C. PARDY: That was proportioned for a portion of the year. That was the money that was transferred from CSSD for the stand-alone department. It will annualize at $242,000.

P. PIKE: Do you have any vacancies in your department currently or is it just the two you mentioned earlier?

C. PARDY: We've got the two vacant positions here.

P. PIKE: So those positions, are they actively being recruited?

C. PARDY: Yes, they are.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you.

That's all the questions I have on that section, but I'd like to keep my time if I can.

CHAIR: When we go into the next subhead, I'll come to you first.

P. PIKE: Okay, thanks.

CHAIR: Do you have any other questions?

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

If I wasn't clear, all the questions that I have are actually general in nature.

CHAIR: Is it to programming or how the offices run?

S. O'LEARY: They're about the Seniors' Advocate questions.

CHAIR: Yeah, we can do that in the Seniors and Aging subhead.

Seeing no further questions, I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 1.2.01, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.2.01, Executive and Support Services, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

On motion, subhead 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 Seniors and Aging.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 Seniors and Aging, carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

First question on this one is can the minister confirm that the 20 per cent increase to the Seniors' Benefit is on top of the amount received last year?

C. PARDY: To confirm, the difference it will be on July 1 will be $331 as a result of the 20 per cent increase and, as you know, it's indexed thereafter. It will move from $1,551 to $1,882 in this current year and just for your projection for '30-'31, it would be $2,037 which will be an additional $155 increase for seniors.

This particular one will result in a $331 increase. For seniors that would be listening

now, then I would think that they should see that represented on their July 4 GIS income.

P. PIKE: Okay, great.

Thank you, Minister.

C. PARDY: You're very welcome.

P. PIKE: Many seniors are concerned that even a modest increase in income would result in them exceeding eligibility thresholds. I get this all the time.

One of the things that we talked about for seniors last year was the whole idea of the increasing thresholds. We need to do that. We need to do it sooner rather than later.

Can the minister confirm whether the 20 per cent increase to seniors will have unintended negative benefits, negative impacts, I should say, on seniors' eligibility for other provincial supports and programs?

I'm going to tell you that's the biggest thing that I've heard in my district, where I have 30 per cent seniors, one of the biggest things. Not only that, while I'm on this topic, we need to increase the thresholds for seniors so they can get into seniors' homes, the new senior units that are being built, because they just can't afford to keep their homes up no matter what. I mean, we can go out there and put new windows and new doors in these homes and do all kinds of home modifications but the homes are usually too big now with a lot of space.

The whole idea around thresholds, if you could address that for me, that's something that I – and you can go any way you want on that, as long as we get where you're to with it. You know it's been on my agenda for some time.

C. PARDY: Number one, we came into government knowing that we were going to review the thresholds. We stated that. I know we've adjusted and increased the thresholds for the Child Benefit. We've done that. That wasn't adjusted from since, I think, 2012.

This is seniors. We stated that we would increase the benefit of this, but I know the previous question from our colleague from St. John's East - Quidi Vidi wondered when the recommendations for the long-term care and personal care homes – if they were fully implemented, it would mean that, annualized, we would have to add $36 million more onto the annual budget and the capital budget could be up to $900 million.

When you look at what you do and every percentage that you would increase, there's always a cost benefit associated with it. I stated before we increased the self-managed care by $2 – still $1 short. We know that. Listen, all we could do right now is $12.7 million that we had put in.

Any time you tinker with those thresholds, there's a monetary value with it. When I say tinker with them, we know that we've got to increase with inflation. They really should be increasing all the time; every year, they need to increase. We've just got to make sure that we've got the budgetary capacity to make sure that we increase.

This is clearly the one that we need to increase the threshold for seniors. There is no doubt. The only thing being, in the comprehensive of everything that we've got to attend to, but it is one that's on our review and our list to know that in the future, we can look at something and would look at that threshold to increase and look at the analysis of what that would cost by an increase of another $10,000 of income it would be.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Minister.

The way I look at this is that – my math is quite simple – you have a windfall now from the oil and gas sector, no doubt. So if you took 25 per cent of that windfall and you put it in seniors only, you'd be able to do a lot of things like that, and I think there's a sense

of urgency when you're dealing with seniors. They have to see the impact almost immediately, and that's something that I'm really concerned about that, down the road, when it comes to seniors, there should be no down the road. We should be implementing changes as quickly as we can because of a number of factors I should say.

I just want to put that out there. If you have a program and you put a million dollars into the program, once the million dollars is gone, then you have to wait for the following year but you also realize in that first year that, hey, we needed a little bit more in there.

I see this no different than the thresholds. If you increase the thresholds and you're going to increase the thresholds based upon a certain dollar amount, once that's done, once you've spent that extra money, then you have to wait for the following year and then you adjust accordingly.

That's just my simple math and my simple thoughts on that. But I'm glad you've done work in that area, full credit on that. I was elated with that news – elated – but I'm also very, very concerned about the number of seniors out there who are struggling and need to do renos or need to get into those seniors' homes and so on. A lot of these seniors are over by $600 and $500, not thousands of dollars, and they just don't qualify.

It is just something that's been gnawing at me for a few years now. You and I have had conversations on this. I think we have the same cohorts in our districts. Anyway, we realize how important it is.

Minister, I'll let you speak.

C. PARDY: You would know from your previous position in government that you were in the position to be able to make those decisions on the thresholds but you know if it was just simply on a desire to know that you can make it, you would. We know that there are other variables that would be at play because everything comes at a cost –

P. PIKE: Yes.

C. PARDY: – and you have to look at your ability to be able to provide.

To repeat, the Premier stated clearly, and I think even before getting elected, that we're going to review every threshold, and we are reviewing the thresholds.

When we release the Age-Friendly grant that was active, we made sure we adjust the thresholds because of the indexing, the federal coming in, to make sure that we didn't lose anybody along the way, which would have happened in the past. So there was nobody that would be getting the increase on the money being indexed from the income from the federal government that would bump them out. We did increase the threshold in that capacity.

Your point is well taken, but keep in mind that the increase in the Seniors' Benefit will put $331 into the pockets of 50,000 seniors in the province – $331 and 50,000 seniors. The only thing being is that we had mentioned about in the economic zone for St. John's, 47,000. They're not all within the threshold, but it is a significant amount of increase that we would have and they're indexed.

