



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of  
Debates and Proceedings**

**(Hansard)**

**Second Session of the 67th General Assembly**

**Thursday, 24 April 2025**

**No. 17**

**The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker**

Published by Order of the Legislature

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thursday, 24 April 2025

<b>Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests</b> .....	778
<b>Statements by Members</b>	
Rustico-Emerald (Ode to Watershed Groups) .....	780
Leader of the Third Party (Bike Bus Initiative) .....	781
New Haven-Rocky Point (The Bookmark – Independent Bookstore Day) .....	781
<b>Oral Questions</b>	
Leader of the Opposition (Tourism inspections) .....	782
Leader of the Opposition (PFAS in drinking water) .....	784
Charlottetown-West Royalty (24/7 shelter access) .....	786
Leader of the Third Party (Pediatric complement) (further) .....	788
New Haven-Rocky Point (Oyster industry) (further) .....	789
Rustico-Emerald (Island watersheds) .....	791
Charlottetown-Belvedere (Trades programs and careers) .....	792
Charlottetown-West Royalty (Bullying) .....	793
Charlottetown-West Royalty (School playgrounds) .....	794
<b>Orders of the Day (Government)</b>	
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure	
Health and Wellness (further) .....	794
<b>Motions Other Than Government</b>	
Motion 26 – Broadening the scope of the playground fund to promote outdoor play and wellness for all ages .....	822
Charlottetown-Belvedere .....	823
Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke .....	825
Charlottetown-West Royalty .....	826
Education and Early Years .....	828
Leader of the Third Party .....	830
New Haven-Rocky Point .....	832
<b>Adjourned</b> .....	833

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**  
**67th General Assembly**  
 Second Session

**Lieutenant Governor** – His Honour the Honourable Dr. Wassim Salamoun, O.P.E.I.

**Speaker** – Hon. Sidney MacEwen

**Clerk** – Joseph Jeffrey

**Deputy Clerk** – Emily Doiron

**Clerk Assistant** – Samantha Lilley

**Committee Clerk** – Emma MacPhail

**Parliamentary Counsel** – Neil Ferguson

**Director of Parliamentary Research** – Ryan Reddin

**Legislative Librarian** – Laura Morrell

**Sergeant-at-Arms** – Gordon Campbell

**Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms** – June Ramsay

<b>Member and Party</b>	<b>Constituency (District)</b>	<b>Other Responsibilities</b>
<b>Arsenault</b> , Hon. Gilles (PC)	Évangeline-Miscouche (21)	Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action
<b>Bell</b> , Hon. Zack (PC)	Charlottetown-Winsloe (10)	Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture
<b>Bernard</b> , Karla (G)	Charlottetown-Victoria Park (12)	Leader of the Third Party
<b>Bevan-Baker</b> , Dr. Peter (G)	New Haven-Rocky Point (17)	Third Party House Leader
<b>Burridge</b> , Hon. Jill (PC)	Stratford-Keppoch (6)	Minister of Finance
<b>Compton</b> , Hon. Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River (4)	Minister of Economic Development Innovation and Trade
<b>Croucher</b> , Hon. Robin (PC)	Souris-Elmira (1)	Minister of Education and Early Years
<b>Deagle</b> , Cory (PC)	Montague-Kilmuir (3)	
<b>DesRoches</b> , Tyler (PC)	Summerside-Wilmot (21)	Government Whip
<b>Dillon</b> , Susie (PC)	Charlottetown-Belvedere (11)	Government House Leader
<b>Henderson</b> , Robert (L)	O’Leary-Inverness (25)	Opposition Whip
<b>Hudson</b> , Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure
<b>Lantz</b> , Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs
<b>MacEwen</b> , Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	Speaker
<b>MacFarlane</b> , Matthew (G)	Borden-Kinkora (19)	Third Party Whip
<b>MacKay</b> , Matthew (PC)	Kensington-Malpeque (20)	



[The Legislature met at 1:03 p.m.]

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Hon. R. Lantz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon. Welcome back to all the staff here in the Legislature, our colleagues. Welcome to everyone in the gallery – thank you for coming – and those of you watching online.

I just want to point out that Colonel Gray High School will be doing their performance of *Matilda: The Musical* this weekend at the Confederation Centre of the Arts. There will be close to 100 students involved in the production of the musical from the actors, the band, the audio, and the visuals. The musical runs from April 24<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available now, and they can be purchased at the Confederation Centre box office. It's sure to be a great show and I hope everyone gets a chance to get out and see *Matilda: The Musical* this weekend.

April 21<sup>st</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> is also Resident Care Worker, Patient Care Worker, and Home Support Worker Week. These professionals are an integral part of our health care system here in PEI. I want to thank all of you for your hard work and your dedication to your jobs, your care and support. It helps provide a better quality of life for all Islanders. Thank you very much.

Earlier today, there was a graduation for the Trade HERizons program at the Central Christian Church here in Charlottetown. Ten individuals graduated from the program. I want to recognize Callen Cudmore, the Trade HERizons program manager who makes this program possible. I wanted to wish the best to the graduates as they embark on their next journey.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Looking forward to a great day here in the Legislature.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[1:05 p.m.]

It's a pleasure to rise and welcome those who are watching online and those who are visiting us in the gallery today. I see some familiar faces – Toby and friends.

I'd mentioned yesterday about tomorrow, Friday, being the first day of lobster fishing here on Prince Edward Island. Again, the wharves are busy. Today, they'll be extremely busy with the fishers baiting their traps and loading their boats. I'm usually there to help them, depending on the time, but today I missed out, so I may miss out on a feed later on. We'll have to wait and see.

I do wish them all the best, number one, a safe season, and a very prosperous season because fishing is a huge part of our economy here on Prince Edward Island. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. I grew up in a fishing community. We didn't fish in our family, but it was that sector that actually kept my family going. If they have it, they're going to spend it in their communities, and we truly do appreciate it.

Also, while I'm on my feet, the "Quack" clan of Anglo-Tignish has expanded with the safe arrival on Tuesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, of Wes Brian Ivan Oatway, who's the son of Mandelle and Nathan Oatway. Proud grandparents are Ernest and Cindy Perry and Brian and Laurie Hiscock. I look forward to seeing young Wes on the wharf or in the draft horse show ring very soon.

With that, I would like to again welcome everyone who's coming into the gallery and also wish everyone a great day.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome back to my colleagues, staff, Pages, and everybody tuning in from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and all around the Island. A special welcome to those joining us in the gallery today, Toby MacDonald and Emily Savoie. Thank you for being with us in here today.

The Charlottetown Bluephins Aquatic Club had an impressive showing at the East Coast Swimming Championships in Halifax recently. The team recorded 99 personal best times, which is incredible, including several PEI record-setting performances. Great work.

Overall, the team finished an impressive fourth out of 37 teams from PEI, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Ontario. Individual swimmers won 11 gold medals, four silver medals, and four bronze medals. Their head coach, Tom Ponting, said: "It's a testament to the hard work and dedication of our athletes. This meet served as a fantastic stop on the road to the Canada Games this summer, providing valuable training and racing experience."

I would just like to take this opportunity to wish the Bluephins all the best and would also like to thank the coaches and the many volunteers for their time, commitment, and dedication to both the sport and the individual swimmers.

This Saturday morning, the PEI Parkinson Association is hosting a pancake breakfast in support of people living with Parkinson's disease. It's from 8:30 until 11 a.m. at the Malcolm Darrach Community Centre. Cash donations are welcome at the door. The proceeds, of course, will go toward local programs, education, and resources provided by the PEI Parkinson Association.

As was already mentioned in here, *Matilda*, put on by Colonel Gray students this weekend – get your tickets. To that, I will just say break a leg to everybody involved.

Finally, I just want to wish fishers and their support systems a great, prosperous fishing season.

With that, I wish everyone a good day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and say hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty today, and everybody in the gallery who has come to watch, especially Lisa Donovan, who is here watching. She's done an incredible job for workers' rights in Prince Edward Island, so I want to acknowledge her and say thank you for your advocacy with that, and too, to let people know that on April 28<sup>th</sup>, it's the day of remembrance for workers' rights. That's coming up quickly, a very, very important day for Prince Edward Island to remember.

Thank you for coming to the gallery. Thank you again, Lisa.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome Emily, Toby, Lisa, and others to the gallery here this afternoon.

[1:10 p.m.]

I don't know if many were listening to CBC this morning, but there was a really fantastic conversation between the host, Mitch Cormier, and two young Islanders, Edie Duncan and Becca Patey. If you ever needed evidence to support lowering the voting age to 16, you have to listen to this segment. They were both super informed. They understood the issues. They had opinions, and they're best friends from different parts of the political spectrum, but as one of them put it, they've learned to disagree well. I think that's something all of us in here could take a lesson from.

So, I want to thank the CBC early morning team, generally, and Mitch, for the job he does as host of that show, but mostly to Edie and Becca for being the incredibly inspiring young women that they were, and the brilliant conversation that they had this morning.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hello to everyone watching from District 10 Charlottetown-Winsloe. Just to echo the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, I do wish all of the fishers a safe and prosperous season as they head out tomorrow. I know there's a flurry of activity on Island wharves right across the province.

I also want to say hello to Andrew. He passed me this note: Earlier this month, 30 of Squash PEI athletes were at the Atlantic Championship at SMU in Halifax in multiple divisions:

Liam Jinks, of Stratford, was the Division 1 champion. Squash PEI's president, Jean-

François Vincent-Rocan of Cornwall, was the winner of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division championship. Division 3 went to Rohan Gorman of Bonshaw, unfortunately defeating an Islander from Charlottetown, Luciana Davila, in the final. Louis Webster of Charlottetown was the D4 champion. Mohammad Elzuhairy of Charlottetown defeated Huy Nguyen of Stratford for the D5 championship. The Junior 2 category was won by Owen Bradley of Stratford.

Many of these athletes are heading off to the nationals in Toronto next week, and Squash PEI has actually doubled their membership since the Canada Games were hosted here in 2023. I just want to say good luck, and congratulations on a job well done to all Squash PEI athletes.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

First, I want to welcome everyone watching from District 18 Rustico-Emerald. As you know, tomorrow is setting day, so there are a lot of people who are really looking forward to that, and as one lady sings, it's the most wonderful time of the year.

Special shout-out to John Regis Peters, who is the chair of the harbour authority and has been working with Jamie Fox and MP Health MacDonald. Even Lawrence MacAulay got involved to get that entrance dredged.

I also wanted to welcome the folks in the gallery. I see Emily Savoie is here, and she's been doing some great work with autism. She's a national consultant now for autism accommodations and innovation. She's here celebrating, among other things, Autism Acceptance Month, which we should all also recognize here.

We have a whole group of people here from watershed groups across the Island. Actually, I think they're mostly from areas impacted from my district, but I'm going to recognize Heather Laiskonis. She's the executive director of the PEI Watershed Alliance. We've got Shayla Steinhoff, who's here from the Trout River Environmental Committee, representing. And from the Hunter-Clyde Watershed Group, we've got Victoria Hawkins and Emma MacNeill. From Bedeque Bay Environmental Management Association, we have Tracy Brown, David Allan, Janice Holz, and Kiley Kitts.

It's great to have you here. We may have some stragglers coming in, too, from the Wheatley River Improvement Group; Maggie McConnell and her team maybe joining us. So, I look forward to a member's statement and some questions later on.

#### Statements by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

#### **Ode to Watershed Groups**

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, our watershed groups do phenomenal work, and I wanted to salute them with "An Ode to Watershed Groups of our Fair Isle."

On the banks of our fair isle, where creeks do gently flow,  
There's a tale of dedication that all of us should know  
Of watershed groups so valiant, and the alliance that they form,  
Guardians of our waters, through sunshine and raging storm.

They monitor our waters, testing day by day,  
Striving for nature's purity, in every stream, in every way.  
Restoring important habitats, where wild things do roam,  
Safeguarding ecosystems, letting nature shape our home.

Erosion they face in battle, with measures scientifically wise,  
Protecting fragile habitat, ensuring life survives.  
Educating all ages of Islanders, they passionately spread the word,  
Engaging with communities, making their voices heard.

Invasive species, they seek and control,  
Preserving the native, their ultimate goal.  
Research and data, they gather with care,  
Informing their actions, with knowledge to share.

Yet challenges abound, as they strive day by day,  
With funding sometimes scarce, innovation leads the way.  
Though full-time staff are limited, volunteers join in – stand strong,

And with unwavering resolution, they push and carry on.

[1:15 p.m.]

So let us raise great tribute, in the people's hallowed hall,  
To those who foster our watersheds, with their soul they give their all;  
For the waters we all cherish, the future they make bright,  
We honour their incredible efforts, under nature's guiding light.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The bar has been set.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** I can't follow that.

"An Ode to the New Bike Bus Program."

[Laughter]

### **Bike Bus Initiative**

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are two elementary schools in the Charlottetown area who will be piloting a new initiative through the City of Charlottetown called the bike bus. Starting in May and for the rest of the school year, students at West Kent Elementary School and L.M. Montgomery School will start biking to school as a group, bus-style.

The idea is that a bike bus offers a fun, safe, and healthy way for students to commute, reducing traffic and pollution. It encourages exercise, independence, and focus, while group ride also boosts safety and helps build friendships, all the while strengthening the school community.

Students will join the bike bus from designated bike stops predetermined by the school and are led by parent volunteers. There are training sessions for both parent volunteers and students to ensure comfort, understanding, and safety.

For students who may be in need of a bike and/or a bike helmet, the City of Charlottetown has partnered with the REACH Foundation and

they will be able to provide these items as needed.

