

Committee of Supply
Proceedings in Section C

ESTIMATES: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

The committee met at 9:39 a.m.

On Vote 41: ministry operations, \$3,682,820,00.

The Chair: I recognize that we're on the traditional territories of the Lək'wəjínəŋ-speaking peoples, the Esquimalt and the Songhees Nations. I want to thank them and extend our appreciations for having us here, in their territories.

You, of course, are all over the province of B.C. and will be in other folks' territories, likely, and we recognize them as well.

[9:40 a.m.]

We're here today to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. I see the good minister is here, ready to get going.

Minister, do you want to make an opening statement?

Hon. S. Simpson: Chair, I also want to acknowledge that I'm here on the traditional territories of the Lək'wəjínəŋ-speaking people. It's always a privilege.

I do want to start by letting everybody know that I'm here with the senior staff from the ministry who will be supporting the estimates: Deputy Minister David Galbraith; the CEO of Community Living B.C., Ross Chilton; a number of ADMs, including Jonathan Dubé, Debi Upton, Chris Brown, Molly Harrington and Sheila Robinson; and Sam Turcott, the executive lead for the accessibility secretariat.

I'm going to forgo any kind of opening statements. We have a limited amount of time, and I want to make sure we use that time for the questions of the critic and the Third Party. So we'll move there, and we will try to be as efficient as we can be at our end with this.

I would note, because I know that we do have a limited amount of time, if there are questions that either the official opposition or the Third Party don't get a chance to ask, do forward them in writing, and we will respond in writing to those questions.

J. Isaacs: Thank you very much for everyone to be here today, and thank you to the minister for keeping his remarks short. We don't have a lot of time. We've only got four hours, and we have a number of issues to talk about.

I do want to just briefly say that in my very short term as the critic, I can see that the Social Development and Poverty Reduction portfolio is clearly a challenging and critical portfolio. It's one that covers a lot of different issues, particularly social issues. There are many individuals and groups to consider, all with diverse and unique needs. Finding a one-stop solution that works for everyone is very challenging. It's difficult, of course, when budgets are tight. There isn't an endless bucket of money, so choices are sometimes difficult.

I thank the minister for our weekly discussions that we've had over the past few months. Some of the issues that we're going to talk about today we have already spoken about. I just want them on the record. I appreciate the opportunity to follow up on any questions that we're not able to get to today or anything that may not be available today.

I'll basically say that my topics are going to be homelessness, CLBC, home share and poverty reduction. I'll get started right away with homelessness.

Every province and municipality is dealing with homelessness. There's no question about it. It's a problem that's not unique to the Lower Mainland. It's not unique to B.C. — right across Canada. The previous mayor of Vancouver said that he would end homelessness by 2015. What has been the increase in homelessness in the past three years, and does the minister see this trend growing?

[9:45 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: I thank the member for the question. You'll know that in 2018, we did the first provincial count. That was a combination of bringing together federal counts, some locally driven counts and then the ones that we added on top of that in 2018. We can talk a bit about those numbers. We were in the process of completing the 2020 count. There are 28 counts that are part of that mix. Of them, 13 had been completed prior to COVID-19, and of course the rest of the counts were all suspended at the time that COVID-19 and the pandemic appeared on the scene.

I will tell you that indications are — and we've seen some numbers from some of those early counts — that the numbers are going up. I do believe that they are going to be higher. I think that's a combination of things. I think the counts we're doing are better than they were before, but I also think that the reality is that the numbers are increasing as we move forward.

The member will know that there are real limits to what we find out from these counts. They're point-in-time counts. They're one day. We try to get the count in, in a day. People who are living rough and vulnerable often aren't interested in being a statistic, and we know people often will disappear on that day in order to not be counted, because they don't like to be counted. The other thing we know is that it just simply tends to be a modest or conservative number moving forward. I do expect the numbers to go up.

J. Isaacs: I agree that the numbers are going to go up in 2020. In 2019, in Vancouver, it was 2,223 homeless on that count, which was the highest level since 2005 and an increase of 20 percent since 2016. So it's certainly a growing concern that we're going to have to be managing and dealing with.

Many of the emergency shelters that normally close at the end of March were extended to June because of COVID. How many emergency shelters were extended, and did the average number of overnight residents increase or decrease during the extension? What types of services were provided to the emergency shelter residents? What was the cost to deliver those services? What was the overall cost to extend the program? And did any of the residents who accessed the emergency shelters move to the hotels?

[9:50 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: I can provide some of the answer to that. On costs related to that, we're going to end up having to get some of the specifics out of MAH, because it was B.C. Housing and their budget. They directly did these agreements. You'll know that it wasn't limited, by any means, to Vancouver and Victoria. There were about 2,600 spaces over 80 sites that were identified and secured to support people. In many cases, with the existing shelters, there has been an initiative — and it continues — to thin the shelters out because they were too busy. That's where we opened up things like the emergency operations centres.

You'll know that in Vancouver, for example, Coal Harbour and the Roundhouse community centres and other communities' arenas or community centres were opened. Save-On was opened in Victoria. That happened in communities across the province. In terms of the services there, full meals were provided for people. Cleaning services were provided, as well as mental health and addictions services and case management.

We had our staff in there, as well as other staff, working with people and assessing to make sure that people were getting the services they needed. That envelope of services — much like it's delivered in the hotels that we've acquired — was provided in the EOCs as well.

J. Isaacs: Again, due to COVID, there was concern that should anyone in the shelters, the encampments or people living in the Downtown Eastside contract COVID, it would spread to this vulnerable population — many living with compromised health challenges — and that that population would need a place to self-isolate. The Roundhouse and Coal Harbour community centres were two downtown locations that were secured for people to self-isolate.

[9:55 a.m.]

Were there any other locations, either in the Lower Mainland or around the province, that were secured for the same purpose?

Hon. S. Simpson: The member is correct. There were hotels that were secured. They were under the jurisdiction or the authority of Coastal Health, Island Health and others. The health authorities had control of those facilities, and they were set aside and held for exactly the purpose that the member spoke to. There was very minimal use of those facilities, as is my understanding, because we had reasonable success, and we didn't see significant outbreaks of COVID-19 in the Downtown Eastside or in vulnerable populations in the way that it was anticipated might be possible.

Absolutely, over and above the community centres that were converted, there were hotels. We'd be happy to get the member a list of those hotels, or to get her further information and details on those hotels, which were held specifically for health authority and medical purposes.

J. Isaacs: Just to clarify, then, with the minister, there were hotels that were secured for self-isolation purposes, in addition to hotels that were secured for housing options. Is that correct?