P. PIKE: I got one more question I want to get in, quickly.

Will the increase to the Seniors' Benefit have any impact on seniors being able to qualify for the Home Repair Program? Have you looked at that? That's something that when you bring in programs and you extend the Seniors' Benefit, you have to think who are we going to knock out of these programs. Have you done that and should there be something said or done about this?

C. PARDY: The goal wouldn't be to knock nobody out. If we had a program that was rolled out here that all of a sudden the SSWB, the eligibility of those who were eligible have been lost, that's wrong. That should never happen, and your point is a good one. That should never happen. Our goal is to increase the thresholds, not to lose those that got programming.

So all I would say is that if we're going to spend $7 million for increasing, I would hope that once we do that, once this increase comes, the same clientele can certainly avail of the Provincial Home Repair and the Home Modification. We ought not to be losing anybody when we roll out a new program, or where we're indexing.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Minister.

That's the answer I was looking for as well. So thank you very much.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

So I'll just go into some questions about the Seniors' Advocate. How is work progressing on finding a replacement for the Seniors' Advocate? And, second to that, the Seniors' Advocate has called for the introduction of continuum of care legislation for seniors in a report from last year. Is this something that the department is actively working on?

C. PARDY: Yes. I would think the continuing care legislation this fall –

OFFICIAL: It is being actively worked on.

C. PARDY: It is being actively worked on. That's the hope that, in the legislative sitting in this fall, that we hope that that will be here, but it's being worked on. Again, I stated in my preamble that we're the only one I think in Canada – not I think, I probably say it with certainty that we are the only one in Canada that do not have it. So we're overdue. It's being worked on.

As far as the permanent job replacement for the Seniors' Advocate, I can't speak to that. I'm not sure where that is in the process. I just know we have the position interim being filled, and I'm sure that they're diligently working to fill that position through the mechanisms of the House of Assembly because it is a statutory office.

S. O'LEARY: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

We heard that the management of the home support and community support programs is being moved to this department. Can you confirm whether this is the case?

C. PARDY: I'll defer that to Deputy Minister Jeannine.

J. HERRITT: The Department of Seniors works closely with the Department of Health and Community Services to oversee the Home Support Program. The service for home support is provided to both adults with disabilities and seniors, and our cross-coordination is very important for that reason.

The home support standards are overseen by the Department of Seniors in collaboration with Health and Community Services. Again, any programs, changes and oversight for the program is shared across both departments, given that the clients that we serve are represented across those two different departments.

S. O'LEARY: So, just for clarity, Chair, they're not moved into the department. They're working collaboratively. Is that the answer?

J. HERRITT: Yes, that's correct.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Seniors.

C. PARDY: Just to quickly further add to that. We know that if our goal is red tape reduction, you know that that might seem a little bit contrary to what our plans would be, streamlining. I would think that we'll have further refinement as we go on to know as to what is being held at the seniors' level that we don't have to crossover with the collaboration piece.

We always have collaboration but I know that we've got, now, a lot of the financial resources and the planning. We do have to work together to collaborate. Sometimes that might slow down as far as the speed of which we can roll something out.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Under 2.1.01, Seniors and Aging, the 2025 Dementia Care Action Plan Progress Report noted that work had yet to be started on advocating for inclusion of dementia training in all undergraduate and post-graduate health professional training programs. So why was work delayed in this plank and how is progress on it now?

C. PARDY: I'll pass that over to the deputy minister, but to my knowledge, I would think there has been lots of work being done on the Dementia-Friendly Communities. Work has been going on for some time. I know I've been at sessions where they talked about the successes that we've had in relation to that. I'm not really sure as to – and I would think in the education programming you referenced?

S. O'LEARY: Yes, for professional training programs, undergraduate and post-graduate professional training programs.

C. PARDY: If I'm not mistaken, even the public service, I think, had a program that was available there what would be online as far as one of the programs on the educational piece it would have. But you can rest assured that is a topic that we ought to be providing education and good education on.

Leo Bonnell, I mentioned earlier, has been an advocate as well when we look at communities and making them dementia-friendly.

S. O'LEARY: I know that you're dropping some names of pivotal individuals in community across the floor. I, too, want to acknowledge Mohamed AbdAllah from Connections for Seniors NL who is doing phenomenal work in our community and finding progressive models on our behalf right across the world. I would certainly like to give a shout-out to that program, Connections for Seniors NL.

Thank you.

C. PARDY: May I just have the deputy minister, Jeannine, elaborate on that a little further?

S. O'LEARY: Yes, thank you.

J. HERRITT: There is currently training under way through Memorial University's Faculty of Medicine for acute care of the elderly training for physicians. This particular budget is housed under Health and Community Services and delivered to Memorial University. There's also dedicated funding for geriatrician training within Memorial University's Faculty of Medicine. From the Dementia Care Action Plan, specifically, there is funding provided to the Alzheimer's Society to train participants in dementia-friendly training, which includes businesses and first responders.

There has been training provided to over 1,200 individuals in the last year. There are activities under way related to that particular action in the plan. Of course, through curriculum within our health professional education, there is also particular aspects of education related to aging and dementia care.

One other example I'll give is our director of Adult Protection frequently provides education sessions within Memorial University and other areas across the system, so social work, nursing, other areas, to educate on adult protection, and recently visited Memorial's Faculty of Medicine as well for a session on adult protection.

So there are specific items that we could provide. We could do a listing, if you like.

S. O'LEARY: That would be great.

Thank you.

As well, to just re-emphasize that Connections for Seniors NL, as you know, Minister, because we were both sitting at the same presentation that was offered about the progressive models of dementia villages that are certainly happening. So, hopefully, that's food for thought there for government going forward.

Is your department working toward allowing senior couples to remain living together when they need different levels of care?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Seniors.

C. PARDY: Yes, we certainly are.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

C. PARDY: Anything further to add to that?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes Jeannine Herritt.

J. HERRITT: There's currently a policy in place to support spouses to remain together. It will be considered as a part of the engagement and consultation on future legislation as well.