As active transportation gains momentum, it is more important than ever that we model for children what it is like to use these forms of transportation. Letting them in on an experience like this will help build confidence and hopefully lead to confident active transportation users.

As we increase the number of bikes and other forms of active transportation on our roads – and in particular, around schools – I'm hoping it will lead the City and Province to design and build safer active transportation lanes. That is good for everyone, it is good for our communities, and it is good for our environment.

I will be one of the parents taking the training to support this fun, important, and forward-thinking initiative. I wish both schools and the City of Charlottetown all the best with this pilot, and I thank them for providing this opportunity to students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

### **The Bookmark – Independent Bookstore Day**

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

National Independent Bookstore Day in Canada happens this Saturday. Here on PEI, of course, we're blessed with a number of local bookstores including the Bookmark, which has been present here on Prince Edward Island since 1972.

Not very long ago, with the rise of big box stores and things like ebooks and podcasts, some folks were writing the obituary for small bookstores. But walk into the vibrant, expanding, and – quite literally, at the moment – on-the-move Bookmark, and you immediately feel and see – to paraphrase a famous author – that the reports of their death have been greatly exaggerated.

Owner Dan MacDonald and his wonderful team – Heather, Laurie, Ben, Trina, Sophie, Mary, Lorna, Marguerite, Kristen, and Emma – have, between them for decades, promoted the benefits of the written word and the value of sharing stories and ideas.

One of my absolute favourite things in the world to do right now is to read books to my three grandchildren, and many of those would have been bought at the Bookmark.

As it says on the Bookmark's webpage: We believe in a local economy. We believe that spending money is a political act and that every dollar we spend casts a vote for the kind of world that we prefer to live in.

Bookstores help us to be more engaged, more informed, and more enlightened, so thank you to the Bookmark for being the exemplary business citizen that you are. I hope that others in this room will join me on Saturday by popping in to say hi, to say thanks, and to celebrate the beauty and the power of books.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Tourism season is right around the corner, and despite this government's effort to credit the NHL for the success, Islanders know it's our world-class operators who deserve the praise.

**Tourism inspections**

Question to the Minister of Tourism: How many inspections of tourism operations and properties were completed in the last calendar year?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have that number offhand, hon. member. I will bring that back to you. I do know that we have about 4,500 tourism operators across the province, so I'll have to get you the exact number back, but I will bring that back.

Thank you.

[1:20 p.m.]

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hundreds of tourism operators are inspected each year, and most pass without any issue, but some require a little extra effort to meet the standards.

Can the minister tell us how many inspections last year resulted in a fail or required corrective action before a pass was issued?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I do apologize to the hon. member for not having that number on hand with me right now. Of course, we do want to make sure and assure anyone that is visiting our beautiful province that safety is paramount. The inspection process is extremely important. It's a great part of tourism. Of course, anyone that travels wants to know that they are safe and that they are going to have an enjoyable time while here.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I do agree with the minister on that.

Minister, for years, our tourism inspections have been carried out by Quality Tourism Services, a respected, independent organization that ensures fairness and integrity in the process.

Does the minister believe that the independent oversight should continue, yes or no?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe I know where the hon. member is going with his line of questioning. This is something that we have discussed – if that is where the hon. member is going with his line of questioning today – about the inspection services for tourism and tourism operators in the province.

We have been internally looking from the legal point of view, from the risk management point of view, about bringing that service in-house. One of the main things that has come to our attention is most of the government inspection services – for example, fire or health inspections – are done in-house.

So, to answer the hon. member's question, the legal and the risk management side would say yes, we should be bringing it in-house.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard from nearly a dozen tourism operators who are really worried about this government's plan to bring inspections in-house, and they've raised some very serious concerns about trust, transparency, and quality.

So, I'd like to ask the minister: Why is the minister moving forward with a plan that undermines a proven system and puts our tourism reputation at risk?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the hon. member for the questions.

I've found in this role that you do find out something new every day. One of the things that I found out being the Minister of Tourism is that ultimately, that does lie with the minister. For example, if there is an issue with an inspection, and something transpires from an inspection that maybe didn't get done or wasn't done to the specifications, it does lie with the minister.

So, again, I'll reiterate that legal as well as risk management have suggested that this be brought in-house, and I am taking the advice of the risk management and the legal.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But you should be also listening to the tourism operators who have concerns on this.

Inspections have remained outside government for a reason. Bringing them in risks political influence. If an inspection doesn't go well, an operator could feel pressure to call their MLA, expecting a different outcome, and we know that can happen.

How does the minister intend to safeguard against political interference under this new plan?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Hon. member, I would hope that that is not the case, and you're saying that it is. I would highly suggest that that would not be the case because at the end of the day, as I mentioned earlier in my remarks, the safety of our guests is paramount. That is one of the underlying things. You want a visitor who will be safe. Anyone who has ever travelled, that is one of the main things that you want when you are travelling. You want to know that you're staying in a safe area, staying in a safe location, and staying in safe accommodations.

I don't agree with the hon. member's preamble. I do feel that anyone who is doing the inspection service would do it to the best of their ability, keeping in the back of their mind that the end user is the visitor who is going to be affected by the inspection.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, he's not getting out and speaking to Islanders because definitely, they contact their MLA when there is any issue within this government.

First, the minister credited the NHL for our tourism success here on Prince Edward Island, and now he's prepared to turn inspections into a political football. Islanders see what's happening.

[1:25 p.m.]

Will the minister commit today to keeping inspection services with Quality Tourism Services rather than going ahead with this half-baked internal takeover?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm going to revert back to comments that I made earlier with regards to fire inspections and health inspections. You know, these are people who do their job every single day. They want to make sure that at the end of the day, safety is paramount. I cannot state that enough.

As I have told you, hon. member, we are in the process of bringing this in-house, and we will continue down that road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Islanders are now relying on bottled water because of high levels of forever chemicals – PFAS – in their wells. In the Hazelbrook area, for example, nine households have been affected. That's nine that we know of, and that's unacceptable.

### **PFAS in drinking water**

Can the Minister of Environment confirm how many residents in the Hazelbrook area are affected and how many other homes in the area have been tested thus far?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The team that we have at the Department of Environment – I've got to start by complimenting them for the work that they have done with the PFAS situation we're dealing with in Hazelbrook. We have 10 residents there in Hazelbrook who are experiencing higher volumes of PFAS in the ground due to sites that were around there.

We've gone the extra step – actually, we're probably ahead of the game here, and probably two years ahead of the game of the federal government in going from every site that we could find to do most of those investigations for community facilities. One of them was at Hazelbrook, and we've been going door to door to those residents to make sure that they are looked after. We're going to keep supporting them and making sure that we have a solution for them on a long-term basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

That was a partial answer, so I'll ask it again. How many other homes in the area have been tested thus far?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** I'll go back to my staff and get you all those details. There's been door-to-door knocking and information going out on an individual basis. I would assume that they all have been checked. Every one of them is getting bottled water at this time and we are moving forward in trying to get a permanent solution for those residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Mr. Speaker, these chemicals pose a real health risk to Islanders, and Islanders deserve lasting solutions, not just bottled water deliveries.

What action is this minister taking to provide permanent access to clean drinking water?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I've stated before, our staff are working directly with those residents, and we are putting a plan together to make sure that we do have a long-term solution. It is not something that we enjoy and that we want to see in our drinking

water. Like I stated, the level of PFAS has been put up by Health Canada and we were on top of the game. We were probably two years ahead of the process here, and we're going to make sure that we're going to look after those Islanders and we're going to put a very thorough plan together to make that they're looked after.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure; you're two years ahead, but yet, you're still looking into doing a plan. So, it's a little bit confusing there.

This issue extends beyond Hazelbrook. Residents in Slemon Park have been left with filters and jugs for weeks with no clear timeline for resolutions.

Why hasn't the minister prioritized a long-term fix for these families, especially those in his own backyard?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I've stated before, because of the seriousness of this issue, we've been on top of the game. We've looked at investigating whatever was done throughout our school communities, with our community organizations, and these here are in residential areas. We will continue to work with them. We've met with the residents. We worked with the City of Summerside as well, as Slemon Park is considered under that jurisdiction as well, and we will continue to do that.

We want to make sure that Islanders are well protected and we have a very thorough plan. To do that, we want to make sure that everything's looked after and we're going to make sure that everything in this plan will be answering to what can be in that long-term plan for all the residents of PEI if they are experiencing those levels of PFAS in their system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. H. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

So, the minister keeps saying that they're on top of it, they're on top of it, on top of it, but there is no plan. This government has left Islanders drinking from jugs for weeks now. Even by this minister's standards, that's unacceptable.

[1:30 p.m.]

When will clean, safe drinking water be restored to every affected Islander, and why has this not been his top priority?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Like I've mentioned, we are looking at a long-term water treatment system. That's something that doesn't occur overnight, so we will continue to work with them. Our staff are on site. They've contacted the individuals. They've done door-to-door knocking with the people involved. They did public meetings as well in Slemon Park and in Hazelbrook.

We're happy to move forward with a water treatment system that will be on a long-term basis to make sure it meets the needs of those Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every day, more and more Islanders are finding themselves without a safe place to sleep, and yet this government continues to drag its feet. The shelters they rely on still shut down during the day, forcing people out into the cold, rain, and uncertainties.

Question to the Minister of Social Development.

Minister, you are responsible for protecting the most vulnerable Islanders. You heard from advocates, frontline workers, and people with lived experience. They've told you what they need: shelters open 24/7. And yet this government still refuses to commit. We saw this yesterday from your government.

**24/7 shelter access**

Question: Why are you not standing up inside Cabinet to demand what people you serve actually need?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

**Hon. B. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question.

I'm very saddened when people don't have a place to live, but I'm also very aware of the amount of money spent by this government. Just in Summerside alone, there was just millions and millions of dollars spent to put an emergency shelter up in Summerside. That one is considered an emergency shelter. There's a shelter for women that's open 24 hours a day. There's also a men's shelter open in Summerside 24 hours a day. Then, of course, there's an emergency shelter that just was opened about six months ago.

As far as the direction that we're headed, I'm very pleased at this point.

Thank you very much.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Mr. Speaker, this isn't theatre, this is real life: many living with trauma, chronic illness, and compounding effects of poverty. Getting pushed out of the shelter every morning doesn't help anyone get back on their feet; it just adds to more instability.

Question to the same minister: How do you expect someone to rebuild their life, find a job, attend appointments, and manage their health when they're forced to carry every possession they have on their back and wander the streets for hours until beds open up again the next night?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

**Hon. B. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I will talk about our shelter here in Charlottetown, where they have a 12-hour service, but just across the parking lot is another 12-hour service, a day program where those folks could go to. You could actually leave your

emergency shelter in the morning, go over to the other day program, spend the 12 hours there, and then go back to the emergency shelter in the evening. I'm very pleased that we have that.

We're going to work on that in Summerside as well, but we just got our shelter up there about six months ago. We're going to continue – and for all Islanders, not just Summerside and Charlottetown. I hope we can expand that. I wish the Minister of Housing was able to speak on that today, but that's not possible. But I appreciate the question, member.

Thank you very much.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Mr. Speaker, opposition just wants to know where this government stands.

Here's a direct question to the minister: Do you support Island shelters operating 24 hours a day, yes or no?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

**Hon. B. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I just stated, I'm very appreciative for where we are today. Can we do better? We can always do better. We can always do better. But I'm very pleased with where we are. We're going to continue to work towards making the most vulnerable Islanders as comfortable as we can. We're going to continue to do that.

I thank you for that question, member.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** I don't know how comfortable you can be when you don't have a place to live.

Summerside, the minister's own community still doesn't have the shelter open 24 hours a day. People are being turned out in the morning with nowhere to go. If the minister won't fight for the unhoused in her own backyard, what message does that send to the rest of the province?

Question: Why is the Summerside shelter still not open 24 hours a day? Are you ignoring the needs of vulnerable Islanders in your own community?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

**Hon. B. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:35 p.m.]

If I could take a moment just to speak on what happened in Summerside with the women's shelter, LifeHouse – I worked very hard on that project, and I'm very pleased to see that that's just expanding from one home to the next to the next, where now folks are going to be able to go into LifeHouse for a certain amount of time, move into an apartment for up to a year, and then move to permanent housing with their children; mothers and children. We also have the Winter Street Shelter for men, where they can stay as long as they need the help.

I'm always fighting for the next step. We just opened the emergency shelter six months ago. We're getting there, but it takes a little bit of time and a lot of money. It's hard to have it both ways, but we're doing the best we can, and we're going to continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** You delayed that shelter for two years, minister. It was delayed, and we had to push on this side to get it open, in your own community.

We've heard this minister say that she's listening, but it's not enough to listen; you have to act. Islanders are not seeing any evidence that this minister is using her position to fight for the people she is supposed to represent. You're not the Minister of Housing, but you have a very important role to play when it comes to supporting the unhoused community in our province.

Minister, if you agree that people deserve a warm, safe space at all hours of the day, why haven't you brought forward a plan or advocated publicly within Cabinet for shelters to operate 24 hours a day?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Hon. R. Lantz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the Minister of Social Development and Seniors for being gracious enough to stand up and answer questions that are actually the responsibility of the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities. There have not been any questions asked of the minister responsible for this file practically this entire sitting, and it's unfortunate that he can't answer those questions here today.

But as a former minister of that department, I'm proud to stand up and say we've dealt with a very difficult file in this province over recent years. We've spent enormous amounts of money on shelters, outreach centres, and services. Much of that was done in a very scrambling way, I will admit, as a very acute crisis fell on this Island.