Hon. S. Simpson: Yes, that's correct.

J. Isaacs: Minister, you said that there weren't a lot of people in the self-isolation centres — not as many as were expected. How many residents were living in each of the Vancouver isolation centres? Again, you've mentioned that meals were being provided. How many individuals from the health authorities, non-profit agencies or outreach organizations were staffing these facilities? Are they still open? Are the locations still being used, and when do you expect those sites to close?

[10:00 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: This ministry didn't have any staff in those facilities directly. The operations centres and others were largely operated by non-profit service providers, and there were contractual relationships. Again, those relationships were through B.C. Housing, which has the contractual relationships with the non-profit service providers who have been supporting this population moving forward.

The detail of what those contractual relationships are — we can certainly explore that with B.C. Housing and get the member some additional information. Or she and her colleagues can pursue that further with B.C. Housing in the Municipal Affairs and Housing estimates when those occur.

What we do know, around those, is that they've been relatively short-term lease arrangements. And for the arrangements that have been had with local governments, for things like the Roundhouse and Coal Harbour community centres, it has been a question of: when did the local governments anticipate bringing those facilities back online as community facilities again and reopening those? I know that we've had some extensions, but the move is, as we are moving, to move those folks into the hotels and out of those community centres over time as they go back.

There is a different arrangement in almost every instance — again, based on the discussions between local government and, largely, B.C. Housing, where the lease arrangement has landed. It's based on what the local governments' expectations are of their requirements for those spaces. The hotels, obviously, are a different matter, and we are extending out those leases on an ongoing basis. Some of it, again, depends on the hotel operators as to when they think they might be in a position to think about reopening their hotels. We have the ability then to know that those arrangements will close at that time. They're all on short-term lease arrangements at this point.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to ask, then, that B.C. Housing provide a breakdown of what the actual costs were for the self-isolated site; what the terms of the lease were — what the costs were, related to

staffing and meals and equipment. If there were beds or blankets, I'd like to see a breakdown of that. I appreciate B.C. Housing forwarding that when they have a moment.

I also wanted to ask the question as to whether or not, in the self-isolation sites, there were safe injection sites and any other costs, like policing or security. I'm wondering if the minister has been able to forecast what the financial impacts are of these self-isolated sites, what the associated costs may be going forward, and whether or not the sites have been reserved, in any way, in the event that there is a second wave.

[10:05 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: Yes. All of those facilities, like the hotels, those ops centres, have had 24-7 services. That included security. It included cleaning, laundry services, full meals. Primary care was available, and mental health and addiction supports, including overdose protection services, for people in those facilities. I would note that, as I think the member will know, we've held firm on a no-guest policy. These were services that were dedicated to the people within those facilities and not available to people outside of the facilities.

In terms of the people who were there, for example, in the emergency isolation centres, the referral came in through Health, so Health controlled the referrals on that for people who were specifically related to Health moving forward.

In terms of the specifics, we can certainly get information around the costs and the overall costs. It's been an interesting process. You'll know that we have, in addition to some of those initiatives, been supporting people in other aspects of the Downtown Eastside in particular with some of those supports as well. Absolutely, those services were there.

We had no interaction around policing costs. Those were matters for the police to deal with themselves. We did have 24-7 security in the facilities that was contracted. Again, as with all of these arrangements, the financial arrangements and contracting were levelled through B.C. Housing. They were the point of contact for the contractual relationships.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. We'll look forward to getting the breakdown of what the individual costs were, as well as what the overall costs were.

I know there weren't that many, but were the residents that were in the isolation sites tested for COVID? If so, is there a number of what the positive cases might have been? Did any of the residents who were self-isolating in these sites move to the hotels?

Hon. S. Simpson: When people were moved from Oppenheimer, the process that was gone through there... Everybody was evaluated at Oppenheimer. Health was there. The health authority had health professionals there. Anybody who was deemed by the health professionals to require testing was tested. That was significant numbers of people at Oppenheimer. Those evaluations, those tests, were done prior to people being moved. We knew, kind of, what we were dealing with there.

In addition, they were evaluated for other health issues, for addiction issues. They were evaluated for the potential to be put on to prescription alternatives. That work was there.

[10:10 a.m.]

In terms of people in the hotels, there's primary care in the hotels. We have health professionals in the hotels on a regular basis, working with people. Obviously, where there are any indications of people being at all symptomatic, testing is done. Isolation can be provided there, or, on the recommendation of health professionals, people can and will be relocated to isolation. Again, those are matters based on the direction of health professionals when they're looking at primary care issues in all of those facilities. That's an ongoing process in the hotels, both in Victoria and in Vancouver, as we move forward. So there absolutely is an awareness there.

In terms of cases, there have been very, very few cases. I know that the medical health officer for Vancouver, Dr. Daly, has spoken to this. Her team has had primary responsibility for testing in the Downtown Eastside and the work there. I know she reported to Vancouver city council about a week or so ago, and reported very minimal cases. In fact, what we've discovered is in the few instances, where the cases that I've been made aware of ended up.... They came not from people who are resident in the community but cases that came from people who'd come to the community to work and were identified and then removed.

We had a couple of instances, I know, at the Salvation Army, at their detox facility. They were very quickly able to isolate that to that one floor and deal with the people who were symptomatic. Further testing showed that there was no spread.

I will tell you that I'm very pleasantly surprised that we haven't seen a spread of COVID-19 in the community. There are lots of reasons why people think that is the case, but we've been fortunate. Some of it's luck. Some of it is, I think, that that community is pretty self-contained, without a lot of exposure outside the community other than people who come in to work there at times.

J. Isaacs: We've seen three larger encampments — Oppenheimer, Topaz and the Pandora corridor — that, under a public safety order, were dismantled in mid-May. There were COVID-related concerns in the encampments, although I'm encouraged to hear that the spread was not what could have been.

But there were also other issues that needed to be addressed, such as the level of crime, active drug activity, overdoses, weapons and just a lot of disorderly conduct around the neighbourhood and towards nearby businesses. It was getting uncomfortable for staff and for some of the health authorities, outreach workers, first responders and police to enter the parks.

B.C. Housing did start to look for some SROs and housing sites that could accommodate the residents living in Oppenheimer. There were some SROs, as I understand it from our conversations, and other housing options that were secured. But the majority of residents in Oppenheimer were offered housing at various downtown hotels.

Which ministry led the initiative to dismantle the encampments and offer housing at hotels? Were other ministries involved in the decision, and are those ministries also contributing to the costs out of their budgets?