S. O'LEARY: That's wonderful to hear. That's great to hear because, historically, it's been a very contentious issue for people who are living with lifelong partners and unable to be housed together. That makes a lot of sense, so thank you for that.

Is the department working on any policy, regulations or legislative amendments to prevent the practice of personal care homes dropping the residents off at the hospital and not taking them back when they have become too difficult to care for?

C. PARDY: A full rollout of the personal care home standards will come in October of this year. They're existing, and that would be inherent in your question, covered within those standards.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

C. PARDY: So I would think that many of these would be national level standards that we would have. We've had lots of consultation with the personal care homes and a full rollout in October. But well on our way with those standards coming soon.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful, thank you.

Can we have an update on the work of the Provincial Advisory Council on Seniors and Aging? Have they made any recommendations in the past year that the department is looking to implement?

C. PARDY: We're going to have my first meeting with this advisory board sometime between now and, I would think, within two months, we will have an in-person meeting with the advisory council.

S. O'LEARY: Wonderful.

I'll squeeze in one last question.

The advocate called for the NLHC to expand the Home Modification Program to include a preventative approach including providing small preventative home modifications without needing an assessment and providing a no-cost loan to those who don't qualify for it. Is this

something your department is working on or can help fund out in the budget?

C. PARDY: I stated that in my preamble.

S. O'LEARY: Yes.

C. PARDY: That's Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, it's in their capacity, but I'm pleased, pleased to pass on that we've adjusted that.

In addition to increasing the amount that the seniors can avail of, the problem frequently became where they had access to the OT and that was a large amount of time to get the OT to come in. At this stage right here of this program, we don't need an OT for small renovations or modifications that seniors would need in their home. We don't need that.

The immediacy of it occurring should be greatly enhanced. That one we've laid, but any extensive modifications to homes, obviously, we would have the OT involved.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, you have noted that you do work closely with the Department of Health and Community Services. I'm just wondering regarding home support services, because home care and home support services are within your department, do you have any indication or any numbers or percentage of seniors that have been approved for home support services but are unable to avail of it due to not being able to employ somebody in the community, especially in rural Newfoundland, this is a tendency to be a huge issue?

C. PARDY: I'll pass that to my deputy minister, but I know in my district, like yours, I'm sure, I would have areas of my district in the most rural parts of it that they have a problem accessing home care supports. There are usually no agencies that would be covering these areas that they would have. It's a problem in our most rural aspects of our districts, but I'll pass it over to Deputy Minister Jeannine now for any further elaboration.

J. HERRITT: In '25-'26, just over 6,400 seniors received home support services. We do not have a capture of those who were looking to avail of service but weren't able to, for example, find a home support worker at this point in time. However, we are implementing a provincial home support solution, which includes care planning, shift scheduling, shift tracking and would also capture the data like you suggested in terms of those clients who are seeking home support services but are not able to avail of it due to workforce challenges.

That is in a phased rollout and we'll see progress across the province this year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

NL Health Services does, in fact, have a program in place for persons with disabilities where there is significant tracking completed. I would think that you would avail of that type of resource also.

Home support workers currently perform a very broad range of duties from household assistance to complex personal care. Is the department examining whether different levels of home support should have different training standards, classifications or compensation structures?

C. PARDY: Yes, and I'll defer for elaboration to the deputy minister.

J. HERRITT: The department is currently reviewing opportunities for education for home support workers based upon the complexity of care that is provided. We've introduced a micro-credential for home support workers which is offered through

Keyin College and the uptake has been very positive. We're looking at ways to expand education related to the complexity of care that is provided in people's homes when they care for clients through home support.

There's an acknowledgement that there are different levels or complexities of care and that individuals who care for these people, the workers, they need different levels of training. It's sometimes individual and, other times, it can be covered in a curriculum which has been developed.

To that regard, our department is looking at education requirements and the classification. Of course, home support workers are employed by either agencies or directly by clients and then classifications and those sorts of things may potentially follow from there.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you very much.

Can the minister explain his strategy to support aging in place which reduces pressure on long-term care facilities?

C. PARDY: Can you repeat that question?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: I'm just wondering, Minister, if you can explain your strategy, as minister, to support aging in place and such things that will reduce the pressures that are presently being placed on the long-term care facilities.

C. PARDY: As we mentioned, about the Provincial Home Repair Program, the Home Modification Program, it was restricted before that people couldn't get the work done because the grant size wasn't applicable, the lifetime expenditure was prohibitive or they didn't want a loan in order to do work on their house.

So we would think that for aging and those staying and the preferred seniors wishing to stay in their homes, this should be a great help for those in order to make their homes more accommodating for them to stay in, whether it be through home modification accessibility or whether it is to repair the roof or some other aspect of their house.

I would think that would be good indication of what we've done.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

That's the bricks and mortar and that's certainly a huge component; however, one of the issues that seniors are facing is the fact that they're approved for two to four hours of home care a day, and they need assistance with meals. Of course, we eat three times a day, and it's very difficult to employ people to show up to your house for one hour in the morning, one hour at noon and one hour in the evening.

Is the department recognizing this challenge with employing people and the low number of hours that seniors are being approved for?

C. PARDY: Yes, it's a challenge. I know back to your question before when you look at the education component for complexity of care, when you look at the education, it improves the quality of care and we also look at the retention piece, maintaining those to make sure that they're well equipped with the training to be able to stay in the home.

When we look at the number of hours, that's rural. I know that in urban to a far lesser degree, but that's a rural element that I think that we're constantly being challenged by, as to having somebody to go in. I know that if they were down in Burgoyne's Cove, in my district, then the distance is often prohibitive for someone going down for a small amount of time that would be required.

Yes, one would be to increase the hours to make it work. We need to do an analysis of that as to what the cost expenditure of that would be, to make it feasible for somebody

to go into those areas that would be even rural in our rural districts.

There's more work to be done there because, again, if we have the data that shows that we have a lot of people without home support, but the professionals in Health and Community Services would be suggesting that they would need some support then, yeah, we've got to tackle that, no doubt.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So, Minister, is there any consideration being given to the flexibility of expanding the list of relatives that are permitted to provide care for seniors? If you have a relative that lives next door and they're willing to be employed but because their relationship is too close, they're excluded, is there any flexibility, given the fact that this is in fact a rural issue?