I want to thank everyone in this room who had a hand in responding to that crisis. We continue to respond to that crisis with services and shelters, and we have a plan to move forward to improve those services. The minister himself has talked about his Housing First model. He is, at this moment, doing research on how to unroll that program and provide further services for the unhoused in Prince Edward Island.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** You created this mess. You had no plan. After six years, you scrambled around. You didn't know what you were doing with this file. A lot of money went into it. It could have been half as much, and we could have gotten a better plan out of this. The point-in-time numbers have more than doubled, approaching tripled. This is a disaster.

Mr. Premier, what are you doing and what plan are you following that you're talking about? Housing First is six to seven years away at best. What are you following for people who need shelter tonight?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Hon. R. Lantz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I look forward to the minister being able to respond to these questions. It is indicative that the opposition doesn't want to ask him those questions.

We do have a task force of community members and partners from all across the province who meet on a monthly basis, who are devising a

plan for moving forward and responding to the needs of Islanders with complex needs. We have a plan to move forward. We'll continue to invest, but emergency services are just that. They are for emergency services.

We have a long-term plan to house people in appropriate housing so that they can move on with their lives with dignity, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you for that, Mr. Premier, but back to the Minister of Social Development.

When we're talking about housing and social development, this is exactly what happens. People fall through the cracks and the fissures that you've created along the way.

To the minister: As the lead on social supports, what exactly are you doing to ensure vulnerable Islanders aren't falling through those said cracks in housing and the shelter system? Because this is about people first. It seems that you're watching from the sidelines. What actions are you taking to help the people of Prince Edward Island get out of the position that they're in right now?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

**Hon. B. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:40 p.m.]

Thank you for that question because it gives me an opportunity to just say how great the staff are at Social Development and Seniors, and the empathy that they have working with these individuals on a regular basis.

We're doing everything that we can, and we will continue to do that, member.

Thank you for that question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the last couple of weeks, I have been hearing from parents of Dr. Jovan Vuksic's patients who are terrified for their children. These children and their families have received no assurances at all from this government that

they will be cared for now that Dr. Vuksic is leaving. One mother told me that her son with autism and ADHD refuses to meet with anyone except for Dr. Vuksic, who has built the trust and relationship needed to support him. She ended her email with these simple words: "Please help."

**Pediatric complement (further)**

To the Minister of Health: How can you justify losing a physician who was providing a much-needed service?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've touched on this topic in the House before. I don't want to comment on personal matters, but we have hired 51 physicians without any issue. We have a process to do this. Pediatricians remain a priority for our recruitment team, and we will continue to work on pediatric care on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** He is highly specialized, and by this action, you are showing us that this is not a priority for your government.

Before finding Dr. Vuksic, one Island family faced paying over \$6,000 out of pocket, or waiting over three years for provincial support for their child with complex need. A three-year wait – that's unacceptable and shows that we absolutely need more pediatricians and doctors for children with mental health challenges. This parent said: "This care literally means the difference between a successful future or not for my child."

To the Minister of Health: Why are you allowing this specialized doctor to be driven away when the successful futures of these children are at risk, literally?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, at Health PEI, we have a standardized process for hiring, appointing, and

privileging physicians. We know that. We've talked about our relationship with the College of Physicians and Surgeons on PEI who do licensure. We have the Medical Society who represents those physicians on PEI. Those three organizations work together as we move through the hiring process, and we continue to rely on our partners as we move through each and every hiring process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Completely avoiding the questions.

There's such big talk from this government about upstream, preventative supports, but actions show this is simply not a priority. This is not just about one physician; it's about a systemic failure that continues to push away the very people we desperately need.

This parent told me: "I am aware there are always multiple perspectives in situations like this, but rigid policies and bureaucratic red tape have once again taken precedence over the needs of our most vulnerable population, our children."

To the Minister of Health: We simply can't lose any more frontline mental health support for children. What are you doing to fix the rigid bureaucracy within Health PEI that is putting our children's lives at risk?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In her preamble to her question, I think it's very important to say there are multiple perspectives to every situation, and again, I am not going to comment on a personal matter within this House. We do have a process that we move through in conjunction with the Medical Society and the College of Physicians. We always adhere to those procedures in the hiring process, and again, we've had 51 physicians sign on to practice on PEI in the last 16 months.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Spring is a time of great anticipation and excitement, and the natural world begins to wake up and the cycles of life start all over again. At least that's the way it should be, but look under the waters of any Island bay or estuary and that bright hope of new life has a very large cloud in the shape of an MSX parasite casting a very dark shadow over the oyster industry.

#### **Oyster industry (further)**

A question to the Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture: What are the latest data telling us about the prospects for the wild oyster season that starts in just a few days?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll say to the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point that he painted a very good picture of what it's kind of like right now. The early numbers that we have been collecting – there are 37 sites across the province. We are hoping to have all of the wild bed sites complete by the end of the week.

[1:45 p.m.]

I will tell the hon. member that the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke had asked the question earlier this week – where are the areas that we are seeing a higher prevalence of MSX? – and they are in the areas of the Lennox Channel, Percival, Enmore, and Bedeque Bay, which again, is the bulk of where a lot of the wild fishery takes place.

But I will say, though, too, that there have been some areas that are very low prevalence at the moment, but we are continuing to test those sites.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

I'm going to start by thanking the minister; a very direct and fulsome answer to the question I just asked.

A situation that went, last summer, from concerning to deeply troubling by the end of 2024 has emerged in '25 as potentially devastating, and early excursions into Bedeque Bay – the minister has just mentioned that, which of course, is ground zero for MSX here on Prince Edward Island – present a very alarming picture with really heavy mortality and absolutely no chance of a viable fishery there.

To the same minister: How is your department going to accommodate the dozens and dozens of fishers who would typically have their dories in the water out in Bedeque Bay in a week or so and will now have to find an alternate location to make a living?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the hon. member's questions.

I had a meeting recently with the PEI Shellfish Association, and that was one of their worries as well, hon. member, was that with an area like Bedeque Bay not being open – as I mentioned in my previous answer, the bulk of the fishers are there.

I heard Bob MacLeod this morning on the radio. Bob is a great advocate and he's done a great job. He's wanting our department – as I mentioned in the previous answer, our department is continuing to test these other sites.

The one area of issue that the fishers are worried about is the fact that if – again, there are so many that are used to being fishing in the Bedeque Bay area, where they are going to be spread out across the Island. So, again, we're going to be relying on the numbers. What we would like to see is that those fishermen and the fishers will be dispersed to different areas and that the prevalence of MSX won't be high in those areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I attended the Aquaculture Alliance event a few weeks ago – which, of course, the minister attended also and spoke at – presenter after presenter painted a really bleak picture of what lies ahead for the Island oyster industry. In his remarks, when the minister spoke, he talked about many initiatives that this government is taking, many really good initiatives to assist the industry, like data collection/research and funding into new facilities like nurseries and hatcheries.

But one thing that was conspicuously absent from his remarks that day was any mention of a compensation plan for fishers, buyers, and processors.

To the same minister: As the clock ticks on and signs of a potentially catastrophic season loom even larger, when are fishers – and actually anybody who's involved in the oyster industry and who may be affected by this major disruption – going to see details of a proper and comprehensive compensation plan?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, just (Indistinct) off the questions asked earlier this week from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, the contingency money that we do have in the budget... As I've told – I've met with fishers and I've met with the harvesters, and some of the buyers as well – that is money that is going to be used for all facets of it, whether it is compensation for product loss, whether it is for research and development. We're going to be putting that towards hatcheries. We are one week from today that the wild fishers will be going out on the water.

The other, second part of that: I do want to let the hon. member know that we are still encouraging all fishers – the data collection piece of it. Of course, the fishers aren't on the water yet, so we're starting to see some of the early results from some of the growers who have brought their cages to the water, and we're seeing some mortalities there.

We will be there. We've been supporting the industry before. We will be there to support the industry. We just want to know, because again, it is going to be a case-by-case basis.

As I mentioned earlier in my response, there are some areas where the prevalence of MSX is lower, so there might be a different application for a person who isn't seeing the same mortality as maybe a fisher who is out of Bedeque Bay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Wetlands are a crucial part of healthy Island ecosystems. Our watershed groups are really experts, and do the critical work in many cases, sometimes to restore but definitely to maintain wetlands.

In the case of the Summerside golf course project that happened recently, a compensation payment of over \$400,000 was made for the destruction of more than 27 acres of wetland. The PEI wetland policy emphasizes a "no net loss" approach, prioritizing avoidance.

[1:50 p.m.]

### Island watersheds

Question to the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action: Can the minister confirm whether any portion of this compensation has been directed towards supporting the work of watershed groups or the PEI Watershed Alliance in restoring or protecting similar wetland habitats?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for bringing that to the floor of the Legislature.

As you stated, there is no doubt in my mind that the watershed groups are doing phenomenal work for this province. We had a great working relationship with the alliance and with the watershed groups.

I have to state, as well, that I have 13 nieces and nephews, and I think half of them worked, at one point, through the watershed groups on the summer projects. So, I'm very aware of the kind of work that they do and the phenomenal work that they do.

To your question directly, to the amount of – we're standing at an all-time high of investment that we're providing as a Province. Over \$2.1 million is distributed through the watershed groups on an annual basis to do the work, in collaboration with our department.

Our department is working very closely with them, and we will continue to support the watershed groups.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, am very proud of the way our government has supported the watershed groups over the years. I've been an advocate. We're at an all-time high because watersheds are so important to our Island; they're foundational. I mean, without healthy watersheds, what happens to our farming, our fishing, our tourism, not to mention our health and our wellness? They're very crucial.

Watershed groups across the Island are taking on more projects and responsibilities every year. Yet, there is a growing concern that core funding through the Watershed Management Fund has not kept pace with inflation or workload.

We're at an all-time high, but a question for the minister: Can the minister tell this House whether the Watershed Management Fund has been indexed to inflation this year or increased to take into account inflation, and if not, will the minister commit to doing that?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I have stated, it is at an all-time high. We have a great working relationship. We will continue to listen to the groups and to the Watershed Alliance to make sure that they have what they need to do the work. It's very important work that they're doing on behalf of all Islanders, and also in conjunction with my staff at the Department of Environment.

We will continue to work hand in hand with them, and to make sure that they have the

appropriate funds to do the work that they're conducting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the minister for his dedication to helping watershed groups.

The PEI Watershed Alliance has asked government to fully implement all recommendations of the Forestry Commission's final report. We heard about that yesterday in questions. The partial implementation, they say, really won't achieve the goals identified by either the commission or the watershed groups who have contributed extensively to this work.

Question for the minister: Can the minister explain how the voices and the deep expertise of watershed groups really on the front lines will be meaningfully integrated into the next steps of forestry policy development?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenaault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to start by thanking the staff in my department and the work that they have done with the Forestry Commission and the department, or the sector of fisheries – Fish and Wildlife, especially – that have been working very hard on this report. They've started implementing those recommendations.

I will assure the hon. member that I will coordinate a meeting with my staff and the Watershed Alliance to make sure that they're onside with what's happening with the commission report and that they're aware of what's happening, and that we can move forward with that report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**S. Dillon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For many years, university education was regarded as a pathway for securing a successful

future for a family, often overshadowing the trades; however, it's become evident that trades – now in high demand – offer substantial income opportunities.

### Trades programs and careers

Question to the minister of immigration, advanced learning and population growth: Given this shift in the job market and the increased demand for trades programming, how is your department supporting trade education in PEI?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population.

**Hon. J. Redmond:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question.

[1:55 p.m.]

We all know how crucial it is to help support those students studying in many sectors, especially those of our trades. From our department's perspective, some of the supports that go in would be funding around apprenticeship training, we certainly help support those that go off into colleges, but also, supplying funding to organizations like Skills Canada PEI. When they have a chance to try that trade and compete and figure out their passion, it's certainly a great investment in the trades.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**S. Dillon:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Young people today are greatly influenced by social media, what is taught in school, and exposure to opportunities. We are seeing a growth in females entering into the trades and I hope to see that that continues.

Question to the same minister: Does your department support promotional efforts to continually raise awareness about the opportunities available through careers and trades programming?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population.

**Hon. J. Redmond:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for the question.

One of the areas that we do support investment in, especially in encouraging women to get into trades, is through Trade HERizons. I had the great opportunity this morning to attend a graduation ceremony where 10 amazing, powerful women graduated and are going to advance into the trades world through programming and some right into the professional field.

We certainly work hard within our schools to show students opportunities and invite students to come to our various programs within our post-secondary institutions. In fact, I have a niece graduating this May from welding, and we're very excited for her next steps in that career. I would encourage anyone interested in trades to reach out.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**S. Dillon:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It would seem that effort is being made to increase awareness of the opportunities in the trades, and it's working. The trades currently offer high school programs such as carpentry, welding, electrician, and automotive, and these programs have become very popular, creating waitlists to get into the courses.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: With the increased interest in trades programming, is your department looking into how to support our Island schools with programming that meets the demands for Island students?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

**Hon. R. Croucher:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for these questions.

I love this topic, and I know there were questions asked here in the House last month, maybe, about females in the trades. We're seeing a huge growth in that. In fact, the sister of a young man I'm going to be speaking about here tomorrow is actually enrolled in the

welding program in Georgetown, and that's a direct result of the exposure that she's had at Souris Regional School to the welding program.

As a Holland College grad myself and a small business owner who has dabbled in some of those trades like welding and automotive repair and a little bit of carpentry, I absolutely have a keen interest in this topic, member.

I'm going to be doing an upcoming across-the-Island school tour and it's absolutely going to be one of the areas that I'm going to be speaking to faculty and staff about, how we can grow that programming. I'm going to work with my colleague here at Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population on how we can collaboratively increase the exposure to the trades.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the Minister of Education.