[10:15 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: I'll just take a second, maybe, to walk the member through how this all came together. This truly was an all-of-government initiative. There were a number of ministries involved in different ways. Public Safety and Solicitor General was involved. Municipal Affairs and Housing, Mental Health and Addictions, Health and this ministry were key ministries. Finance, though, obviously had a role, because they were needing to approve costs moving forward, and the Premier took an interest in this in an early discussion and, in fact, was part of the discussion.

The result of that was to create a process where I was asked by the Premier to lead the coordination of that all-of-government initiative, and a team of deputies — including my deputy, the deputies for Municipal Affairs and Housing and others, and assistant deputies — formed a team. We had teams in both the communities of Victoria and Vancouver. Local governments were active participants in those teams — in both the cities of Vancouver and Victoria. The health authorities played a role in those teams. We brought public-sector partners from the non-profit sectors who played roles in that as well. Police also were involved in those teams in both communities.

Those teams.... They monitored. We had daily briefings as we were moving through the process of the decampments, in both cases. Decisions were made on a daily basis, and I met on a daily basis with senior officials to see how the progress was going and to adjust the plans as we moved forward.

So it truly was an all-of government initiative to get this done. In my time as an elected.... Certainly, in my three years as a minister, I've seen good collaboration with government. But I will tell you that I'm not sure I've ever seen so many ministries and authorities come together in quite the way that they did, in a very quick process to be able to operationalize this effort and make it work. But it was absolutely an all-of-government initiative, with many ministries involved and a number of discussions at the ministers' level as we moved forward through the process.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister, for the fulsome answer there.

How many people have been moved into the hotels since May 5? Did they all move from Oppenheimer? Were there people from Main and Hastings — or the Downtown Eastside — that were also offered housing at the hotels? Where did the numbers come from, beyond the residents from Oppenheimer? Were there any other homeless individuals that were offered housing at the hotels, such as someone who may have been on the wait-list for B.C. Housing, or someone who may have been coming out of treatment or out of recovery?

[10:20 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: The commitment with the decampment was to move the people who were in the encampment. The way this process worked was when we first initiated the process, there was essentially a census taken of who was on the sites. We determined fairly quickly exactly who was there, and then began the process of evaluating people's personal circumstances, the

complexity of issues, and some determinations being made about need as well as what people were looking for in terms of their desire for housing and that. But it was about evaluating need.

As the member will appreciate, there's quite a range, in terms of the complexity of people's situation and what their requirements are around services. So that was a focus of making sure that we got people into facilities that would be able to meet their needs moving forward.

Based on that, we moved 261 people out of Oppenheimer, which was the number that we determined there. I think the member will appreciate that these numbers are a bit of a moving target when you have an encampment and there are some coming and going. Not everybody who was on the site was a permanent resident. There were people who would be there part-time and then on the go, but they'd leave their tent there, and they would come back. So there was obviously some evaluation there. Very similar in Victoria, where 344 people were moved from Pandora and Topaz into hotels.

Again, as people have been moved, B.C. Housing continues to move people. I know they continue to keep a registration centre down at the Orange Hall, which is a facility adjacent, right next to, Oppenheimer Park. As an example, when you had the situation where there were a number of people who went to Vancouver Port Authority lands and moved over there, I know that B.C. Housing and some of the outreach partners went in and registered about 30 people from that site for housing, as an example. I know that there are conversations going on in Strathcona around the same thing. I know there are discussions that have gone on, in a similar way, at Beacon Hill Park in Victoria.

B.C. Housing is continuing to do the work they do, which means going out, doing the outreach, registering people for housing and then moving folks. It's a bit of the.... The people who have moved, largely, into the hotels, the 261.... As you would imagine, as we start to look at more permanent purchases and acquisitions in the hotels, both in Vancouver and Victoria, there is some movement of people that will happen into more permanent locations. When spaces are freed up, if those spaces are available, then of course B.C. Housing is looking to make those spaces available for other people who are in need of housing.

I will say that we know that, for example — in Victoria mostly, but in Vancouver, it was true too — in order to put the non-profit service providers together, to bring the comprehensive services, including health services, to the table, there were a lot of people who kind of went over and above to do that, as we did push those services to make sure that we could fulfil the needs that we anticipated people would have.

As we move forward and look at more permanent options and that, part of that, too, is making sure that the capacity issues are addressed. That's capacity with service providers. It's capacity on the health side. And that work continues to go on. And I will say that there's a team of people in government working on making sure that we learn from what we've done here and that we have infrastructure and plans in place moving forward to support many of the other people in our province who are struggling with homelessness.

J. Isaacs: How many hotels are involved? How many individual rooms are occupied or available? Where are the hotels located? Are the hotels at full capacity now? How long are the residents expected to stay at the hotel?

Can you also confirm, Minister, if some of the hotels have six-month leases, which hotels have the six-month leases, and if there's an option to extend the leases in any of the hotels?

[10:25 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: Thank you for the question. As the member will appreciate, there have been a number of different facilities here, a number of hotels, some that we know about that obviously have had some profile. There also have been hostels that have been taken. We've talked about locations like the EOCs, like the community centres, like Save-On-Foods.

So it's been this mix. The leases are all different arrangements, because they've been done with individual hotel associations who were partners in this in terms of helping us identify potential hotels. Then there were individual arrangements made between B.C. Housing and the hotel owners. Every one of those is a slightly different arrangement, depending, I believe, probably, largely on the expectations of the hotel operator as to when they can get back to service.

It's an ongoing conversation with those hotels. In a number of cases, there have been extensions made where we've been able to extend by a month, by two months, by three months what were original arrangements as the hotel owners have determined that the likelihood for them to get back soon is not as remote. We have an arrangement with them where we are paying a discounted room rate for the rooms, so they do have revenue.

As the member may also know, numbers of the staff who worked in those hotels — we've found ways for many of them to come over and be hired by the non-profit service providers to help deliver operational services and that around the facilities as people who are very familiar with that and did that work.

So those arrangements were made. We'll be happy to look at a detailed list for the member that provides as much of that information as possible. There may be some aspects of the financial arrangements, of course, depending on the terms of the lease agreement, that may or may not be available, but that would be because of the terms of the lease agreement and providing that. But we're happy to provide as much information as possible and, certainly, I would think that the large numbers about costs that are related to this we'll be able to make available.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. I'll look forward to getting the list of the various hotels and what the lease arrangements were and what the terms are.

Were there any upfront payments for a security deposit or a damage deposit? Do any of the lease agreements include remediation or renovation costs after the lease has expired? Have those remediation costs been allocated in the budget? Are there any other ministries that might be sharing in those remediation costs? And how were the remediation costs arrived at?