C. PARDY: Yes. We've had flexibility because I know that has occurred in my district. In the absence of getting somebody, then we can utilize somebody if it's needed. Then we'd often have somebody who can go in and support them in the absence of a home care worker being provided.

So yes, and I know that the deputy minister would say that we're reviewing that program to see as to what adjustments we can make in that to make it more user-friendly for those that would be in rural parts of our rural districts.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: What I also find as well, yes, we have changed the policy somewhat. There are still some barriers remaining because there may be an agency within that area. So the requirement states if there's an agency, you have to go to the agency first.

But I really think that there needs to be more individual assessments done on the actual family and the individual requiring the care as opposed to just looking at a policy and saying yeah, there's an agency so you have to go to the agency. I just think more flexibility is required.

C. PARDY: I can tell the hon. Member that that's under review.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you very much.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: The outgoing Seniors' Advocate said Newfoundland and Labrador needs a legislated continuum of care model covering home support, personal care homes, long-term care and palliative care. Does the department support moving toward that type of legislative continuum of care, that framework that the Advocate herself put forward?

C. PARDY: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you.

C. PARDY: I would hope that we see that, maybe as early as this fall.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

Budget 2026 does focus on the creation of long-term care and transitional beds through reannouncing several initiatives such as the Corner Brook facility renos, the new facility for Stephenville region. What *Budget 2026* does not do is explain where the staff to work in these new facilities are going to come from.

Can the minister shed some light? Has there been discussion with the department of Health and Community Services on where these staff are going to come from?

C. PARDY: We're conscious of that in many professions. I think that came up as well in Executive Council. We're challenged with supplying, as we were with the rollout of the family care clinics that we had. We can put a clinic out there, but we didn't have the staff to operationalize the clinic.

We know that in these areas, whatever demand we've got, we're trying to increase the class sizes that would help support those facilities. We know in advance where the buildings are going. I just think that we've got to make sure that our programming matches the needs we have in these future buildings.

So are we challenged? Yes. Are we more optimistic than maybe what we were in the past? Yes, but nevertheless it will always be a challenge, especially in certain areas for staffing.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Is your department considering ways to supplement payment for home care for seniors so they don't have to pay as much out of pocket?

C. PARDY: We've got the regulatory and a model in place of people on the affordability, of what they would have to pay for their home care based on what their income would be, and it varies.

There's a procedure that Health and Community Services would utilize when they do their assessment and their financial assessment of the senior, the client. In doing that assessment, that is always under review. I think I stated that before, everything ought to be under review.

I've heard many people in my district complain about the cost and they can't afford it, especially if it's increased, why the increase? We would like for it to be as low as possible, but we have to have some support in order to make it as viable as what it can be to offer.

So, yes, we're cognizant of that. We'd like to have it as low as possible and we're reviewing the allocation of what the client would have to pay.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

What work is this department responsible for in administering the Aging Well at Home Grant?

C. PARDY: We are fully.

S. O'LEARY: Fully responsible?

C. PARDY: They supply the funds.

J. HERRITT: (Inaudible.)

C. PARDY: My deputy is telling me that the Health and Community Services administers – I'm going to pass it over to her.

S. O'LEARY: Good plan.

C. PARDY: We've had lots of discussion on the Aging Well at Home Grant. When it comes down to the administration of it and when it comes down to the policy of what we deliver, getting more uptick, getting money out to the people quicker, I can tell you that we've had lots of discussions in our department on that. That's one of the things, working with another department that we would have.

So would I think that we own the Aging Well at Home Grant in our department, most certainly, because I know that we've had reams of discussion on that, but the operationalizing of it is occurring through Health and Community Services.

I'll pass it over now to my deputy minister.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you on that.

J. HERRITT: Thank you, Minister.

The minister is correct. The Aging Well at Home Grant policy comes from the Department of Seniors. Newfoundland and

Labrador Health Services administers the grant on behalf of government. They were given $5 million for the grant itself, as well as dedicated staff positions, to operationalize the program. The financial assessment and application process is operationalized through the health authority.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Seniors.

C. PARDY: Just to further add, I know that there was a little over 8,000 in the first year of the program; we're expecting 13,000. We've already sent out close to 8,000, which would be the first year of the program, the $400 and those people.

When I said our program and our division, we wanted it to get out. I know the deputy minister was very understanding, but we wanted to get the money out quick to them. We adjusted the application. If the applications were successful yesterday or last year and can confirm that their income is generally the same and they're at the same location, we didn't hold anything up. We just went and rolled out the $400 to them.

That was the red tape reduction in the ease of sending it out. We're looking at getting 13,000 served. I'm not sure what the total number would be out there within the eligibility but I know that from a little over 8,000 to 13,000 in this current year.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

Is there anything under Grants and Subsidies for core funding for community sector groups? If so, does this represent an increase over last year?

C. PARDY: I'll pass it over to the deputy minister.

There is no increase in the amount of money that has gone out to the Grants and Subsidies. It's the same as what was last year, but, nevertheless, same recipients are getting the same amount of money this year as they did last year. I can report that while we would loved to have indexed it, but it's the same amount.

J. HERRITT: The Aging Research Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador gets $100,000; grants to community age-friendly assessment is $95,000; grants delivered to support the community transportation program, $300,000; funds for 50-plus clubs to offer programs and services to address social isolation, $200,000; the NL 50+ Federation Inc., $10,000 and Seniors NL, $343,100.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you very much.

That's it for me right now, Chair.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Being close to the break time, instead of starting a new set of questions, we'll now take our 10-minute break.

How much time do we need? Do we need to take a break? We can take a break and come back. There are lots of questions for you, Minister.

We will now take a 10-minute break and reconvene at 10:36.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We're now continuing the Estimates and the head of expenditure for Seniors in the subhead 2.1.01, Seniors and Aging.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, how many people are currently on the wait-list for placement in long-term care facilities across the province and do you have it recorded by region?

C. PARDY: Yes, we do and Deputy Minister Jeannine will share that with you. We know that's an issue and I think that's why we had to put in as far as making sure that we increase our capacity, not only with those that would be occupying or in beds in the acute care. We know that we've got to find the capacity, but we do have a long wait-list.