Bullying has always been an issue in our province. It happens with kids all the time and we've got to put an end to this somehow, minister. We're seeing it prevalent in school systems. I'm very worried about this, and so are parents.

### **Bullying**

Minister, what are you doing to take action on bullying in Prince Edward Island?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

**Hon. R. Croucher:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the member for speaking about this very, very important topic. The member knows how passionate I am about this, and I know his passion as well because we've had some good conversations about it.

Any incident at any of our schools is concerning to me, and the wellbeing of our students has to be of the utmost concern and consideration. So, I'm engaging with our school authorities and encouraging them to engage with me and my department as well on how we stem what seems to be a rising trend.

I'm working, I assure you, diligently with our department and our school authorities, to get a handle on this and try and start moving in the right direction. Again, member, I know you're passionate about it; my door is open anytime you want to sit down, and we'll brainstorm.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that, minister.

[2:00 p.m.]

Kids need to learn how to play, and they need to learn how to play together, and that's an active way that we can do that. The problem with this is that your government will not fund playgrounds, and they won't come to the aid of people needing the playgrounds updated and school repair. They don't fund the full cost of it.

### School playgrounds

Minister, I'm asking you – Sherwood School right now has to raise a lot of money for their playground – will you step in right now at this time and fund their playground at Sherwood School?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

**Hon. R. Croucher:** Thank you, member.

I believe we're the first government ever to fund playgrounds in the way that we do. I've been engaged with the Sherwood Home and School foundation. We've had some really good conversations over the last week or so. I encourage everyone here to attend their fundraiser that's happening – is it Friday night, Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere?

**S. Dillon:** May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Hon. R. Croucher:** May 2<sup>nd</sup>, thank you. I know the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere and I are going to attend that.

Right now, we have a \$25,000 fund for playgrounds. They're quite expensive. We have some really great Home and School foundations throughout the province that are doing really great work in advocating and fundraising. We're

going to continue to support them in every way we can to get more playgrounds at our Island schools.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

### Orders of the Day (Government)

**Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Premier.

**Hon. B. Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the 1<sup>st</sup> order of the day be now read.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

**Deputy Clerk:** Order No. 1, Consideration of the Estimates, in Committee.

**Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Premier.

**Hon. B. Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to His Majesty.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[C. Deagle in the chair]

**Chair:** The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to further consider the grant of supply to His Majesty.

Minister, would you like to bring a...?

[Laughter]

**Chair:** Come on in.

Would you like to bring a stranger on the floor?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yes.

**Chair:** Shall it be granted? Granted.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Very eager, Chair. Very eager.

**Chair:** Let's get it done.

**Hon. M. McLane:** First one in the office every morning.

**Chair:** Okay. We are on page 109, community health programs.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, and welcome back. Love your energy today.

I know that we kind of started asking questions yesterday on Best Start, and I'm looking for it in our big handout. I don't see that. Oh, right – yeah, okay.

I notice that there's been a slight increase to the budget there. I think yesterday the answer was that it was about just inflation cost?

**Karen Stanley:** That's correct.

[2:05 p.m.]

**K. Bernard:** Okay. I guess I'm trying to figure out the best way to ask this question. Do we feel that that is a sufficient amount to cover the work that they do? Have there been questions for more funding from them?

**Karen Stanley:** There were discussions with them before this number was determined.

**K. Bernard:** Is there anything new around that? I know that years ago, government had an initiative, First 1,000 Days, which has fallen by the wayside. I'm wondering if there are any new sorts of programming that would be similar to Best Start or kind fall under that First 1,000 Days realm?

**Karen Stanley:** I honestly do not know much about the First 1,000 Days initiative. I do know that a review was done of the Best Start program, and there may be some changes upcoming for that, but this is the budget as it

stands now. If something is needed later, we'll adjust it at that time.

**K. Bernard:** I'm also looking at the PEERS Alliance operational grant. That went up slightly. Is that a permanent operating grant that government has intentions of renewing?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, I actually believe this is the last year of a five-year agreement. Most likely, it will probably be extended after that.

**K. Bernard:** I don't see – and it might be right in front of my face – Pride PEI funding. Is that in a different section? I don't remember where that's funded.

**Karen Stanley:** I don't actually believe we gave direct funding to Pride PEI this year.

**Chair:** It's another department.

**K. Bernard:** Yeah, I think you're right. Okay. Sorry about that.

**Hon. M. McLane:** That's alright.

**K. Bernard:** I think I'm good for that, Chair.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

I know last time we talked about the \$100,000 new initiative, new funding for travel reimbursement within PEI. I understand that there are some parameters around that. It's a pilot project, and I think you indicated in your response that it was cancer-related at this time, and that it could expand. But I noticed, in the big book there, that there was previously a grant last year for \$20,000 and now we're moving it to \$100,000.

I wasn't aware that there was \$20,000 available for travel reimbursement within Prince Edward Island.

**Karen Stanley:** That was a practice that started in, I believe, February of this year. We had reallocated funds from other places to start the program a little bit earlier, so that it would be up and running for the first of this fiscal.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, it's not a previous iteration? It's the same program that we're talking about?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. Thank you, that's helpful on that.

I don't think we talked about this last time, the support for the GLA:D physiotherapy sessions.

**Karen Stanley:** Oh, the GLA:D. Let me just check to see if I have a description of it.

The GLA:D program is at various rural private physiotherapy centres. It provides education and exercise programs for individuals living with osteoarthritis in rural PEI.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. Where do I see on here the new initiative that the minister announced? I think it was \$80,000 for post-operative rehabilitation.

**Karen Stanley:** Health innovation.

**M. MacFarlane:** Health innovation?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. So, that's within the department, but coming up in a future session.

**Karen Stanley:** That's correct.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay.

That's all I had on this.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Chair.

With your indulgence, may I ask one question on a previous section, just quickly?

**Chair:** Oh, geez, I don't – yeah, fine.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, perfect.

Under health policy and planning – it was asked yesterday – the consultation, the research and recommendations on affordable transportation, the \$24,000 – that was obviously a project that was done. Can we see what those recommendations are? Are they able to be tabled?

[2:10 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** The answer is I don't know if they're able to be tabled or not, but I can find out.

**Chair:** Do you have any more?

**G. McNeilly:** No, just thank you for accepting that question.

**Chair:** Do you have questions on this section?

**G. McNeilly:** Yes, I do.

**Chair:** Okay. The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you.

It was talked about yesterday; the budget estimate for '25 in professional services is up, and it was said that it was because of an allied health clinic. How much was set aside for that?

**Karen Stanley:** \$448,000.

**G. McNeilly:** How far are we along? Is this one clinic? Is this negotiations with a private entity?

**Karen Stanley:** This is still conceptual at this point in time. We have not started actual negotiations with anyone yet.

**G. McNeilly:** So, you have half a million dollars set aside for a conceptual project? That seems like an awful lot. It's not a needs assessment. You're looking at a project with that amount of money.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, it's an estimate so that we're able to get started this year.

**G. McNeilly:** What phases do you expect to complete this year? Are you talking about private relationships in the community with that money?

**Karen Stanley:** I do not know the answer to that.

**G. McNeilly:** Do you expect all that money – the \$448,000 – to be spent this year?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**G. McNeilly:** So, you're going to spend all the money, but you can't tell us what taxpayers' money is going towards spending.

When do we expect an announcement on this project? What services will it provide?

**Karen Stanley:** It's supposed to provide primary care services, established in the primary care standard, and it should be for patients both within and outside of the patient medical homes.

**G. McNeilly:** I don't know what model that's using. Is that a new model that we're talking about here? I've never heard of this.

**Karen Stanley:** The allied health portion of it, the integrated allied health-led is definitely a new model for PEI. We do not have anything else like it, which is why this is a pilot project that is going to be started.

**G. McNeilly:** When can we expect further information on this? This seems like a lot of money. I don't know how much money's going into it. I thought the focus was on patient medical homes to deliver primary care. That's what we were told for a very long time. Now it's not, and we're moving to another model.

I'm sorry I have to ask those questions. I appreciate the guest taking them on. But I don't know what other information... Island taxpayers should be able to get more information than this at this time. I'm not sure why we're not able to get it.

**Karen Stanley:** I can get some more details and bring it back.

**G. McNeilly:** Great. Thanks a lot.

The After Stroke program, I see that it's \$111,000. It's the same budget line. Is that a grant from the federal government to bring that in?

**Karen Stanley:** No. No, it is something that we've been funding for a few years now.

**G. McNeilly:** There's obviously a need for after-stroke care in Prince Edward Island. That's a great program. I'm just wondering: Is that money always fully spent? I'm just wondering why there were no increases. Huge increases in health care spending, but for after-stroke care, we're not seeing it here on this budget line.

**Karen Stanley:** It was a multi-year agreement, and this was the amount that it was agreed upon.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay.

I talked about this before, the Beck Exercise Physiology, but I do believe the title of that – the provincial chronic pain exercise program – changed from previous years. I think it was more rehabilitation, and now it looks like it's pain management. Can you correct me if I'm wrong on that?

**Karen Stanley:** There's actually a new portion to it, so that may be why the title has changed.

[2:15 p.m.]

**Hon. M. McLane:** Member, I do remember – not to go backwards – we actually won an award for our stroke program in July of this year. It was recognized nationally for its protocol and delivery.

**G. McNeilly:** Yeah, I think it's great. They do great work.

**Karen Stanley:** It definitely did change; we've got additional funding for a different variation. I don't have any notes on that, but I can definitely bring that back.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, because I'm looking at the 2023 grant, chronic pain exercise grant, and it was only \$9,000. Now, it's up to \$69,000 for next year. This is the type of funding that we actually need to be putting into for rehabilitation and pain management because we're lacking in pain management, I do believe, in Prince Edward Island.

But I'm just saying, with that additional money, how are we supposed to measure the results of this program? It should be very successful.

**Karen Stanley:** No, and my apologies, I should have had a note on that. I will get something for you.

**Chair:** Hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, do you have many more questions on this section? You've had 12 so far, but...

**G. McNeilly:** Sure. Are we...?

**Chair:** I just have a few more on the list.

**G. McNeilly:** Oh, okay. Yeah, you can move to them and put me back on the list.

**Chair:** Okay. We should be out of here in June.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** I just have a couple more questions. One is just a clarification. The Lung Association of Nova Scotia and PEI – when I first looked, it looked like they had lost their \$25,000 grant, but when I look over on the next page of the big book – HW 7 – I see they're there again through the health innovation fund for \$50,000. Did they just get moved?

**Karen Stanley:** No, it was actually for a different project. The health innovation fund is for one-time, project-based. This was for something else, regular funding. They didn't lose their funding; they just haven't made a request for funding for this year yet.

**K. Bernard:** Is that common, that sometimes requests come in later, and then...?

**Karen Stanley:** Absolutely.

**K. Bernard:** Okay. I'm just wondering, the PEI Midwives Association – I was kind of looking for an update. I know that's not probably.... Is there another section where we would see salaries and stuff like that, or how does that work?

**Karen Stanley:** Health PEI.

**K. Bernard:** Through Health PEI, okay.

I am good. Thank you.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thanks. Hi, again, Karen.

I'm going to carry on, actually, where Karla left off. I realize the salary section for the Midwives Association will appear in Health PEI, but there are a couple of expenses here that appear in community health programs. One is the liability insurance, a really important part of them doing their job, and I see that's gone up substantially. Is that because the number of midwives has increased?

**Karen Stanley:** That's correct.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** How many midwives do we have now currently working on PEI?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Four or five; I was surprised. I met them when we did the pharmacare announcement. Four or five? Oh dear. Because they're in that building where we did the

pharmacare announcement, so I went down to talk with them. Four, for sure.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** That's great. As you know, it's something I've been a really strong advocate for ever since I've been here. Do we have any data on how many deliveries they have done over the last 12 months? I know they only started – it was probably less than a year ago when they did their first delivery.

**Karen Stanley:** How about this? I'll make sure I have it when we get to the section on Health PEI.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Okay.

[Laughter]

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thanks, Karen. Good for you.

The minister just mentioned where they're currently located in Charlottetown, but I know part of the plan of expansion for midwives is to have a presence also in Summerside. Any sense as to how close we are to that?

**Hon. M. McLane:** The position is posted.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** That's great. That's all I have.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Peter, we have five for sure.

**G. McNeilly:** Sorry.

Under Hospice PEI, I actually worked with – they approached me and I think we talked, minister. I sent you information about how important hospice was last year; it's a lot. Anyway, looking at 2023, you started off and the grant was \$100,000. What I see here is that the forecast was \$80,000 last year and now it's down to \$50,000. Is the money in another section?

[2:20 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** No, they have a base grant of \$50,000 a year; however, two years ago, they requested an additional \$50,000, which were able to accommodate. This year, they requested

– at the latter part of the year – an additional \$30,000, which we were able to accommodate.

The only amount you see budgeted in that budget section is \$50,000 because that's the base, but if they do make a request next year at the latter part of the year, and if we're able to accommodate it, we will.

**G. McNeilly:** Because they approached us during budget time and said that we are struggling, and that was the thing. I appreciate you came in, and I appreciate that the minister and you came in and gave them additional funding, but they shouldn't have to fundraise as much as they can. That's what they were saying to us: They would like more additional funding because the stress on hospice is getting quite a bit more.

For me to see it going in the wrong direction – I know it's base funding – it's concerning. Why do we just go to the base level for something so important? Why didn't we go to the top level, which you budgeted for them in 2023, which was \$100,000?