[10:30 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: Yes. For all of the hotels, there are arrangements. The agreements that are in place are to return the hotels back in a condition that will allow them to go back into the market. The commitment... Again, these are all arrangements that are largely, I believe, held through B.C. Housing. The government has focused these arrangements through one entity, B.C. Housing, in terms of the lease arrangements.

The one caveat I would put on that is that although I believe that the lease arrangement still is with B.C. Housing, even for those that the health authorities have jurisdiction over, I'm not entirely certain that the health authorities and that aren't paying some of that cost. But other than that, all the costs are driven through B.C. Housing around the terms of the lease.

The agreements are that they will be returned. There are arrangements with professional companies and that, who will be able to come in and essentially do the deep cleaning in the rooms, remove those things that need to be replaced and provide replacement where necessary. All of that is part of the term of the lease — to be able to turn these back to the owners in a condition that will allow them to be able to go back to the market in a more conventional use when that time comes.

J. Isaacs: Was there any kind of insurance coverage that was obtained for damage to buildings — fire, theft or just general insurable liabilities? If so, who's paying for those premiums? Do you know what those premiums are costing?

Hon. S. Simpson: I can't provide certainty on that. I know, for example, that most of government self-insures, but I'm not exactly sure that B.C. Housing does that and whether B.C. Housing has a distinct arrangement — around insurance arrangement. But B.C. Housing would have been responsible for insuring. Any of the insurance on liability — on any of those matters — would have been there. When we inquire of the questions for some of the answers that the member's asked for, we will ask about the insurance arrangements.

J. Isaacs: We have seen some hotels being purchased. One, of course, was the Howard Johnson purchase at \$55 million — Howard Johnson has 110 rooms — and \$19.4 million paid for the Buchan Hotel on Haro Street. I'm just wondering if there was more than one bidder on these hotel sites or how these sites were chosen. Is the government looking at making any other capital investments in hotels? Are they looking at other cities around the province? Does the minister believe that the \$500,000 per room — that's what it turned out to be for Howard Johnson — is an efficient use of taxpayer dollars?

[10:35 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: As the member will know, B.C. Housing has a whole division that deals with real estate. They're dealing with real estate transactions at all times. They are the folks who have that detail. I do know, in terms of costs, that they have a pretty effective system. They evaluate all of those.

I also know — in the discussions, for example, around the purchase of the Comfort Inn — that some of it is buying and looking at property with the expectation of redevelopment down the road. That has been announced by Minister Robinson and B.C. Housing. For some of these

facilities, we will be looking at redevelopment for more purpose-built social housing moving forward and looking at the opportunity for being able to do that as we move forward.

In terms of the details, the member, I think, will also know that it's probably not too advantageous to be talking about where you're thinking about buying hotels and not buying hotels when you're trying to get the best price that you can get. There's a lot of confidentiality until the sales are finalized and the deals are closed. Those discussions, though, to the extent that they can be had... I would encourage the member to have those with MAH and B.C. Housing, because they have the real estate expertise and they do the assessments and the evaluations on the purchases.

Our ministry here, in terms of the homelessness issue, has been around some coordination of the ministries, coordination of the services and the interaction with the people on the ground, as well, in moving forward. The bricks-and-mortar detail — much more of that has rested and will continue to rest with B.C. Housing.

J. Isaacs: Thank you for the answer, Minister. What percentage of the people who were moved into the hotels have addiction problems? What are those addictions or substances being used? Do they include alcohol, heroin, crack cocaine, opioids? What is being offered to treat or replace these substances?

Hon. S. Simpson: As an example, in the evaluation of the folks at Oppenheimer, 90 percent of the people who were evaluated had an addiction issue. It could have been a range of addictive drugs or narcotics. It could have been alcohol. But 90 percent of that population were struggling with addiction. An even larger percentage than that were identified as having mental health or brain injury issues moving forward.

[10:40 a.m.]

All of the facilities currently have the ability to support, through the health authorities and others, overdose prevention and services. Safe supply is available and being ramped up. When the evaluations were done of folks in the encampments, at the point where it was identified that people were struggling with an addiction, there were health assessments made and prescriptions, where appropriate, provided to people so that they could access that regulated, prescribed safe supply.

We continue to ramp that up and increase the use of that and are monitoring that. Obviously, lots of that monitoring is also being done by our colleagues in Mental Health and Addictions.

J. Isaacs: I realize it might be a little bit challenging to break down the cost per individual for safe supply, because it could change. Circumstances could vary. But how much money has been allocated to pay for the safe supply of drugs? Is the Minister of Health contributing to the costs?

Hon. S. Simpson: So 100 percent of the costs are provided through the Ministry of Health and paid through the Ministry of Health. The administration of that is done largely through the health authorities and the health officers on the ground in different communities and their teams who have responsibility for that, obviously working with physicians and nurse practitioners and

others who have the ability to prescribe. But of those costs, all of the costs related to the medical services here are directly through the Ministry of Health.

J. Isaacs: How many of the hotels have safe injection sites? What safety measures are put in place in the temporary shelters that now have safe injection sites? Will these safe injection sites remain in these areas once the temporary shelters are no longer being leased in the hotels? Were the neighbours consulted on the creation of safe injection sites, and if not, will they be consulted now that they've been established?

Hon. S. Simpson: Four of the hotels have monitored safe consumption rooms inside the building where there are sterilized materials and a safe way to dispose of needles, where people have that opportunity to use inside.

[10:45 a.m.]

As I would note, these are private. They are not drop-in facilities. They are not open to other members of the public. They are exclusively for the residents of the facilities there, not dissimilar to what happens in many other supported-housing facilities. All of that is there.

In terms of any longer-term overdose protection, prevention services, that would be done in collaboration with the city of Vancouver or the city of Victoria, where they have input into those facilities — certainly, any facility of a drop-in nature that was not exclusive, as these are, to the hotels where they're provided.

There have been a number of discussions, absolutely, in the community, and discussions in Vancouver, I know, with the business improvement association, discussions with local neighbourhood associations, as has happened in Victoria with the Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Association around the hotels that are close to their community. Those discussions will be continuing and will be ongoing as we move forward with those facilities. There'll be a continued discussion both with the city and with the local neighbourhood organizations and with local business groups — in the case of Vancouver, with the Downtown BIA, which is actively involved with these discussions moving forward.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister.

We just talked briefly about some of the mental health challenges and brain injuries. Does the minister know what percentage of this group may have mental health challenges? What services and supports are being offered to them? Is there any way of costing out what the delivery of these services is? Are the mental health services being shared between ministries? What is government doing to assure that there are adequate supports in place when they are needed? And how is government planning to address the increasing costs related to supporting this population, particularly in continuing to provide a safe drug supply and also increased mental health supports?