We also now, as you would be aware of, are utilizing in the capacity within the personal care homes as well, which has been a benefit in order to serve seniors that would be in need of that.

So I'll pass it over to Jeannine.

J. HERRITT: Provincially, we have 489 people waiting for long-term care as of March 2026. Of the 489, 160 are in Eastern-Urban; 42 in Eastern-Rural; 141 in Central; 84 in Western; and 62 in Labrador-Grenfell. Of the 489, 206 are awaiting long-term care placement in the community; 91 are in personal care homes; 160 are in acute care; five are in protective community residences; 25 are out of region and two are out of province.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

Are those stats in the binder?

C. PARDY: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, perfect. Thank you.

Just moving on, Minister, you mentioned that we're going to see standards coming in October as it pertains to personal care homes following the Auditor General's report. Can you tell me what recommendations the department has fully implemented to date?

C. PARDY: I'll pass it over to the deputy minister now in short course, but included in those standards, basically it rests with quality of care, oversight, timely reporting. These would be some of the themes that would be within the standards that we'd be rolling out.

I think we've made advances – I shouldn't say think; I know we've made advances in those areas, even through our consultation with the owners of the provincial care homes. So just the fact that we've engaged so frequently on these measures in preparation for the rollout, there is a general awareness and ability and determination for readiness in advance of the standards and the reporting.

J. HERRITT: Of the 10 recommendations that were released in April of 2025, there were three recommendations directed to the department, five to NL Health Services and two shared across both organizations. All of the recommendations were accepted and action plans were developed by both the department and the health authority. Of the five recommendations for government, one has been fully implemented and four are partially implemented.

The full implementation of the new Personal Care Home Operational Standards will, in fact, implement the additional requirements for the AG review. Training in is progress and full enforcement is effective as of October 1.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay, thank you very much.

Minister, many seniors struggle with the costs associated with moving into care homes or with having to avail of home care workers. There's a financial assessment and there's a cost associated with it. What advocacy has your department done regarding subsidies or financial supports or just assessing this?

I do find that when seniors are assessed, their finances are not that great but the part that they have to contribute, they cannot do it. They just don't have capacity to do it.

C. PARDY: I think we alluded to this a little earlier. We made a commitment that we're going to review thresholds and I would put that into the category of thresholds. I know, in the District of Bonavista, I hear that a lot that they can't afford their contribution and sometimes they make the decision to go without, even though they've been assessed to be in need of home care but they determine that they just can't afford it and what it is.

Is that something that we need to have a look at? Yes, 100 per cent. My understanding is we are. Again, any time you make an adjustment of that, there's a monetary figure that we've got to attach to it in a future budget. We are looking at that, no doubt.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister, because we definitely have seen the affordability issues just very recently that that is a huge, huge barrier, the contribution costs.

Government announced $22 million to expand the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Plan and they approved three additional medications. Is the minister able to provide any sense of timeline or scope that seniors may expect any further expansion of the full inventory for the medications that will be covered?

C. PARDY: That would be through Health and Community Services but I know that I have had conversations with the minister that we've looked at as far as what future plans would be, where we're going and what direction we will be going as far as what will be added to that list.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

Minister, I know my colleague here has spoken about the Dementia-Friendly Communities program and Dementia-Friendly Communities areas. Can you inform us of the challenges or successes that can be shared as a result of the Dementia-Friendly Communities program that has been ongoing?

C. PARDY: The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and I, amongst others, were there at the Connections for Seniors launch when they looked at and profiled their housing. I know that Mohamed, the CEO or the executive director of Connections for Seniors, did a wonderful job on promoting a model for a dementia-friendly community. The concept was striking. We don't have one in Newfoundland and Labrador, but I think they would embrace that initiative in order to have a dementia-friendly community that we would have in our province.

Even though we know that we've talked initiatives, making communities more friendly, but this one was just strictly a community of which is built around dementia friendly. They did a great job in presenting and I'm sure that would be one of the things that would be discussed and planned for in the future.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister, it would certainly bring us into 2026.

Seniors access to free medical exams for licence renewal for those over 75 has been well received. Can the minister confirm that this will continue?

C. PARDY: Again, that would be Health and Community Services, but if we ran on a platform of lower taxes and affordability, then I know I wouldn't be a proponent to removing anything that is an affordability measure for seniors. I would hope that it continues.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

Age-friendly community initiative, how much of an uptake have we seen from communities in the province?

C. PARDY: The first rollout was a little over 8,400, around that number. We're at that

number now, but our projection is 13,000 this year. That's a significant uptake. As we know with any program, usually the second year exceeds the first year.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So I guess there are plans to grow the participation if we're going from 8,400 to 13,000?

C. PARDY: This is the Department of Seniors, but I frequently converse with the Minister of the Department of Finance.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Hope so.

C. PARDY: Sometimes our goal has to be to look at every program that we have, the administrative cost of administering a program. Is it conceivable that you can send out the $400 cheque to the seniors that have established? We said we'd make the second application this year different than last year to streamline. Do we need an application if we know that we can roll out for these people that would be within that category? Maybe we can eliminate the administration totally of that, quicker, get the money out to those who need it, reduce the administration costs, which can enable us to be able to send more out for them.

That's the concept that my hon. colleague had asked earlier when the streamline of the Cabinet; streamline the Cabinet then we have extra money, extra resources that, hopefully, we can put out and benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: That would definitely be a benefit to see a program progress and change and adapt.

C. PARDY: Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Only four seconds, so I'll wait for my next time.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's East - Quid Vidi.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for actually answering a question in advance because that was actually one of the things that we certainly wanted to hear the answer to was about streamlining the department, as you spoke to that and how much money has actually been saved as a result of that streamlining, the smaller Cabinet, et cetera. That money, of course, which we would hope and expect would be reinstated towards seniors' programming specifically.

Can you speak a little bit to how much money has been saved in that regard?

C. PARDY: I can't give you a figure, but I know that I'm excited about the savings that we've had and some of the initiatives we've done.