**Karen Stanley:** We did not budget \$100,000 in 2023; that's what we ended up giving them. We budgeted \$50,000 because that was the three-year agreement. There was funding available, and they made the request, so we were able to accommodate it.

Their base has always been \$50,000.

**G. McNeilly:** But that would seem like a proactive approach to government. Hospice is – the needs are there. Shouldn't their base funding go up with at least inflation, at least the cost of living – to go up because they're struggling with this? I appreciate the work that you've done on this, but these are the things that make a difference for organizations. Shouldn't that be the case?

**Karen Stanley:** That can be something that can be discussed when we go into negotiations into the next agreement.

**G. McNeilly:** You were in a three-year contract with them, then it expires. Do you negotiate with them individually? When is that negotiation? How long is the next contract going to be?

**Karen Stanley:** Just because of our management plan cycles, organizations – not just Hospice – usually put presentations into us

with requests for funding in the fall so that we can include it in our management plan. That's how the process goes forward.

**G. McNeilly:** I know you talked about that yesterday with the transportation grant. It's a new program that was out in January. There were terms like "it will probably expand." Those types of terms were used to talk about it, but there was nothing concrete. It was done through the cancer unit, and it would probably advance to further units.

I would like to get something more concrete. Do we have a plan how that rollout is going to take place to spend \$100,000 for people's transportation on PEI?

**Karen Stanley:** Well, it will start in this area. The program will be evaluated to see if it's meeting the needs that it was set out to, and then based on that evaluation, we will make future determinations.

**G. McNeilly:** You're basing it out of one little area with the cancer area, but it could be moved all over. How long is that evaluation going to take? Will that effect you spending the whole \$100,000? It just seems like a small amount. It seems like we could do a better job with transportation in PEI; that's what I'm hearing, too.

**Karen Stanley:** We can't start the evaluation yet because the program has just started. So, once it gets some time underneath it, then we will do the evaluation and decide where to go from there.

**G. McNeilly:** How are you communicating this important program? This will be an important program for...?

**Chair:** Is this a budget question?

**G. McNeilly:** I do believe because there's \$100,000 and if people don't know...

**Chair:** (Indistinct) communication?

**G. McNeilly:** ...that they can access this. It's gone from \$20,000 to \$100,000....

**Chair:** Do you have another question other than that one on the budget?

**G. McNeilly:** Do I. So, in the \$100,000....

**Chair:** (Indistinct) relate it back to the budget.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you very much.

In the \$100,000, how much is in that number for communications so that people know that they can access this in a time of need when they need it in Prince Edward Island?

**Karen Stanley:** This is all funding which is going directly to the people. There is nothing specific for communication in here. Any communication would be through either our own regular communications budget or through the cancer centre's communications.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Chair, I'm sorry, I just want to limit takebacks for expediency. So, for midwifery stats, Peter, midwifery....

**Chair:** I'm sorry, just make sure we use their title, not their name.

**Hon. M. McLane:** I'm sorry, member.

[2:25 p.m.]

In the 10-month period from February to December, midwifery-led births were 24, but accepted into the full course of care were 84 during those 10 months; pre-conception counselling, 11; accepted lactation requests, six; accepted post-partum care requests, 13.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you so much, minister. I really appreciate that.

**Hon. M. McLane:** I just want to keep Karen's list – her night work – to a minimum.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Chair.

I guess I'm just going to jump off a bit of what Charlottetown-West Royalty was saying in terms of Hospice PEI. I don't know how I don't see things that are on the page at all here.

In the throne speech, government had announced that there was going to be – I'm going to paraphrase – operational funding for certain community groups. I'm wondering if those plans have been worked out, if Hospice PEI would fall in the category of an organization who would receive that funding.

**Karen Stanley:** As far as being increased over and above the \$50,000?

**K. Bernard:** Well, I'm not sure on all the details, but it was in that it said that there would be community organizations that would start receiving core operational funding so that they weren't jumping through hoops and creating new projects all the time for funding. So, I was wondering if Hospice PEI would be one such group that government would consider for that.

**Karen Stanley:** It's definitely something that they would consider. Whether or not it's in the plan for this year? Not that I'm aware of.

**Chair:** Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Community Health and Policy: 54,826,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

Pharmacy Services

Pharmacy Services

“Appropriations provided for the oversight, guidance, and delivery of provincial drug programs in PEI. The provincial drug programs are mainly delivered through community retail pharmacies, or in the case of Provincial Pharmacy, delivered directly to clients. The unit provides oversight for federal bilateral agreements.” Administration: 52,800. Equipment: 9,900. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 704,100. Professional Services: 3,183,100. Salaries: 1,812,500. Travel and Training: 10,100. Grants: 70,423,600.

Total Pharmacy Services: 76,196,100

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm just going to ask: Is this pharmacy services only in the community or pharmacy services that might be available through patient medical homes?

**Karen Stanley:** This would just be community pharmacies.

**M. MacFarlane:** For the other example I gave, in patient medical homes where pharmacists might exist, is that funding delivered through a different section?

**Karen Stanley:** That would be through Health PEI.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Around the budget, Chair, please.

**M. MacFarlane:** On the salaries line, there was a \$400,000 increase. Is that to do with what, please?

**Karen Stanley:** It has to do with a combination of things. In the last few years, we have been expanding in the number of programs. In '23-24 and into '24-25, we've added more drugs to the formulary. We have added more changes to programs and such. In addition, in '25-26, we're having the addition of the drugs for two different federally funded areas. So, all of those additional programs and additional work are requiring additional staff.

**M. MacFarlane:** So maybe, then, on – you mentioned the increase in spending on drugs. There is a big increase in spending on the high-cost drugs, which is great. Last year, about \$13 million was budgeted and now we're up over \$21 million. Where did that extra money go – the overspend? I'm just going to turn to the page.

**Karen Stanley:** In HW 6, the forecast for this year was \$21 million. Next year, the budget is \$22 million.

[2:30 p.m.]

**M. MacFarlane:** Right, but if we look at some of the individual lines, some of them jumped out.

So, the drug cost assistance program, when \$9.5 million was budgeted, but \$16 million was spent.

**Karen Stanley:** Okay. This actually has to do with a change in how we were budgeting things. Prior to this year, when we were budgeting, we budgeted on the net cost – net of rebates. So, what rebates are – if you look at this line on the very last two numbers on HW 6, you will see rebates on drug costs of \$19 million and \$21 million.

Previously, we didn't break that out; we actually reduced the cost of the programs, but because it wasn't giving the true cost of what we were actually expending at the time, we decided to change how we were budgeting. So, we didn't

actually go from \$9 million to \$6 million, it was just a change in how we were budgeting. We actually put out the \$16 million to the individuals – that was the cost of the drugs – but then because of our utilization, the drug manufacturers were giving us a rebate. But we don't know what those rebates are until the end of the year, so we just changed how we were budgeting.

**Hon. M. McLane:** So, we (Indistinct)...

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**Hon. M. McLane:** ...changes with volume.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, I'm going to have to get a little more explanation on that if you could. Does that mean – year over year, is it apples to apples or apples to oranges when we see some of the changes?

**Karen Stanley:** When you see our forecast to budget this year, you will definitely see apples to apples. If you look at last year and you look at last year's budget to this year's forecast, you will see a difference.

The bottom line number is the same, it's just how we broke it out is different.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, we are going to need to see another a full year go by to see the comparisons under the new way that the rebates are being shown? So, we're going to need to see this fiscal come to an end and then we'll have year-to-year comparisons based on what we need to be...?

**Karen Stanley:** I can probably go back and restate last year's budget in this format if you'd like.

**Hon. M. McLane:** What? [Laughter]

**Karen Stanley:** But that's not an issue; if that would be preferred, I can do that.

**Hon. M. McLane:** We're reporting gross rebate to net, and we used to report net.

**Karen Stanley:** And there's a whole reason why that happened, because our rebates used to be only \$1 million to \$2 million. When they were only \$1 million to \$2 million, it wasn't a big issue. But over the last four years, it went from

about \$8 million to \$20 million, so that's why we changed how we were forecasting.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, so maybe just to take an example then, if we look at the – and maybe it doesn't apply because I'm going to need to think more about the change on how that's tallied – the Pharmacy Plus program. When we look at last year, \$1.8 million – forecasted going forward, \$2.99 million. Are there changes to that program?

**Karen Stanley:** Ironically enough, this was one of the programs where we did not change the budget. If you looked at the budget last year, it probably would have been around \$2.9 million. So, we did not change....

In the last year, the budget was \$2.9 million; we only spent \$1.8 million, but we are planning on making more changes to that so that we fully subscribe to it this year.

**M. MacFarlane:** Then my question is: If this line is not affected by the change in modelling or approach – you did say you're looking to make changes to get more uptake on it. So, what resulted in the \$1.1 million not being used if it was the same year over year?

**Karen Stanley:** Utilization.

**M. MacFarlane:** When you say utilization, is that utilization at the pharmacy level or at the...?

**Karen Stanley:** It's the consumer level.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, what will be the efforts and the steps taken to make sure that there's uptake on it? Because we all talk in this House about how successful that program is and how popular it is, but.... So, it's surprising.

**Karen Stanley:** One of the changes that was made was something that was announced in the budget speech, which is the addition of strep throat and increasing the pharmacists' scope so that they can test for strep throat. That was one of the changes that were made which will help with the underspend.

[2:35 p.m.]

**M. MacFarlane:** No, by all accounts it's a good program. People speak very highly of it. The minister speaks highly of it. Pharmacists speak highly of it. So, it's great to see it try to be maximum utilized.

The family health benefit is another one that jumps out that doesn't appear to have been fully utilized.

**Karen Stanley:** No, it hasn't, and it is something that has been chronically underspent, so one of the things that we are hoping to do over the next couple of years is look at our drug programs to see what's working, what isn't working, and how best to set them up for Islanders.

**M. MacFarlane:** Are there any other ones that the department is looking at? We talked about a couple that I just picked out, but are there others that don't get the same uptake as we'd like to see, and that need to be revisited in how they're either approached to the public, or marketed?

**Karen Stanley:** We'll probably look at them as a suite of programs.

**M. MacFarlane:** And when looking at them as a suite, is there anything else on the grant page that we're looking at supporting, beyond what we've done last year?

**Karen Stanley:** Other than the new initiatives which are being funded through the federal government, which would be the contraception and the diabetes, no.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. What about the PWC drug/vac tender? Is that something new? I'm not seeing any numbers attached to it.

**Karen Stanley:** No, and that is something that should not have been included. It's something that just came from our accounting system, but it's not something that we've been utilizing in the last couple years.

**M. MacFarlane:** If it's not relevant, I'll skip my questions on it, if it's not something that we're going to be dealing with.

On the diabetes side, I see the insulin pumps are getting a big increase from – if I'm looking right, is it \$400,000 to over \$2 million? What's leading to that expansion in funding?

**Karen Stanley:** That actually was the removal of the age. That was actually provincial funding that we had done last year.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, it was an age gap. Was it of 25?

**Karen Stanley:** It was, yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** What's it now?

**Karen Stanley:** It's been removed.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, and that's effective when?

**Karen Stanley:** Last September.

**M. MacFarlane:** I must have missed a ministerial statement on that one.

What about glucose sensors? If you're eligible for a glucose sensor, that's covered. What about an insulin pump with the glucose sensor?

**Hon. M. McLane:** The new program is launching May 1<sup>st</sup> with all the parameters, in conjunction with the federal government agreement, that will outline all the co-pays and stuff like that. We're one week – I even had it in my calendar today. One week until it goes live.

I'm not sure if the diabetes program website has been updated yet with all those parameters.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, that did get through the federal government before it was prorogued and the election was called?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah. You missed that announcement too? [Laughter]

**M. MacFarlane:** I missed that too, yeah. (Indistinct)

Just to confirm on that, are you able to say more about what's coming May 1<sup>st</sup>? I guess my question was specifically on – if you're eligible for the glucose sensor, are you also eligible then to get the insulin pump?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah, all the parameters are here; I see it now. Under the current co-pay schedules, we'll pay \$10 per 10mL vial or \$20 per five 3mL cartridges. It's all listed there.

**M. MacFarlane:** I'm getting to the end of my questions on this section, Chair.

It might be on the next page, drugs for rare diseases.

**Chair:** He's taking all of Gord's questions. It's great.

[Laughter]

**G. McNeilly:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Ask them again.

**Karen Stanley:** Can I explain that? Maybe that'll help with your question.

**M. MacFarlane:** Yeah. I was just looking at the numbers, but please.

**Karen Stanley:** We get federal funding of about \$3 million each year, but the program didn't actually start until part of the way during the year.

[2:40 p.m.]

Because we did not access all of the funds – it started late during the year, so we were only able to spend \$2 million of the \$3 million that we received – we were able to roll that over. So, in addition to the \$3 million that we have to spend next year, we're able to spend the \$1 million that we didn't spend this year.

Did that answer your question?

**M. MacFarlane:** It does, and leads to maybe another one or two.

So, you say that – paraphrasing – the leftover money is going to get used going forward.

**Karen Stanley:** They're allowing us to do that, yes.

**Hon. M. McLane:** It doesn't always happen.

**Karen Stanley:** It does not always happen. We had to make the request, and they did allow it this time.

**M. MacFarlane:** Alright. So, then, we can see the line for this sort of retreat back down to previous....

**Karen Stanley:** It should be around \$3 million.

**M. MacFarlane:** Yeah, okay.

I don't know how drugs are determined for rare diseases. Is that what is sometimes colloquially referred to as the catastrophic drug program?