Hon. S. Simpson: Absolutely. There's a range of those health supports being provided. Again, the delivery agent for all of the health services related to these homelessness initiatives is

through the local health authorities. They have been partners, from the beginning, in the process of structuring those services, and they deliver them. They come on site to provide those services.

Again, they provide mental health services. They provide addiction supports. They also provide primary care, often issues like wound care. Those kinds of things are very important. And they deliver them a little bit differently in every facility, depending on the size of the facility, also depending on the complexity of the issues that the people in the facility are facing.

The evaluations that were done by B.C. Housing, by our staff, our community integration specialists, and by Health — those efforts were to determine very early on what the complexity of those issues would be and to look to house people in the facility that would best be able to accommodate that, including that suite of services. That's the effort that goes on now. There's ongoing evaluation of that.

[10:50 a.m.]

I would note, for the member, that as part of what's come out of this first round of looking at this and what we would learn from this, there's a very active discussion now among the ministries involved and the Ministry of Health around the model of care, around what that model of care looks like, what make sense and how you do that in the most cost-effective way.

That work is going on now. We're able to draw on what has been a couple of years of experience. These models first came into place in 2017, when the first modular housing was put in place with wraparound services. Health and Housing and ourselves and those who are working with folks who have complex issues have learned a fair amount over the last couple of years and have learned more with this recent initiative. There is a lot of work going on around what that model of care looks like and how it best gets done and what we should learn from that experience.

In terms of the numbers, again, I would say that the identification given to us was that 90 percent of the folks who came in were struggling with addiction. The numbers in Victoria are a little bit less but not a lot less. We're talking very broad challenges here on addiction. On the mental health side, the expectation is even more significant numbers than on the addictions side.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. The terms "wraparound services" and "24-7" are some things we hear a lot about. But it's not quite what people may think. In fact, 24-7 relates to staffing or security, as I understand it, and not medical or psychological help. I'm not sure why we're using the term wraparound.

But I understand there may be a nurse practitioner on site one or two times a week. There may be access to a physician, or a physician may be on site one or two times a week, or a counsellor or outreach worker. There is a referral when they are on site, or there may be a referral, to an addictions specialist or other mental health supports. But the 24-7 supports, as they are implied, are not actually available on site 24-7. It really means that residents can get a referral to access supports. They make an appointment, and they get into the system.

There is a new term that's called rapid response. I'm just wondering if the minister can advise how rapid response will differ or improve services and access to services and supports.

Hon. S. Simpson: Again, a lot of the detail of what happens in a particular facility.... We can kind of delve into that detail with the service providers at some time.

[10:55 a.m.]

Wraparound services and what that constitutes, and 24-7, is a range of services. It is about meals. It is about the provision of food. It is about case management issues, having staff in the facilities through the non-profit service providers who are there. It is about having the oversight 24-7 on the sites around security and safety-related matters.

Health matters. Again, there's availability of health services for people when they require them. And as I said, there's a lot of work going on around what the models will look like moving forward, and those are being driven by Health. The Ministry of Health is largely leading that discussion. We'll know more as they do the work that they are best equipped to do for government around what those health services look like moving forward.

Every facility is a little bit different because of the nature and the makeup of the population that's there. But I would suggest that what we've developed as services related to supported housing.... Again, starting back in 2017 with modulars and evolving over time is a model that we're building on. There's a lot of consensus that takes people to a place where they stabilize more quickly. They have the opportunity to benefit from having those supports immediately available to them or available when they need them moving forward.

I'm pretty confident and comfortable with calling these wraparound services, when you look at the whole package of services.

J. Isaacs: What is the total number of staff supporting residents at the hotels, and do you have a breakdown of the number by health authority, agencies or outreach organizations? Do the staff work at a single site, or do they rotate to different hotels? What are the overall staffing costs related to supporting residents at the hotels? In addition to staffing and some of the other meals and cleaning that we already talked about, are there any other additional costs to the hotels? For example, security, fencing, garbage cleanup — anything of that nature.

Hon. S. Simpson: For the member again, those details.... B.C. Housing has sorted those arrangements out with the service providers and made those arrangements. I'm sure B.C. Housing will be happy to talk to the member about those matters.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. We will follow up with the Minister of Housing.

Immediately following the dismantlement of Oppenheimer, we saw a new encampment at Crab Park. After an injunction order by the Supreme Court, this camp was dismantled. But the following day, a new camp was erected at Strathcona Park. Similarly, the decampments in Victoria resulted in the establishment of other encampments, including Beacon Hill Park. There are apparently tents at a number of parks throughout the cities currently.

Does the minister know what the number of tent cities was in 2017, '18, '19 and what it is now? And does the minister expect the number of homeless and number of tent cities to expand?

[11:00 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: The encampments around the province — in our best estimate, there probably are about 40 locations around the province, with maybe as many as 1,000 to 1,200 people in those locations. The numbers move. What we're not certain about, of course, is the numbers of people where that would be people who are in significant need of housing and people who are there for activist purposes as well.

J. Isaacs: Tent cities are becoming increasingly common, particularly permanent tent cities and sanctioned tent cities in Victoria and Vancouver. The minister stated that cities will be responsible for deciding to allow for sanctioned tent cities or not. Does this mean that the province will allow permanent tent cities if a city requests one?

Hon. S. Simpson: It's a bit hypothetical. I haven't heard any local governments asking for tent cities, and any discussion they had, they would have those with Municipal Affairs and Housing around any requirements other than the cities being able to do what they are already authorized to do under their own jurisdictions. But I certainly haven't. I'm not aware of any of those requests moving forward.

I'd like to ask if we could just take five minutes.

The Chair: I would like to suggest that we take a five-minute recess. Right now it is 11:02. We'll be back at approximately 11:07. Thank you, Members.

The committee recessed from 11:02 a.m. to 11:09 a.m.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

The Chair: I'd like to now resume this sitting of the estimates process.

[11:10 a.m.]

I believe we'll turn it over to the member for Coquitlam–Burke Mountain with another question.

J. Isaacs: Now we're going to just move to a little bit of a different topic here but still related. We've heard that residents were not informed that local hotels in their neighbourhoods would be used as residences for street-entrenched and hard-to-house homeless people. In fact, one resident in Yaletown, Jennifer Chiang, told CTV: "We first heard about this, actually, through Facebook." The residents of the neighbourhood had no idea that the local hotels were going to be used.