When we look at the fines and fees, reviewing those, we've done that with every department, that is due in next month. We want to know that every fine, every fee, every program, what the administration cost would be of the program. A case in point would be the aging well grant that we go through the administrative cost with six or seven employees for an extended period of time on a contractual basis in order to operationalize the program. Maybe we may not need that in order to put the money out the door for those that would need that.

There has to be some checks and balances, but we've got enough data on the income that these seniors would have now, that we may be able to just provide the funding without the administrative over take.

We've had several examples within our core government of that. Your question may have been in Seniors alone, but that's one that would come to mind, operationally, is to streamline that one to make it a little more cost efficient.

S. O'LEARY: Understood, but to mine down into the specifics, as Finance Minister and Minister of Seniors, obviously, you know that those line items are important. Is there

an opportunity to find out how much money has been saved by streamlining that specific Cabinet? The cost savings that has happened as a result of your comment there to streamline the department, because of the smaller Cabinet, et cetera, the specifics that would impact the seniors' portfolio, specifically.

C. PARDY: We don't have that figure. We don't have it in the Finance Department, but I know how much money we saved on that, I know there was a general allocation that every portfolio that you had as a minister, as a rule of thumb, I was informed, probably $700,000 to $1 million, that would be in that. If that's what it is, then we know that we've got a small Cabinet, thus, you know, you requested a stand-alone for seniors to better serve them.

So, yes, but that would be the cost associated with doing that as a ballpark. That would be a million dollars, conceivably on the high end, that you wouldn't have to put into people's pockets, if you're going to operationalize it with a stand-alone department. Those are the decisions you make, what exactly the cost saving measures of that would be.

We utilize mail to a large degree, even today, we utilize mail and it costs core government a large amount of money utilizing mail. Sometimes it's essential that it occurs. I think quite frequently, it's not. That's another saving that we would have that we do the analysis of.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you, Minister.

I guess we'll see where the cost savings are as time evolves, I guess is ultimately what it is. We're going to see it as it unfolds because there will be, obviously, budgetary items that we will see that will have either reduced, potentially, as a result of having those streamlined departments, correct?

C. PARDY: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

My constituency office has been inundated very recently and presented with a family's challenge whereby seniors' care was interrupted by mandated split shifts, in particular, there as an offer to provide a family with four split shifts at two hours long, despite the family's stated need for an eight-hour shift. This caused the family, the senior and many others great duress.

We had numerous emails and phone calls going back and forth and also to the various departments and it just didn't really seem to make much sense, to be completely honest, to leave a senior without the ability to have care and to have these two-hour blocks.

Understanding that my colleague had referenced earlier the fact that just popping in for perhaps meal time or something makes total sense, but in the general scheme, this particular family was denied that support.

I was wondering if you could speak a little bit more to that system and how we can progress from that so that families aren't under that kind of duress going forward.

Thank you.

C. PARDY: I'll pass that to my deputy minister.

Operationalizing would be through Health and Community Services but again, mind now, we create policy and we do the administration. It would be in our capacity to make sure that things that would be impediments to serving our seniors, then we can make sure that we do the adjustments for that to occur.

I would say to you that there's a difference between self-managed and the agency care. Because in self-managed, that usually doesn't occur. I know those that would be offering self-managed care in my District of Bonavista, split shifts, that doesn't happen.

In the agency care, sometimes, I'm assuming, that that's maybe where it occurs where they're trying to fit in services of so many seniors that you've got – we would know that the ultimate would be if you've got somebody you're used to, what you've got, then that might be the ultimate. Again, it depends on the needs of the senior as to what you would have.

Again, we talk about the degree of complexity. I'm sure that those would have the training and the expertise to deliver complex care to a senior, when needed, then there's a greater risk if you did have a couple of people that would be involved, that you may not have that capacity once you bring numerous people in to provide the care.

I'll pass it over to Jeannine to elaborate further on that.

J. HERRITT: The process for the allocation of hours under the Provincial Home Support Program is determined through NL Health Services clinicians. A clinical assessment is completed to determine the appropriate number of hours. If a client or a family has a concern, or if the client has a change in clinical status, they can request to have another clinical assessment completed.

NL Health Services and the Department of Seniors will work with individuals, clients, families when there are concerns in terms of how care is organized or if there are additional challenges identified that may not be apparent in the initial clinical assessment. Through discussion, either directly with the case manager or within NL Health Services or through other inquiries, we're happy to deal with individual circumstances.

In terms of the number of hours, it's determined directly through that clinical assessment and with the support of clinicians and the case manager within the health authority.

S. O'LEARY: Thank you.

So just to be clear, to avoid these situations – obviously, this was something that my constituency office was dealing with for several weeks back and forth. They would be dealing directly with NLHS or that process there. It wouldn't come under the Seniors; it would just be information for the Seniors policy-making.

C. PARDY: Yes.

S. O'LEARY: Okay.

J. HERRITT: The best route for individuals, clients, families to take is to discuss their concerns directly with a case manager, as they have the most information about the care and can work directly with them. We also have a process for inquiries or concerns to be handled through the health authority, through patient relations, but also the Department of Seniors is happy to take inquiries as well. We have an inquiries process and assistance, where necessary.

S. O'LEARY: Okay, thank you.

We know that senior women, in particular, are impacted uniquely by health care issues specific to gender. During my time being elected as MHA, I've had the great privilege of meeting with a number of different organizations that are dealing with elderly women's care, specifically menopause issues and the incredible complexity of health care issues that impact seniors as a result of menopause.

This is very gender-specific, I realize, but I think it's extremely important to note because I have had several meetings since I've been elected on this issue. Everything from menopause, complex UTIs, a myriad of issues that are very specific to women.

I'm just wondering, how does this department plan to work with the Health Department to address this particular intersection? Because it is a seniors' issue,

but it's also a health issue and, again, working collaboratively through departments, I would understand, so that we can look at and give more power and more attention to progressive methods of dealing with menopause in women as they age.

Thank you.

C. PARDY: That's a good question.

I think that would be in the mandate of the Health and Community Services, NLHS. Any senior that would be involved, then yes, we are inherently involved with any policy or any practice that would occur within the health care, if the clients that we serve, the seniors, would be involved.