**Karen Stanley:** This actual set of drugs was determined by the federal government, and then

we were able to add a few others on. The drugs that we were adding on were ones that we were not previously covering.

**M. MacFarlane:** Will we be able to continue to cover, and expand coverage...? I guess my concern is that we have a bit of a boost going into the next coming year, but then we're going to retreat back to previous numbers. Is that going to affect what rare or catastrophic diseases are going to be eligible for coverage? Will there be a clawback on coverage if we don't have that money carried forward in future years?

**Karen Stanley:** We do not tend to claw back on programs.

**Hon. M. McLane:** There's a national strategy for drugs for rare diseases. It's being formulated. A rare disease in Prince Edward Island may not be a rare disease in Ontario, so to speak, so there's a lot of cross-jurisdictional work on the continued framework of the funding model.

**Karen Stanley:** But once we fund a drug, we most likely will not defund the drug.

**M. MacFarlane:** And you're confident, then, that going forward with the funds that will be available, we can continue to make money available?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes. That being said, they are always based on our estimates, and utilization can always change those numbers.

**M. MacFarlane:** Just maybe a final question, just generally, on the section.

This is the section for the community pharmacies, and we've talked about the Pharmacy Plus. Is there consultation with the private pharmacy owners to see...

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** ...what they need to operate? Because, as I mentioned in a question before, the scope of practice of the pharmacists in our community is really expanding, and the demands being placed on them and their staff are expanding.

I don't know how much of this budget allotment goes directly into the hands of the pharmacy owners to try and deliver those services, but can you say that there is a robust consultation process with the clinics, the pharmacies?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Through the Pharmacy Association. That's where we have those discussions.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, and Chair, just maybe....

**Chair:** Second last final question, the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

[Laughter]

**M. MacFarlane:** Your thought is, then, that what we're seeing coming forward here reflects what the advocacy of that association has been doing in your outreach with them to meet the needs that they've expressed to you?

**Karen Stanley:** Within reason.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay.

That's fine, thank you.

**Chair:** Alright. The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

I think we have all the questions answered. (Indistinct) any more?

**G. McNeilly:** You think so?

There are some days when you run for two different parties at various times in your life, and then you see this national pharmacare program in here....

[Laughter]

**G. McNeilly:** You're ahead of the curve here, folks.

[Interjections]

**G. McNeilly:** Trying to wake you up a little bit.

[2:45 p.m.]

The national pharmacare program – it's great to see that in there. It's a great program. Can you tell me – we've got \$6.9 million budgeted – when that program is.... It started April 1<sup>st</sup>, maybe? Can you tell me a little bit more about...?

**Karen Stanley:** Yeah. We do have to pass the budget. We are getting some of the programs in place. I believe you said the diabetes portion of it was starting in May?

**Hon. M. McLane:** I believe – that’s what I have in my calendar, May 1<sup>st</sup>. I know that was a big start date.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes. So, that one would be starting first. The contraception may take a little bit more work before that’s up and running, but all of it will happen in the next 12 months.

**G. McNeilly:** That’s great news. I’m excited....

**Hon. M. McLane:** That’s why you’re taking credit: NDP and Liberal.

**G. McNeilly:** Exactly.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Okay, I see where you were going with that.

**G. McNeilly:** That’s why you guys have been saying that for the last two weeks. Anyway, it’s a great thing for the people of Prince Edward Island.

What I worry about is – obviously we don’t know the information on that, but diabetes and contraception, at this stage, we have \$6.9 million. You mentioned, too, about – I’m worried about not meeting the thresholds of spending that money, and what happens. Are there stipulations in that program about where that money would go?

**Karen Stanley:** If we did not spend it, we can ask for it to be carried forward into the next year.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, good. That’s good news; I’m glad to see that.

A couple of things in here. In here, there’s a diabetes control line and then there are four or five different other lines. Can you tell me the difference between the diabetes control line and the programs? Is that managing people’s diabetes in the control line?

**Karen Stanley:** The diabetes control, I’m guessing, is the insulin itself, because if you look under the diabetes programs, there’s the sensor, the pumps, the supplies, and the strips. But again, that’s just my assumption.

**G. McNeilly:** I have last year’s budget, and that line should carry over into the next year, and a lot of lines – they don’t.

**Karen Stanley:** No, and that was because of how we were budgeting and the rebates. That’s why all the numbers changed, fluctuated so much from year to year.

**G. McNeilly:** I was listening closely to that, and they fluctuate. Is this a one-time thing? Because I remember being in this chair for a lot of years and this not matching up.

**Karen Stanley:** Interestingly enough, the reason why we changed how we budget is because the numbers had always fluctuated. We had always presented the budget based on a net base, but then always forecasted on a gross base. I’m like, well, that didn’t make sense, so I changed how we budget.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay.

**Chair:** He doesn’t know (Indistinct)....

**G. McNeilly:** Yes, I know (Indistinct)....

[Laughter]

**G. McNeilly:** Because this has baffled my brain – which isn’t very big some days, but with this, it’s been difficult to follow.

**Karen Stanley:** It was hard to follow because we were budgeting on one basis, and then we were forecasting on a different. So, this year – and this is the first year that we did it – we decided to budget and forecast on the same basis.

**Hon. M. McLane:** It’s based on your input, member.

**Chair:** If it helps, I have no idea, either, hon. member.

**Karen Stanley:** We did actually have this discussion last year because you were asking why these numbers were weird and why there were these big rebates. I was like, “You have a point,” so we changed how we budgeted so that it....

[Interjections]

**Chair:** A good idea can come out of anywhere.

**G. McNeilly:** It's just that in opposition, you only have so many opportunities to ask these questions. I appreciate it and you're very good at what you do, Karen. I just couldn't figure it out, nor could I keep trying to keep you accountable if the numbers aren't there.

Does this relate to it? In this year's budget on HW 6, the last line is the rebate on drug prices.

**Karen Stanley:** That is it. That is the money that we get back from manufacturers because we're spending more, so they are giving us a better price. But they're numbers that we don't know what they are until we get to the end of the year. With our budget, it is just our best estimate at that point in time.

**G. McNeilly:** That's great because going through this the last few nights, I had them both out and I didn't understand what that line was. So, I appreciate that, and I look forward to – well, if we're still here, I'll look forward to this in the future.

That's great because this is important stuff for Islanders, because what I'm hearing is that, especially with the drugs for rare diseases not spending that much money.... I just met with a constituent a month ago. She's an advocate for this. She struggled to get support, but now I'm finding out there is \$2 million of unspent money in that.

[2:50 p.m.]

It's a rare disease. It's difficult to get a diagnosis. How do Islanders access drug support for their rare diseases?

**Karen Stanley:** Normally, it's through their physicians. They would be talking to their physician, their physician would say, "You should be on drug Y," and then the physician would make the application.

**G. McNeilly:** I'll go back and talk to her, and make sure that she...

**Hon. M. McLane:** I pass them on through to pharmacare, too, if I get a call from a constituent.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay. I appreciate it.

The high drug cost, again – I know what we just talked about, but the high drug cost from the following year was \$13 million. I don't mind a

little bit of jumping of the numbers from net to gross, but this is a jump of \$8 million.

**Karen Stanley:** The budget or the forecast from last year?

**G. McNeilly:** The budget last year was \$13 million. The forecast in '23-24 was \$9 million. Now, it's up to \$21 million and \$22 million.

**Karen Stanley:** A lot of that has to do with a change that we made to the program in '23-24, reducing the co-pays. That's why you saw most of that increase this year, because the change was made in late '23.

**G. McNeilly:** Yeah, that makes sense.

I appreciate this, and I understand it. For the first year, as you can see – it's difficult because we have to just trust that the money is being spent on the things that it needs to be spent on.

A general question is that there seems to be some unspent money there through drug use in Prince Edward Island here. Minister, what are you doing to increase the amount of drugs that are available to Islanders? It seems like there's money there across the board. How do we put more drugs on the formulary based on these numbers?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Well, it is about utilization, but even from a cancer perspective, we've added 56 cancer drugs. I know that; that's part of the suite of the drugs that we've added over the last three years. So, utilization is always usually the answer for drug budget numbers.

We forecast as best we can, but any (Indistinct) rare diseases, a couple can be significantly expensive.

**G. McNeilly:** Pharmacy Plus, again – it's the same thing and we've talked about it before: You were underspent the year before, and you're underspent now.

I know that you've made some additions – strep throat – and I understand that totally. I think that's great, but are we going to be back in the same situation next year with your budget and not spending the whole budget for Pharmacy Plus?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Back to the strep throat, and we haven't pulled that through the system yet.

The other question, I guess – I think we still do have awareness issues on Pharmacy Plus. There are people who are going to walk-in clinics or other health care facilities who could be serviced at the pharmacy. So, we continue to try to promote the programs, but as the patient learns that a UTI does not require a doctor visit under most situations.... We see those numbers and the numbers of individuals continue to creep up, of who have accessed it for the first time.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Chair.

I just have one question. It just dawned on me that one of the lines in the big book is a forecast and not money spent, so I don't know if I'm asking this question properly.

I had been under the impression a few years ago that the hepatitis C numbers in PEI were dropping, but when I look at this – I know most of the drugs went up; I'm assuming that's taking inflation into account – this one went up roughly \$500,000 based on the forecast.

I'm wondering: How many people does that service? Does that suggest that hepatitis C is maybe not on the rise, but that it's not declining?

**Karen Stanley:** The budget has always been actually higher than – it has always been around maybe \$1 million, \$1.2 million. I think the previous year we didn't spend anything, and this year we just spent \$300,000. This was a matter of being overly conservative and not wanting to reduce too much of the budget in case we needed it.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Coming back to these rebates, just a final question or two.

If I understood your description on how the rebates are calculated, it's because of the bulk purchasing or...

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** ...if we purchase so many drugs from the provider/manufacturer....

[2:55 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** So many, the types; different manufacturers give different rebates on different drugs.

**M. MacFarlane:** Occasionally, I'll hear in the news that there might be a move towards either an Atlantic or a national purchasing of drugs, which would in turn result in possibly bigger rebates to be distributed across the country.

Is that explored to maximize what rebates might be available to the provinces based on bulk purchasing?

**Karen Stanley:** We actually do a lot of our negotiations on prices through CADTH, which is a national organization, and then we do our individuals after the CADTH negotiation.

But yes, we are always exploring different areas with our Atlantic colleagues to see if we can make sure that we can get the correct prices.

Just for an example, in 2019-20, the rebates were only \$5.6 million. They had been like that until about '22-23, where they were \$12 million. Then in '23-24, the number of medications – because we added so many more medications to the formulary, we went from having 200 medications that got rebates to having 278, so our rebates went from \$12 million to \$19 million. It was just such a big jump that it just changed everything.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you for that.

That's helpful in understanding where the rebates fit into the budget and what we get out of it. But right now, it's province by province by province that negotiates the purchasing of their own drugs for their own residents?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** There's no collaboration?

**Karen Stanley:** We actually do product listing agreements with the individual pharmacies, yes. So, each province signs their own listing agreement.

**Chair:** Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Pharmacy Services: 76,196,100

Shall it carry? Carried.

Health Workforce Development

“Appropriations provided for workforce planning, development of training and bridging programs, and innovation in the health care field.” Administration: 46,700. Equipment: 241,500. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 57,400. Professional Services: 696,000. Salaries: 1,509,700. Travel and Training: 48,200. Grants: 1,224,000.

Total Health Workforce Development:  
3,823,500

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West  
Royalty, I’ll let you go first this time.

**G. McNeilly:** Wow, that’s awesome.

[Laughter]

**G. McNeilly:** Great. What is going on with the grant spends...?

**Karen Stanley:** [Laughter] Absolutely. That’s a really good question.

We had introduced a new program back in August of ’23, I believe that’s when it started. It was an IEN bursary where we were reimbursing licensing costs and other costs for IENs up to \$10,000. We had based it on a very high volume of IENs which we did not get. So, you’ll see the decrease.

**G. McNeilly:** This was something that the minister has talked a lot about in Question Period as a way to the future, and I think it is. I know it was a new program.

How many IENs did we get versus anticipated...?

**Karen Stanley:** It’s not necessarily the ones that we got; it’s the ones who applied for the grant. So, it’s not an automatic. You don’t show up and we give it to you; you have to come apply for it. They are made aware of it, but a lot of the time they may have already been here or they just haven’t applied for the grant yet. So, we didn’t take all of the budget for the grant down, but we did reduce it based on utilization.

**G. McNeilly:** That makes sense. I see it here.

So then, in the budget, you have consultation – curriculum for Transition to Registered Nurses in Canada, 390,000, and the budget forecast is 548,000.

Is this the program that we teamed up with Saskatchewan, I think it is? Could you tell me more about that?

**Hon. M. McLane:** We just licensed their curriculum. We’re not really working with them; we just licensed that curriculum to deliver it.

[3:00 p.m.]

**G. McNeilly:** There I see the number go up, which means that there should be more internationally educated nurses in the system, correct?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, and we are expanding the program. We’re adding a second cohort to it, so the overall budget for that program is going up.

**G. McNeilly:** I appreciate these answers.

The internationally educated nurses; when I saw this program come in – it’s a good program – I knew they were going to struggle with adapting. We said that we are underspent on grants to support them, but why are we hearing that there have been struggles for them to adjust? If the grants were low, where did we miss here with what was happening?

**Hon. M. McLane:** (Indistinct) struggled to adjust (Indistinct)

**G. McNeilly:** The nurses that were coming in have struggled to adapt – and I mean, this is an individual case or different things, that they come to a new place and they’re struggling to adapt, whether it be culturally, into the community, missing family, and whatever. But they did not uptake on the grant program.