Another resident in the Topaz Park neighbourhood in Victoria, who feared for their safety — they wanted to remain anonymous — stated: "We've had people on our property at all times of the day. They're stealing things out of our garbage cans.... They're getting everything that's needed. Why are they coming to our properties?" He said: "There are drug dealers crawling all over the park, and I've been approached twice by some guy trying to sell me fentanyl. I don't go to the park anymore."

Was there any notification given to the residents or any kind of a consultation within the neighbourhood that hotels would be used to house this high-risk population before this action was taken? If not, why not?

Hon. S. Simpson: I guess I'd start by talking about the circumstances that we're in. These decisions to decamp, both at Oppenheimer and Pandora-Topaz, were decisions that were taken in what we saw as a health and safety crisis. A crisis that, as the member has said.... We had these very concentrated encampments. We had activities going on, on these sites, that were very problematic and challenging and, in some cases, criminal. We had health workers and other workers who felt risk — and that risk elevated with COVID-19 — going on to the sites.

The decision was made that these particular two circumstances in Vancouver and Victoria were an emergency. The sense of that was the need to move quickly. We made the decision to do that, and the hotels were acquired. Some of that was by having a fair amount of people in the community, and other people around the issues of homelessness, advising that using hotels was something that should be considered because of their availability and because of, obviously, the downturn in activity in the industry.

So those decisions were made in an emergency situation to take those on. They were seen to be, at that point, as temporary facilities, knowing that we needed to find permanent locations, absolutely. Some of those were available for acquisition. But in all of those cases, once we were there and in place, conversations were engaged with people in the community around that.

[11:15 a.m.]

The other thing that I would note is in both instances, the cities were full partners in this. They were fully apprised of the locations that were under consideration, and local governments were full partners in making the decisions on those locations or in moving forward.

J. Isaacs: Well, we've heard, actually, from some of the not-for-profit housing organizations and some of the agencies that provide other supports downtown in that area that they weren't informed either. It was a surprise to them that this all happened as quickly as it did.

But we have received hundreds — and I mean, really, hundreds — of complaints from residents that they do not feel safe in their own neighbourhoods. Residents have been dealing with aggressive behaviour, garbage, crime, drug activity. All this is happening in front of their children and many more unpleasant things that we don't really want to say on the air. But they are dealing with a huge amount of stress in their neighbourhoods.

The residents there do have compassion and empathy for the people that are experiencing homelessness and addiction, but they don't feel that this is a good mix, putting street-entrenched and chronically homeless people in the same neighbourhood as families and families with children.

There was surely some expectation, Minister, that conflicts would arise, and there is some predictability that there would be some bad behaviour and street disorder, because we're dealing

with a very volatile and aggressive population with very high needs. How can residents of this neighbourhood be expected to deal with these issues without proper supports from government?

Recently, Tamara told me that residents do not feel safe in their neighbourhood, especially the young children. She stated that the kids can't go play in the playgrounds they used to play in. There are so many discarded needles and people congregating in groups. They don't even want to walk near those people. There are six or eight people. The residents that are in these towers and nearby buildings are afraid to walk out of their neighbourhood and go to work. One resident said she's crying every night because there is just no support, constant noise and sirens.

So I guess the question to the minister is: how is it fair to residents that almost 600 people were dropped into a neighbourhood with no notice, no consultation, and now the families who live there are left to deal with that? Young people, young women afraid to go out now. Needles everywhere — in the parks, in the doorways of private buildings. These are people's homes, and they feel like their neighbourhood has been destroyed.

[11:20 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: A couple of things. First, I think, as we've seen with the move... Initially, in the first week, as people started to stabilize, I think we did see some disorder there. It's interesting that in discussions that I'm aware of, the business community was very concerned in the first week, but definitely saw some of that behaviour that was concerning to them diminish after the first week as people got more stable and landed in their housing.

The other reality is that we are engaged with the community around how that relationship works, about what we have to do to address the issues that people in the community have and about how we make sure that there is cleanliness and that we're limiting the disorder that's outside of the buildings.

I guess the other thing that I would say is that these are challenges that existed before this, too, for the people who lived around the Oppenheimer community, for the people who lived off of Pandora and for the people who lived near Topaz. They are concerns they had when those encampments were there and when there was a level of disorder in those encampments that's much more severe than the situation we have today with managed housing.

People are in a much better way. The communities they're in will be in better shape than the communities where those encampments were, where there was no management of the situation. We have the ability to monitor that, moving forward. We have a responsibility to meet the needs of people who are homeless in our community and who are vulnerable. We need to do it in as responsible a way as we can, and we need to do it while minimizing impacts on others in the community. But we do have a responsibility to meet that need.

It certainly was our assessment that in a very short order, in an emergency situation, the approach of accessing those hotels and then managing that with the comprehensive supports from health, food and other services in a secure way is the best approach to take.

What I would say to the people in the community is that I share concerns where those concerns are there and where activities are happening that are detrimental to the community. We need to work together — the province, the city, the people in the community — to be able to address those needs. But we also need to do this in a way that does not abandon the people in this province who need our help the most: people who are living rough, who are living homeless, who are vulnerable and who are struggling with mental health and addictions.

That's the commitment that we made with this, and that's what we'll proceed with. We will do our very best to do this with the cities and with local people in the communities and in neighbourhoods to reduce the impact on those neighbourhoods. Nobody wants to see that happen. We'll work to try to make that situation better.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. As I said earlier, the residents have a lot of compassion and empathy for this group. But what's happened — and I've heard this just as recently as two days ago — is the business community is still negatively impacted. There are people hanging around in numbers that are basically scaring people off, scaring off customers. As of just two days ago, someone had called me and said that they're at their wit's end with all the activity that's going on around their building. So it continues to go on. It's not getting better. Residents would argue that it's actually getting worse.

So my question — and my comment — is that really, the problems that were in Oppenheimer Park have simply transferred over to Yaletown. While it may be early days, there is no way of saying what the effect is going to be in another two or three or four weeks down the road.

So my question is: how is government supporting and staffing these facilities, and what is being done to better manage the behaviour and avoid conflicts and increasing crime? The police really aren't able to do very much other than to move people along.

[11:25 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: I think one of the things we need to look at.... We can look at other supported housing. We in British Columbia, right now.... I think Municipal Affairs and Housing has 2,200 units of supported housing built and another 900 or so that are in progress right now.

We know that from housing — and we know from the modular that was put in place — that often communities were anxious about what happened when that housing came into their community. We also know that in most instances now, it's pretty welcome in the community. It has stabilized. People's lives have stabilized.