There has been lots of conversation of UTIs in long-term care and the treatment of that. I know that there's research on as to whether the use of antibiotics, the amount of antibiotics that would be utilized; PAP clinics, that would be involved or availability of such.

We ran on the aspect of better health care and making sure that we provide better health care for seniors but that would be that we need to collaborate more on. As far as voicing the concern, what you would have would be the same as what I would have or the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's would have, I would think, the seniors.

We will certainly collaborate more on those issues, and I know what you're referencing. I can't say that I have had partake in many discussions on the medical part of the seniors. We've been on the policy side whether it would be the Seniors' Advocate, the Adult Protection, the affordability measures and the legislative piece.

We will certainly look to be more engaged on that, even though the mandate rests with NLHS and Health and Community Services.

S. O'LEARY: Understood.

Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Your time is up.

S. O'LEARY: My time is done.

Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Can the minister provide an update on the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Aging with Dignity funding agreement? What discussions are ongoing, especially as it relates to long-term care and home and community care?

C. PARDY: Okay.

I'm going to pass that to the deputy minister as well.

J. HERRITT: In '25-'26, $21.7 million was transferred to the province under the aging with dignity agreement; $7.9 million for home and community care; $8.9 million for long-term care; and $4.8 million for personal support worker initiatives. Funding for this is allocated, as you may know, on a per capita basis.

This funding supports 89 positions in the health authority including staff for the Home Dementia Program, community-based rehabilitation and Home First, and approximately $4.1 million support of the long-term care recruitment and retention initiative in '23-'24.

The funding also supports, in part, wage increases for approximately 1,600 personal care home staff and over 6,800 agency-based home care workers.

P. PIKE: Excellent.

I assume those figures are in the binder.

J. HERRITT: We can provide those.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you.

Minister, is the All-Party Committee on Basic Income continuing?

C. PARDY: I would think that report has been concluded and I've never been part of discussions as far as continuation of that. I know that the Committee now we're intent on and working on would be the Poverty Reduction Plan that we're rolling out. I would think that the work of that Committee would certainly be a subset of this poverty reduction.

So the answer would be no, it wouldn't be, but the poverty reduction one would be the one that we will be focusing on and hopefully get that standardized in the very near future.

P. PIKE: Okay.

A real-time issue. I talked to a gentleman a while ago, him and his wife were living in a seniors' cottage. She developed an illness and had to go to long-term protective care in a long-term care facility in the region. Her pension and anything else she had coming in covers her stay there.

The husband has to drive about 40 kilometres a day to get to her. He does this every day. He's very committed. With her pension now gone, because it's used for her to stay in the long-term care facility, he's finding it extremely difficult to maintain his bills and to maintain a vehicle, which he uses for transportation to visit her. That's gotten worse in the last little while because of the high price of gas and the state of the roads because he's done some damage to his vehicle.

As well, prior to her entering hospital, she was waiting for a long-term care bed or a protective care bed. While she was in the hospital, Eastern Health was charging her $39 a day. She ended up being in the hospital for a couple of months waiting to get into a long-term care facility – a very huge bill for somebody that is just barely scraping by.

For me, there are a couple of issues here, but they're real and they're happening all the time. I wasn't aware of it, but I am now, and I've had quite a few discussions with people in the same boat.

So I'm just wondering have you had inquiries about that from other people and, if you have, are you looking at ways that we could probably help out the seniors who find themselves in this predicament?

C. PARDY: That's a really good question. It's a situation that would occur in many districts that we would have. That's not a one-off.

P. PIKE: No, definitely not.

C. PARDY: Not a one-off.

I've often said that any good policy that you have to be responsive and nimble, and I know that. You've got to be revisiting all the time to do that.

There are a couple of things that would be inherent there. We mentioned that 26 to 30 per cent of those people, some seniors, would be in an alternate level of care within our acute care system. But as soon as they're medically discharged, they start billing them.

How many did I receive in the past number of years from the District of Bonavista and the strain that that would be in situations like we're talking about where two people go to live in a cottage and they've got the resources to do that. One goes, in this situation and, all of a sudden, their resources are going to pay for their stay at the acute care, NLHS, while they're waiting for long-term care. Now you've got the strain on the spouse that would be left in the unit. We've got to have a look at that.

If I said to you that's something that we've looked at since I've been in, I haven't been sat around on those discussions, but I know that we may have had discussions on that in the past, and things that I would have submitted as the Opposition Member back in the years past, representing situations similar to what you just presented.

So do we need to look into that to make sure that we've got some accommodation that would be in there for these situations? Absolutely. I think absolutely. Is it a quick fix? No, but it's certainly one that we ought to be drilling down on to see what we can do to make sure we provide the level of care for this minority segment. Like we said, it's not a one-off. There's a minority segment that are in those situations.

The accommodations in the past, Member, I think your response may have been in the past, where in long-term care before, if you weren't Level 3 or that level of care, they wouldn't have you into the long-term care facility. I think the question came up earlier as far as cohabitation to make sure that we've got the flexibility to accommodate them in a living environment, and that's a win-win.

P. PIKE: Yes, it is.

C. PARDY: A win-win. So we've got to be nimble.

P. PIKE: Thank you for your understanding there.

You and I certainly see eye to eye on that one, as we do on many things. I think that's something that I would like to have looked at anyways.

But there's one other piece to that, too. In rural Newfoundland, we have these long-term care facilities in place. In rural Newfoundland, we have certain communities that have these long-term care beds. I would just say to you that if we were looking at putting more long-term care beds in the regions, which we are –

C. PARDY: Yeah.

P. PIKE: – that we look to ones already existing to put extensions on. Because in those hospitals right now, those units, there's an understanding of what you're trying to achieve there and there's a great support system of volunteers that are already in place with a fair bit of training. So I'm just saying, it makes sense to keep those units in the communities that they're already in.

Anyway, the current Seniors' Advocate has retired.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

P. PIKE: Where are you in respect to a replacement there?

C. PARDY: We alluded to that a little earlier. Number one, the replacement is in on an interim basis. The House of Assembly, as a result, the statutory office, will be looking after the fulfillment of that one. That's, again, at an arm's-length, the statutory office, that the House of Assembly will be looking after. But I would think that they'll fill that as expeditiously as they possibly can, following the due process that we, as the House of Assembly, have created.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you.