Have you heard this, minister?

**Hon. M. McLane:** It’s not a budget discussion, but I can share with you the process on how we integrate those INs into our system in partnership with IRSA and some other ones. I have very detailed pathways. I think it’s important to note that the TRNC program started in May 2024, so we are in the early stages.

**Karen Stanley:** I was just going to say: The internationally educated nurses bursary program provides up to \$10,000 to support for the licensing, their licensures, to get that if they have to pay that. So, it’s not to help them integrate; it’s to help with their costs.

**G. McNeilly:** Was that explained to them before they started this process? I thought this was integration costs into cost of living and different expenses. Is there a program for that?

**Karen Stanley:** There's a different program at Health PEI that you may be thinking of.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay. Thank you.

When I'm looking at the.... Is it appropriate for me to ask how many internationally educated nurses that we have on Prince Edward Island at this time?

**Hon. M. McLane:** I've talked about it in the House before. We've had 59 complete the TRNC program, and my last update was, probably a month or a month and a half ago, there are 25 currently enrolled for a total of 74. That's probably a month old, probably.

**G. McNeilly:** That's those numbers. Okay, perfect.

In the budget book, you underspent on salaries by about \$250,000, but I see an increase to \$1.5 million for next year. Is that additional staff?

**Karen Stanley:** We had the decrease in salaries due to vacancies. The increase in salaries is due to the expansion of the TRNC program, so we need to hire more clinical nurse educators to help with the expansion of the program.

**G. McNeilly:** How many more are we going to – and they're all nurses that we are hiring for training?

**Karen Stanley:** The majority of them are for the Transition to Registered Nursing in Canada – sorry, I used the acronym; I'm used to it. They are nurses, yes.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

This is the section with respect to bridging programs. We talked about IENs. What was that acronym? I couldn't....

**Karen Stanley:** TRNC: Transition to Registered Nursing in Canada.

**M. MacFarlane:** Transition from what, please?

**Karen Stanley:** They could be a registered nurse in another country. They could come to Canada and be working as.... Usually, they're nurses of some sort in another country, but they have to get used to nursing in Canada.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, these are nursing coming into Canada, and I guess IENs are different from TRNCs?

**Karen Stanley:** Usually IENs take the TRNC, sorry.

**M. MacFarlane:** That's helpful. Thank you.

**Hon. M. McLane:** (Indistinct) acronyms – a new language.

**M. MacFarlane:** But what about Canadians LPNs who want to become RNs, Canadian RNs who want to become NPs? Where does that fit?

[3:05 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** With LPNs who want to become BScNs – bachelor of science in nursing – we actually are working with our colleagues at Workforce and Advanced Learning as well as UPEI to develop a laddering program to help LPNs become RNs.

**M. MacFarlane:** Where do we see allotment for that initiative?

**Karen Stanley:** The funding actually was added to our budget last year, but the program never got off the ground last year. So, there is \$666,000.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, that \$660,000-some is carried over from last year into this year?

**Karen Stanley:** It's not carried over; it's just the budget allocation.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, that program will still exist and be promoted?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes. Not still exist – it will exist this year.

**M. MacFarlane:** Sorry, I didn't catch why it wasn't taken up or why that went unspent.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Credentialing and prerequisites.... It's quite complex, (Indistinct) work with the university.

**Karen Stanley:** It was just getting everything together, getting everything set up with UPEI, getting the curriculum developed.... It just did not get up to speed. There is hope that it will be ready for the fall of this year.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, because I do hear interest in that bridging program, so if it was somehow able to be made less complicated to facilitate uptake in it, I think it would be used. Wherever that red tape might exist....

**Hon. M. McLane:** Ask WALP. That would be a WALP question. [Laughter]

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, I see where the issue lies now.

[Laughter]

**M. MacFarlane:** So, that's on the LPN to the bachelor of science in nursing. What about the bachelor of science in nursing bridging up to nurse practitioners? Is this also captured in this section?

**Karen Stanley:** No, there's nothing for that at this point in time.

**M. MacFarlane:** And if there was something at some point in time, I assume it would fit within this section?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, depending on what it is, because I think now you can just – once you have your BScN, you can actually go and apply to become an NP; you don't need that laddering of credentials. But if there was a special program developed and we were involved, this is where it would be.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, I'll ask the question: Is there an intention to move into a particular program like that?

**Hon. M. McLane:** The federal government has a loan forgiveness program for nurse practitioners. It's up to \$30,000. You upskill to a nurse practitioner and there's up to \$30,000 in loan forgiveness for nurse practitioners. It's not a very old program – probably six, nine months where they introduced it. There's also one for LFM's too, family physicians.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, thank you for that. I think this is a pretty important section that we're on right now for expanding our workforce and meeting the needs of our health care

professionals who want to upskill. We all see the value that NPs provide in our health care system.

The equipment line jumps out at me a bit in that there's quite a jump. What would that be about, please?

**Karen Stanley:** Equipment required for the expansion of the Transition to Registered Nursing in Canada program.

**M. MacFarlane:** Equipment? It surprises me that there's equipment necessary for that.

**Karen Stanley:** It would be for the specialized mannequins that they may need, or any different types of just general equipment. I can bring it back because I do not have the notes. It just says to see option 1, and I don't have option 1 here.

**M. MacFarlane:** Maybe, if you would. I don't want to create a lot of homework, but it is a significant year-over-year increase on that particular line.

**Hon. M. McLane:** The program is doubling in capacity.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, the program is doubling in capacity. But yeah, that's not a problem; like I said, that is definitely something that I know I have.

[3:10 p.m.]

**M. MacFarlane:** Next, I'd just look at the travel and training line and wonder if you could explain the spend there that's forecasted: \$69,700.

**Karen Stanley:** Absolutely. Our workforce staff accompanied the recruitment staff on quite a few different trade missions during the past year, so the budget was up to reflect that. What I mean by that is there were various conferences; there were job fairs for physicians and nurses in London, in Birmingham, and in Dublin.

For last year, our staff went out with them. As well, our principal nursing advisor – because we were expanding the nursing program, or we wanted to; we want to bring in more of the TRNCs – they went to a lot of the job fairs. They were in Toronto and Regina. There were trips to Philadelphia for an anesthesia conference. So, even though the recruitment is with Health PEI, our staff does accompany them.

**M. MacFarlane:** And I see we're at a forecast of \$48,200. Last year it was budgeted \$13,600, so it looks to me like there's an expectation that in the coming year there'll be the requirement for further staff accompaniment with Health PEI recruitment to other places. Is that an initiative that's on the books of additional missions?

**Karen Stanley:** That is what we see as happening this year.

**M. MacFarlane:** Sorry, just to clarify that, you see continuing on the mission...?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes. Maybe not to the degree that it did happen this year, but yes, we do see it continuing.

**M. MacFarlane:** I guess when we get into the Health PEI section, we'll see the budget for the travel and training for Health PEI. So, then to get a fulsome number, we'll add the two together to see what the expected spend would be on the travel missions.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. Was this section – in the heading, didn't that also include recruitment as well at one point?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes. The recruitment portion of it, which was about \$4 million to \$5 million, transferred to Health PEI effective April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, there's obviously still a recruitment element from what we just talked about.

**Karen Stanley:** A little bit. A lot of the time, our manager may accompany them. In '24-25, when they were intertwined, I think that's why you saw so much travel. I'm thinking now that they're not quite as intertwined, there may be less, but it's really hard to tell right now because this will be the first year that they're separated.

**M. MacFarlane:** I think it previously included the Physicians Recruiting Physicians initiative. Was that also in this section?

**Karen Stanley:** It was. I don't believe the initiative is moving forward at this point in time, but all of that moved to Health PEI.

**M. MacFarlane:** Just to clarify that, Karen, is there still that initiative but under Health PEI, or

has that initiative been removed from here and it's no longer a part of the recruitment strategy? Specifically the Physicians Recruiting Physicians.

**Karen Stanley:** How about I will know the answer when we get to the section in Health PEI?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah, we can talk about it then.

**M. MacFarlane:** Is there somebody else on the list, Chair?

**Chair:** Yeah.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West  
Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Did you change the name of this section?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, because recruitment moved.

**Hon. M. McLane:** (Indistinct)

**G. McNeilly:** What? [Laughter]

**Hon. M. McLane:** Have you been listening?

**G. McNeilly:** Well, I was just trying to....

[Laughter]

**G. McNeilly:** Well, I was looking at this because it's.... I might have missed it because I wasn't....

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, the recruitment portion of it – last year it was called health workforce and recruitment, and it was about \$5 million more than what it is now. It's because the recruitment portion moved to Health PEI effective April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

**G. McNeilly:** Why did that happen?

**Karen Stanley:** Because it was felt that it would be better to have the recruitment for the – that's something that we've been getting from consultations for ages, that something that should be happening, to have the recruitment actually in Health PEI so that it's all working together as a more cohesive unit.

[3:15 p.m.]

**G. McNeilly:** Yeah, and that's why I kind of tuned off to maybe the answer of that because I was looking at different things and it's changed so dramatically from the budget book. It's impossible to keep accountability with the programs that are not in there anymore. Now, we have to take the old budget books and then cross-reference them to a Health PEI section?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**G. McNeilly:** I'm sure that's not a problem for you, but when you're only....

**Karen Stanley:** Just think of how much work it is for you and then multiple it by about 100, and you've got how much work it was for me.

[Laughter]

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, is there a question in here somewhere?

**G. McNeilly:** Yes. I'm just looking at how can we – and I'll go through that afterwards, but there are some pretty important programs in here in the old section....

**Hon. M. McLane:** (Indistinct) the new section.

**Karen Stanley:** If you're looking at the big books and if you're looking at the two of them, you'll see some names or programs that are the same. For those, those are the ones that remained. The bulk of what you saw in last year's will be in Health PEI.

**G. McNeilly:** For the UPEI paramedicine degree program that wasn't there in '23-24, it had just started in '24-25....

**Karen Stanley:** [Laughter] Sorry, I'm laughing because that moved, but not to Health PEI. That is actually now in emergency health services, which is a couple of sections down.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, you're struggling; you need some help....

**G. McNeilly:** No, I don't need help, but Karen, this is difficult when you're looking at different things in here.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora did just fine.

**Karen Stanley:** That \$150,000 paramedicine, it did continue again this year.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay. It's funny because the first thing I mentioned went to another section, but you said, and we talked about it, all going to Health PEI....

**Karen Stanley:** With the exception of that.

**G. McNeilly:** There are no other exceptions?

**Karen Stanley:** No other exceptions.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay. I will continue to keep that in mind. I appreciate it. That can't be an easy change for the chief financial officer of health. I appreciate it. We'll see how that works out. Again, it becomes about accountability between a department and an authority. Hopefully, we'll get some answers on the floor on how that transition is going.

Thank you very much.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

This seems to be as close to an HR section as I can see. I'm wondering if exit surveys of health care staff are captured in this section.

**Karen Stanley:** No, that would be in Health PEI.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, would this be the section, though, responsible if we're – I know we talk a lot about the new medical school here on the Island, but what about our residency seats? Is this the section that would put money into increasing those seats or funding and supporting those seats?

**Karen Stanley:** No.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. I'm going to have to try and keep these in place for then.

Does the Department of Health and Wellness play any role in the collaboration between our communities and our post-secondary institutions in offering training programs for health care professionals in our communities, like either continuing professional development/upskilling? Is that sort of continuing development included in this section of health workforce development?

**Karen Stanley:** What type of continuing development are you thinking of? The short answer is no, but I'm trying to figure out where to send you.

**M. MacFarlane:** In the recent platform of the government, there was a promise to work with communities and post-secondary institutions to offer these training programs for health care professionals in communities across the province. I'm wondering where we would see, if anywhere, where that particular initiative might be placed. To me, it sounds almost like something that the colleges would put on themselves.

**Karen Stanley:** It's not something that I am familiar with.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, that's fine. If it's not here, it's not here.

I think that's all I have on the section, Chair.

**Chair:** Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Health Workforce Development:  
3,823,500

Shall it carry? Carried.

[3:20 p.m.]

Chief Public Health Office

"Appropriations provided for administration of the *Public Health Act*, supervision of provincial public health programs, immunization programs, disease surveillance, and communicable disease control." Administration: 30,200. Equipment: 5,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 7,378,400. Professional Services: 866,200. Salaries: 2,017,100. Travel and Training: 19,000.

Total Chief Public Health Office: 10,315,900

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West  
Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Chair.

To start off, the chief public health officer – is that position full-time?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**G. McNeilly:** I noticed the chief public health officer and the deputy chief public health officer had increases – I know that they were – to their salary lines by \$120,000. Was that because of the master agreement?

**Karen Stanley:** The physician services agreement, yes.

**G. McNeilly:** So, do those positions just follow along with the master agreement?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, that's correct.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, I noticed that, and I did notice in there that one of the positions actually decreased underneath them. There was a slight decrease when I went back through the budget book last year.... I can tell you which one....

**Chair:** How many budget books have you got?

**G. McNeilly:** I've got – well, this is the thing.

[Laughter]

**G. McNeilly:** You have to because they're not.... You need both....

**Karen Stanley:** It may have just been the timing. There should have been no decrease in the salaries.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Might have been a start date issue.

**Karen Stanley:** Could have been a start date issue, yes.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, great.

Then I'll ask this – and this is why you have both budget books, Chair: In '23-24, there was \$307,000 forecasted for an overdose prevention site, and in '24-25, there was \$812,000 forecasted for that said overdose prevention site. Where is that overdose prevention site?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Get back to (Indistinct) from a budget perspective. Even the Health Canada order that would allow us to do one was only valid until September of this year. So, I guess there is some uncertainty, somewhat, whether that health order will continue. I forget what they call it, the emergency health order that allows jurisdictions to do it. Last time I looked, it was up to September 2025. So, with a government change, whether that may continue

is kind of – places are up in the air. But it may have been renewed; I haven't looked at it lately.