That's the challenge we face here: how do we stabilize people's lives moving forward? That's the work that we need to do. I have no doubt that there are an awful lot of compassionate people in the community. What we need to do is work together to try to mitigate the challenges that they're seeing in the community and be able to address the issues of an extremely vulnerable population.

That's a piece of work that will be ongoing. It will be ongoing through the discussion and dialogue that goes on with the neighbourhood associations that are in the communities, with the business people who are in the communities. Those teams have been pulled together by B.C.

Housing and by the service providers, who are very skilled at operating these facilities and understand how they work and how to make them work effectively. I am confident that they will be able to look at how to address those issues moving forward.

In the cases where some of the facilities will be more permanent in nature, others of them that will be temporary, depending on the housing arrangements moving forward.... But we have a responsibility to meet the growing needs around homelessness, around mental health and addiction issues and around people who are extremely vulnerable. If anything, that problem has been heightened by the combination of COVID-19 compounded by what it has done to the illegal drug supply and the supply chain and issues that have led to greater amounts of overdoses, largely because of illegal drug supply availability.

We're going to have to do this work, and we're going to have to work together. We all do share a responsibility to make this work, and that's our commitment. It's to make sure that we make it work, putting both the interests of people who are vulnerable and the interests of people who live in those communities at the forefront as we look for solutions that work for everyone.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. Just on that note — this is the last comment, and then we can move on to our next topic — the problem is that it's not working for the residents, and it's not working for the business associations. We've heard from them many, many times over a number of different weeks with almost 100 people — in one case, more than 100 people online — that are registering their complaints and wondering what they can do about the problem.

Again, it's not that they don't have compassion and empathy. They do. They just don't feel that dropping 600 people in their neighbourhood without any consultation, without any discussion and without full supports was not fair. So I'll just leave that comment there.

If the minister is able, through the Chair, we can move on to Community Living B.C. If you need a break for a moment, we can take a two-minute break. Otherwise, we can just carry right on.

The Chair: Minister, what would you prefer?

Hon. S. Simpson: I think we are pretty good to go. There are people here. So just give us a few seconds to shift some people into appropriately distanced chairs, and we'll go from there.

I appreciate the member's last comments. We're a couple of weeks into this process. I believe it does get better, and it will get better. I believe that people will stabilize. I believe that we will find the support there for that.

And I think with the legitimate community associations in those communities — they've been reached out to. Those discussions will be ongoing about what solutions look like moving forward. I know the discussions, certainly, around the couple of hundred people in Vancouver.... Of course, that 600 the member talks about is spread between the two cities. But the couple of hundred people in Vancouver, I know there's ongoing discussions with Charles Gauthier and the Downtown Vancouver Business Association and their leadership in this.

[11:30 a.m.]

It's a work in progress, no doubt. But it's work that we're committed to doing moving forward, and we're confident that we can both meet people's needs and make life better for our most vulnerable citizens, stabilize their lives and do it in ways that are not overwhelming for the surrounding community.

I'll stop there so we can talk about Community Living B.C.

J. Isaacs: The 2020 budget allocated \$121 million over three years to Community Living B.C., which would have been about \$40 million per year on average.

What is the revised budget for 2021, including COVID-related expenses such as increased staffing, overtime costs, additional supplies and pandemic pay? Does the minister expect that these costs related to COVID will continue after the state of emergency has been rescinded, and when is the pandemic pay expected to end? Is there enough room in the budget to accommodate all these extra costs?

Hon. S. Simpson: Thank you for the question. The budget hasn't changed from what was tabled before. Essentially, \$1.14 billion was the budget moving forward. Additional dollars were provided for a three-month period, \$35.6 million, and that came out of the COVID money, the \$5 billion fund that was made available. Those dollars were made available for three months, and they were largely to support home share and other service providers who found dramatic changes in how they were able to provide their services that increased their costs. That, of course, could come in any of a variety of ways.

These were dollars that allowed CLBC to provide additional supports where unforeseen costs came up. They've been in place for three months. We're evaluating now, as we move forward, whether the transition back to more normal or typical services.... How quickly is that happening? Where are there gaps there? Where might there be other challenges? Those evaluations are going on now. But the key extra dollars over and above what was in the annual budget was the \$35.6 million of the COVID-targeted emergency response fund.

J. Isaacs: Thank you for your clarification on the amount there.

Has there ever been a year where there was either a budget shortfall or underspending? What happened to the underspending, if that did occur? Can the minister just confirm if CEOs, management, employees or contractors of CLBC or their agencies are paid a higher salary level? Do they receive bonuses or profit-sharing if they meet budget targets or if they spend under budget?

[11:35 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: Around the questions of staffing, there are no bonuses of any sort paid to the senior officials in CLBC. Their salary structure is largely set through the salary guidelines from the Public Sector Employers Council, PSEC, in the Ministry of Finance, who sets those guidelines moving forward.

None of this is tied to financial performance, so we don't link those. In terms of any surpluses, as a rule, the surpluses are very nominal. Where there are small ones.... I'll give you an example.

Last year, on a budget in excess of \$1 billion, there was \$3.7 million that was left there. CLBC is allowed to retain that money and use it in the subsequent year on services.

J. Isaacs: Looking at changes to the strategic direction and alignment with government priorities, which is outlined in the CLBC '20-21 service plan, are there any changes contemplated in the next year to 18 months?

Hon. S. Simpson: There have been no changes to the service plan that we're currently operating under. Obviously, everybody kind of got knocked off their game by COVID-19. There was the need to respond to that, and we continue to respond to that. But the expectation is that we will continue to manage under the existing service plan and the parameters of that plan until we re-file in February with the next service plan.

J. Isaacs: How many full-time employees and part-time employees are directly employed by Community Living, and how many full-time and part-time are on a contractual basis? How many of those contractual arrangements are not-for-profit? Has there been an increase or decrease in either the number of employees or contractual arrangements since COVID-19, and if so, what were those changes?

[11:40 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: In terms of employees of CLBC, the number is 707 people who work for CLBC directly. That's about 30 people more than the previous year. In addition, I would note that that was with about a 5.2 percent increase in caseload.

Just to maybe ask for a clarification from the member, in terms of that second group contract.... Just to understand who the member was wanting to capture there. Obviously, there are all of the agencies that deliver services. There are home-share providers. There's a variety of places. I'm just trying to get a sense of, kind of, how big the member is casting the net.

J. Isaacs: Yes, Minister. I was asking the number of contracts overall. How many contracts? How many people? How many agencies, including home-share providers? I'm just trying to get a sense of how large the organization is.

I'm suggesting to the minister.... If it's going to take some time to accumulate that information on the number of people, you can get that to me later.