I think my time is up.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

CHAIR: It has to be alternating; that's the only reason. You can ask one question and then we can go back to Paul.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: No, that's okay. We have lots of questions.

CHAIR: Okay, yeah.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: We're good.

CHAIR: Fill your boots.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I'm just going to switch to housing for a moment here. When might the seniors in Lab West expect to see some shovels in the ground, given the commitment of $10.5 million to support the Lab West application to the federal Build Canada Homes fund? I know things take time.

C. PARDY: Did the MHA for Lab West prompted you with that question, sitting behind you?

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: No.

C. PARDY: It's our priority, and I think we've made it clear, and I think the Member has been active for getting that up. It's a priority of ours, I will say to you, ASAP. I know you had mentioned that it takes time. It sure does, but I think we've got most things in line now that we ought to be able to be most expeditious in getting that in Lab West.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So is there a back-up plan if the federal application gets denied?

C. PARDY: We're going to have a unit in Lab West; I feel confident of that. A back-up plan? We'll have units in Lab West.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

How many units? What's the plan? What was in the application? Do you know?

C. PARDY: We can provide that for you.

Probably the Committee Member for Lab West can add to that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: It was 100 units.

C. PARDY: One hundred units. An apartment complex, with the future development, would be a plan for some cottages that would be in the future. I think there's probably a segment up there that'd like the cottages as much or more than the apartments.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: So will the application process to occupy these units be income tested?

C. PARDY: That would be questions now for Housing. I won't venture into that, MHA.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Okay.

One of the promises in the blue book for supporting seniors was to petition the federal government to change the current OAS and GIS monthly pension payment schedules to bi-weekly and to allow pensioners to re-enter the workplace without clawback of their OAS and GIS benefits.

Now, I know that this is a four-year promise but I'm wondering, has there been any discussion, meetings, anything started on that?

C. PARDY: Yes, it's been active as part of, what we're talking about, our Poverty Reduction Plan that we've had. I know that was discussed as well.

Anything to change as far as the regulatory piece with the federal government takes some time to do it. Sometimes, if it's a one-off, it's costly as well. We're back to the point of us trying to look at the dollars and if it's going to take $1 million to change something in the CRA, then that's $1 million, the value in doing.

It is something that is being looked at. We've heard from seniors that that's what they desire. I'm sure we're not unique in Newfoundland and Labrador. Maybe through the federal-provincial-territorial meetings, that might be a nice one that we can collaborate together with the federal minister on board, even though that hasn't been brought up yet, but we'll make a note of that route now as I speak. That would be for the next FPT meeting.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Minister.

So my final questions are going to be on home care and personal care homes – my absolute passion. When does the minister expect the home support workers will actually see the $2 increase that was in the provincial budget?

C. PARDY: July 1.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: July 1.

Thank you.

C. PARDY: As long as the Opposition co-operates, MHA, and we get the budget passed. That depends, so I don't know if you have any inside scoop on that.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: We're getting there.

Minister, this is the question that often comes to me, and I know our government was part of this decision. I just want to know if you can explain why the same employee, doing the same work for an agency and for an individual family, under the self-management model, has two different pay scales. I, personally, know employees that leave self-managed and go to agencies and vice versa.

C. PARDY: Now I know, as you know, I petitioned, when you were in government, that that adjustment – and the petition that I raised, and some of my colleagues, spoke about the pay inequity and it being unjust. I know we've adjusted. I know we spent $12.7 million. Ought there be parity? Yes, as long as the educational component matches up. Sometimes there's a little difference. If you're looking at complexity, there's probably a case that those with the more complex cases, you know that you look at a classification system that ought to be remunerated differently as well. They should have parity in their salary.

The only thing we looked at in year one, we moved that as best as we could, looking at the totality of the budget as best we could. July 1 we'll see that. I speak for the record here that, ought they have parity? Yes.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Minister, I understand the complexities of the care and that some self-managed and agency care are more complex than others. Self-managed care was the origin of home care and agency care came afterwards.

I don't want any government, at any point in time, to move towards total agency care. There is a fear in community that that is happening, because sometimes that is the easier route to do. Because government needs to recognize and realize the amount of free work that families continue to do and the cost.

I hear you talk about the cost and what the $2 means and what the $4 would mean, but I am certain, just based on my own experience, that if an analysis was done on long-term care, eastern residential care, the whole gamut of care and self-managed care, that it would be a lot cheaper to government to support self-managed care. There's no ands, ifs or buts about it.

I do hope that your government continues to evaluate that policy and do that analysis and have the real data in front of you, the difference of the cost of care. I do understand the educational component. I look forward to us growing this program so that we do have the educational supports around the individuals in community.

I will end by saying that I believe that self-managed care is a more holistic form of care and that it is a superior care. If, at the end of the day, families can manage under self-managed care, it certainly enables seniors, specifically, to be able to age at home gracefully, with dignity in their own homes.

I'm going to end with that comment.

Thank you very much.

C. PARDY: Just a quick response to my hon. Member and colleague: duly noted.

S. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you.

CHAIR: Does the Member for Burin - Grand Bank have more questions?

P. PIKE: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: I think I've covered off the most important things, but the chairperson for the Provincial Advisory Council is listed as vacant on the website. When can we expect that to be filled?

C. PARDY: We're going to meet in person, I mentioned earlier, within the next two months and I would think that will be filled before then.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you.

That's it.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01, Seniors and Aging.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01, Seniors and Aging, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 2.1.01 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Seniors, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Seniors carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Seniors carried without amendment.

CHAIR: I just want to thank the minister, the departmental officials and the Committee for your attendance. I do want to thank Ms. Leonard from SeniorsNL for attending. I noticed that she was taking a lot of notes, so the next meeting is not going to be favourable for the minister.

In the meantime, it was really good. Like I said, I concur with the minister and his statement of saying that the seniors in our province have blazed a trail for us and that respect and integrity that we show back to them is more than well deserved.

So I now ask for a mover to adjourn the meeting.

H. CORMIER: So moved.

CHAIR: It is moved by the Member for St. George's - Humber.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

Thank you.

On motion, the Committee adjourned sine die.