The Chair: Thank you, Member. As always, questions are through the Chair, and the Chair, then, to the minister.

Hon. S. Simpson: The number I can give the member quite quickly is that there are about 1,000 agencies that are contracted — the CEO Network and others — with CLBC to deliver services. There are about 3,500 home-share providers, of which more than 3,300 of them are contracted through those 1,000 agencies. Their contractual relationship is with the agencies. Then there are about 240 home-share providers who have a direct, contractual relationship with CLBC.

In terms of more detail, it would take me awhile to figure out how many people work for those 1,000 agencies.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Minister. I'm just trying to get a sense of how large this organization is and how many moving pieces there are throughout the contracts and direct relationships.

Notwithstanding any variances that may have happened with COVID, what is the average term for a contract? Are there any current contracts with individuals who were previously employees or managers with CLBC? Are all the contracts approved by the ministry?

[11:45 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: In terms of those arrangements, the government... CLBC is an independent Crown, so they deal with those matters of hiring and contractual relationships. There are no approvals by the ministry. I appoint some directors and approve a budget, much the same relationship as with other Crowns there.

There are no current employees who have any contractual relationships with CLBC over and above their employment relationship. The board of CLBC has, in fact, passed a motion that declared that that would be a conflict for that to occur.

I do suspect that if we looked at people who might have previously been employees of CLBC... We don't have that in front of us. But are there people who might be doing other services, now that they're no longer employees of CLBC? That is quite possible, but it's not allowed by the board. It's deemed a conflict by the board for an employee to have that relationship over and above their employment relationship.

J. Isaacs: Is the projected growth or actual number of caseloads correlated to the number of full-time employees or part-time employees?

Hon. S. Simpson: To give you a sense of that, the budget is about... Over 93 percent of the budget of CLBC goes directly to services, mostly through its contractual relationships with service providers. The caseload growth — and it is one of the challenges of CLBC — is significantly higher than population growth. It was about 5.2 percent last year.

To give you some sense of this, when CLBC was put in place in 2005, there were about 10,500 people who were receiving services from CLBC. Today that number is over 23,000 people. So it has grown, and it continues to grow. It is part of the active conversation about the ways to manage services and manage caseload growth and make sure we're maximizing the opportunity to meet people's needs.

[11:50 a.m.]

J. Isaacs: Prior to COVID, money was allocated for wage increases, which was consistent with the sustainable services negotiating mandate. Has there been any variance to that wage increase, and does the increase apply to both employees of CLBC as well as contractual arrangements?

Hon. S. Simpson: Employees of CLBC have settled... They're unionized. They've settled their collective agreement. It is the same collective agreement as the public service. The 2, 2 and 2 agreement, essentially.

The member will know that in terms of the organizations, many of them, both for-profit and non-profit organizations.... For those ones that were unionized, there was a low-wage redress that started to close the gap between health, education and social services. That is in place, at this point, moving forward. That was the additional amounts of roughly 4, 4 and 4, moving forward, of additional dollars to close that gap around the low-wage redress.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister

Member, I think at about 11:55, I will suggest we move to progress. We've got a few more minutes for questions. So jump on in, Member for Coquitlam–Burke Mountain.

J. Isaacs: Thank you, Chair. I'll get one more in here, I think.

Last year, as the minister mentioned, many non-profits received an increase in their compensation through the wage redress. As you know, this did cause great concern for the sector. There was a sense from many working in the sector that increasing compensation for one group and not increasing it for another group who essentially had exactly the same job description, doing the same job, amounted to wage discrimination.

I have heard from many organizations, including in my riding, that.... Non-profits have shared their frustration over the wage disparity, especially when employers and employees and independent contractor workers are working side by side, in the same organization, doing the exact same job but being paid at two different wage levels and with two different benefit packages.

This has caused considerable grief, not only for the human resources departments, the executive directors and the boards that have to deal with this, but it's also caused a lot of strife between workers within the work environment. There's a sense that things aren't fair. Many feel that the wage redress is wage discrimination, as I say.

Can the minister provide an update regarding the wage redress and also comment on what he's hearing from the sector and, in particular, the impact that the wage redress is having internally on organizations in this sector?

[11:55 a.m.]

Hon. S. Simpson: I'll take this opportunity to talk about the sector a little bit. I'm pleased that the member raised the issue of the sector.

One of the things we heard.... It was triggered, to some degree, by this conversation, but we heard from a wide range of the organizations that we contract with. Government contracts with about 2,000 non-profits, give or take, to deliver a wide range of services across the board, not just around CLBC but in the broad sector. It's the reason that we put together the social service roundtable, with representatives of all of those umbrella organizations that represent those 2,000 groups.

We've been talking about the relationship, talking about the historical challenges of contracting. We've had a history here. The history goes back a long way, certainly back through the last

couple of governments, of these kinds of contracts, mostly one-year contracts, being delivered to organizations, them not having a real vehicle to be part of the discussion around program and policy and how we move forward.

We've been focused on trying to address that, triggered by this issue in some ways. The social service roundtable has been meeting for months. It has included bringing together a couple of hundred people in Richmond pre-COVID-19 to talk about what that should look like moving forward. I think it's been very positive. That's the sense that I get from this. That's the work that we've been doing to incorporate that non-profit sector that delivers essential public services for British Columbia into the bigger discussions about government policy and program. We think their argument is a legitimate one, that they have real value and a real contribution to make.

On the question of the resources, part of that discussion.... We created a working group within that body that worked with the Public Sector Employers Council and others to look at the issues of recruitment and retention, because what we were told at that table were the real challenges related to recruitment and retention and how that would work across the province. We have dealt with it in two ways in the immediate.

First of all, there was a \$10 million one-time contribution made to those organizations that they control. It deals with health and safety, training and other issues that they had identified where they needed additional support moving forward. Also, we have included now \$26.3 million in Budget 2020 to support recruitment and retention that are being faced by the non-union and the hybrid service providers — i.e., those organizations that have both union and non-union employees. So we've made an allocation of an additional \$26.3 million, and we're talking with them about how those dollars are provided in support.

As the member may or may not know, we have contracts with those organizations, but they are not part of the Public Sector Employers Council necessarily, so we want to make sure those dollars flow through to those workers that the member is talking about. Those conversations are going on now with the Public Sector Employers Council and those non-union and hybrid employers about making sure that we see how that works moving forward over this next year. Then any further discussions will be discussions in next year's budget.

Noting the hour, I move that the committee rise, report progress on the estimates and ask leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The Chair: Thanks for joining us this morning. We will see you again this afternoon, but this session is now adjourned. Thank you, everybody.

The committee adjourned at 11:59 a.m.