**G. McNeilly:** Could you just clarify what you just said?

**Hon. M. McLane:** There is no money in this budget to stand up an OPS at this time.

**Karen Stanley:** The funding that was originally budgeted for that – the \$800,000 – has been reallocated to various harm reduction programs, including a contract with PEERS Alliance for about \$500,000 for harm reduction programs as well as the purchase of naloxone kits for pharmacies and other take-home naloxone kits. So, we've reutilized the funding for other items.

**G. McNeilly:** Yeah, and that would be the \$542,000 in the current budget, but that leaves about \$300,000. Where is that money?

**Karen Stanley:** Most of that you would find is part of the increase in the materials, supplies, and services because of the increase in take-home naloxone kits.

**G. McNeilly:** When you look at the overdose prevention site, it was something that government was going to move forward with. Why did it stop? Why did that not go forward, minister?

**Hon. M. McLane:** If you could relate your question to the budget, and I've already answered – again, back to the budget – that there is no funding in the current budget to do so.

**Chair:** Sorry, I didn't hear your question, hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Oh, you didn't hear my question?

**Chair:** No. I wasn't listening, to be honest.

**G. McNeilly:** Would you like me to repeat my question?

**Chair:** Sure.

**G. McNeilly:** Was the government ever going to build...? You could have done it until September. You chose not to. There's \$300,000 there that I don't know where it went.

[3:25 p.m.]

When was the decision made to not follow your own budget and follow the money that was supposed to be allocated for this service in your own budget last year, and we don't see it now, minister?

**Hon. M. McLane:** I don't think it would be prudent to stand up an OPS if the urgent health order was going to be rescinded in September. It'd be a significant waste of money, to be quite honest with you, with the uncertainty of the government change.

Obviously, things have changed, but six months ago it would have appeared that that might not survive an election.

**G. McNeilly:** So, it was pulled because of the order, or it was...?

**Chair:** Is it a budget question?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah. I guess I'll refer to my answer that there are currently no funds in this budget to proceed.

**G. McNeilly:** Can we get a breakdown of the \$542,000 that was partially allocated? It's under consultation. It says drug-checking and harm reduction measures.

Can you give me a breakdown of what drug checking would be?

**Karen Stanley:** I will have to ask. I just know that's what's in the contract.

**G. McNeilly:** I know you have a harm reduction officer in that area, and he's done a great job. Can you provide information on that budget line, and a more detailed expenditure of what you spent?

**Karen Stanley:** For harm reduction?

**G. McNeilly:** Yes, to cover off that line. Did it all go to PEERS Alliance?

**Karen Stanley:** No, only \$500,000 went to PEERS Alliance. That was the amount of the contract with them.

**G. McNeilly:** I appreciate that.

The consultation, the miscellaneous – it was only \$4,500. It was one time, but I don't know what miscellaneous was. Do you know? Under that line for the chief public health officer.

**Karen Stanley:** I'll have to find out; mine says miscellaneous as well.

**G. McNeilly:** Do you know if all the positions under the Chief Public Health Office are fully staffed at this time?

**Karen Stanley:** They are not. The senior public health policy and planning officer has been vacant since last June when the incumbent moved into the director position, and we've been having troubles backfilling the position.

**G. McNeilly:** That's a pretty important position, public health policy and planning officer. Have you put out competitions outside of Prince Edward Island for that? How many competitions have you run? That's a pretty important position.

**Karen Stanley:** There's been at least two or three. I am assuming that they did promote it outside of Prince Edward Island.

I also do know that to help fill that vacancy, they've been bringing back staff who have retired to come try to help fill in with the extra work while they are still actively trying to hire.

**G. McNeilly:** Under salaries, the budget estimate was \$1.6 million, the budget forecast was \$1.6 million, but you're down – it looks like \$100,000 down there, and then your forecast next year is up about half a million dollars. Do those numbers really...?

**Karen Stanley:** They do because – the reason why you didn't see a big decrease in the estimate to forecast is, as I said, we've been bringing in retired staff to try to help fill that vacancy. Just because that position isn't staffed doesn't mean the work goes away, so we've been bringing in some people who have retired in the last couple of years to try to help fill that.

**G. McNeilly:** I'm glad to hear that for sure.

And then we looked at it for...

[3:30 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** As you mentioned, the majority of that increase is related to the change in the Physician Services Agreement, but as well, there is the addition of a digital health implementation specialist to help with that. That would be with immunization records – which, in the environment we're in today, is more important than ever – and to help with any digital

initiatives. So, we have a new staff member for that.

**G. McNeilly:** But that didn't make the budget book – or.... It's digital health....

**Chair:** You might be looking at the wrong one.

**Karen Stanley:** I'm fairly sure it's there.

**G. McNeilly:** Is it there?

**Karen Stanley:** No, maybe it's not. No, it is not there.

**G. McNeilly:** It's only taken me six years to figure this out.

**Karen Stanley:** Yeah. No, it's not there.

**G. McNeilly:** So, where is that in the budget?

**Karen Stanley:** It's actually included in that number, but I guess because it was a new position added this year, it just didn't get added to the listing.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, thank you for that great explanation.

The materials, supplies, and services, obviously, are up. It was overspent last year and it's up again quite substantially for next year. Can you just maybe provide an explanation on that?

**Karen Stanley:** The most of that is our drugs and vaccines that we purchase. The increase is primarily due to – part of it is the introduction of the RSV vaccine to community care facilities and nursing homes. We had started that with it being into just community facilities and nursing homes in '24-25, and then in '25-26 we're adding it so that people over the age of 80 in the community will also be eligible for the RSV vaccine.

**G. McNeilly:** That's a good news story, and I think that it's money well spent.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Did Borden-Kinkora hear that?

**G. McNeilly:** No. Well, you won't hear it from me very often.

**Hon. M. McLane:** That's a good one; that's important.

**G. McNeilly:** That's important planning.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah.

**G. McNeilly:** I'm really, really glad to hear. The RSV is something, and when we're talking about long-term care and seniors, it becomes very, very problematic for them to get sick. So, that just started last year. Can you tell me anything more about that program – money spent, federal government assistance?

**Karen Stanley:** It's all provincial.

**Chair:** You can't take credit for that one.

**Karen Stanley:** The RSV – we spent about \$333,000 in '24-25, and in '25-26, we're budgeting \$420,000.

**G. McNeilly:** We have RSV – are there any others that we're looking at adding to make sure we're putting that protection on our seniors at this time, proactively, before the flu season, before these seasons come about?

**Karen Stanley:** Something else that we started doing is we are providing point of care testing for respiratory illnesses to community care facilities and private nursing homes so that we're able to find out very quickly if they have RSV, COVID, the flu, whichever.

Instead of having them take them, send it to the laboratory, and backlogging the laboratory, they're able to actually have the analyzer there to help with that. We're putting \$500,000 into that.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Another good one.

**G. McNeilly:** I think that's great. That's why I like this line in the budget because they do such good work of protecting our seniors.

That is money well spent in the Chief Public Health Office. That's their job to do and they do a great job of it, so I want to thank them for that. I will remember that when I visit Beach Grove, PE Home, and Garden Home in my area.

Thank you very much. That's good for right now, Chair.

[B. Trivers in the chair]

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

Further to that line of questioning, all of the vaccines that get out to – whether it's the pharmacies or whoever they're administered, flu shots, RSV, I think Shingrix is another one.

**Karen Stanley:** That's correct.

**M. MacFarlane:** Obviously, the COVID vaccine is....

**Karen Stanley:** The COVID vaccine is actually an interesting one because up until this year, it was actually funded federally. However, the federal government has indicated that they are going to stop funding it, so the provinces will have to start picking that up.

**M. MacFarlane:** What's the Province's response going to be to that?

**Karen Stanley:** It's my understanding that all the provinces collectively are still in negotiations with the federal government. However, \$1 million was added to the budget this year just to ensure that we do have funding if we do have to do that.

[3:35 p.m.]

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. So, this section I would think would also include – and I was listening to the answer on Charlottetown-West Royalty's question on the materials, supplies, and services line. What allotment is there for the Public Health Office to communicate with the public the importance of vaccines, whether it be any of the ones that we just mentioned? Because we've seen a bit of a backslide in the uptake of vaccines. I guess measles would be another one we haven't talked about as well.

**Karen Stanley:** Absolutely. They do have a small public relations, but most of the health promotion type of work is actually in a separate section.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, which I think is coming up after the next one, if I see that right.

**Karen Stanley:** That's correct.

**M. MacFarlane:** It seems to me that when we went through the capital budget, a lot of the different sections had money for digitizing; digital platforms interfacing between the public and health records and that sort of thing. Is this

the section where we would see supports?  
Again, not going back to the capital budget, but is there a movement to either streamline or digitize our access to our vaccine records?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, and that was part of the reason why they added the new position of the digital (Indistinct) specialist.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, thank you. That's what triggered the question in my mind. So, that person's title is what again, sorry? Digital...?

**Karen Stanley:** Digital health implementation specialist. He was a key person in the CANImmunize work that was done. That was when COVID came in, when we were first getting the COVID records digitized. He had been brought on during that project, and we realized at that point in time what a key position that was, so that's why we have made the position permanent.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, that position's goal would be to implement the additional funding from the capital budget to...? What will...?

**Karen Stanley:** No, they just help and assist with it. There is a digital health section that we will see – it's actually the very last section here – and they help with the actual development of the MyHealthPEI portal, which is probably part of what you're thinking of. But this person works as a liaison between the CPHO and digital health.

**M. MacFarlane:** That's all I have on this section, Chair.

**Chair:** Shall it carry? Carried.

#### Population Health Assessment and Surveillance

“Appropriations provided for monitoring and reporting on health status and trends in the Province. The unit supports evidence-based decision-making and promotes continuous improvement by generating, analyzing, and interpreting information.” Administration: 4,300. Equipment: 2,800. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 15,600. Professional Services: 132,100. Salaries: 496,700. Travel and Training: 300.

Total Population Health Assessment and Surveillance: 651,800

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

Just a general higher-level question to start on this. It looks like the appropriations have been fairly consistent, and the spend. Is there anything new that's contemplated, or is it continuing on course with this section?

**Karen Stanley:** Continuing on course.

**M. MacFarlane:** This is the section, I assume, where there'd be population health reports?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** Can you tell us what the spend from last year resulted in, by way of reports completed?

**Karen Stanley:** Sure. They've done a lot of really great work in the past year. They do specific areas of work in surveillance of communicable and chronic diseases, substances, health states, monitoring the public health, population-based research, program evaluation. They were also very key on Live Well PEI, the design phase; not necessarily what you would see with the promotion, but on some of the websites and working with the communities to gather the information.

The 2024 multi-substance survey, which happened, I think, last fall – they were key in the collection of that. They designed and developed the process of implementing a multi-substance surveillance system following up on the survey. They also are part of the enhanced surveillance of anti-microbial resistant gonorrhoea, and then they contributed to a variety of other issues.

[3:40 p.m.]

**M. MacFarlane:** That's a lot.

**Karen Stanley:** Very much so.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah, they do a lot.

**M. MacFarlane:** I guess....

[Interjection]

**Karen Stanley:** (Indistinct) we want: lots of work (Indistinct) little money.

**Chair:** Come through the Chair, please, member.

[Laughter]

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, you have the floor.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

But in your previous answer, Karen, there was nothing new contemplated, so it is to be assumed that all of those reports that you named will be updated in this coming year?

**Karen Stanley:** Most of them will be. There may be other projects coming in '25-26 that we're not aware of at this point in time, but yes, most of the work is continuing.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. Again, I guess going back to our previous chat about some of the vaccines and the backsliding of vaccinations. What we're hearing in the States, the minister of health down there has a bit of a different perspective on vaccines than I would hope most of us might. Is that helping to fuel the direction of some of these reports at all, just with the propagation of measles all of a sudden again, for example?

**Karen Stanley:** Not that I'm aware of.

**Hon. M. McLane:** It'll be health promotion. That would be in the health promotion budget, right?

**Karen Stanley:** Some of it might be, yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** The vital signs project – did you talk about the vital signs project? I guess my question would be: How is the department using the data from that? Does that come through here?

**Karen Stanley:** If it does, I'm not aware of it.

**M. MacFarlane:** Am I in the wrong section on where that would be?

**Karen Stanley:** I don't know. I've never heard of the project before, so I can't really help.

**Hon. M. McLane:** I mean, it contributed to our statistical review, if that's what we're kind of confusing those names together.

**Karen Stanley:** They provide input into the *State of the Island Report*, the statistical review. The all-immunization registry to the new IT platform, they have also contributed to that.

They are also part of the *What We Heard* report on the wellness in PEI. Most of that will be in the next section under health promotion. But they work very much hand in hand with health promotion.

**M. MacFarlane:** I guess maybe just a comment before I go to my next question. It just seems that the importance of this section is growing every year.

**Karen Stanley:** Absolutely.

**M. MacFarlane:** Are there any concerns from the staff that it's a struggle to keep up with the growing demands and expectations? It's really important work being completed here. To the very first question I asked, there doesn't seem to be any increase; it's been holding fairly consistent. I don't know if you have a comment in response to that, but my comment is that it almost looks like it should deserve some extra funding.

The professional services line was overspent a fair bit.

**Karen Stanley:** No, it was underspent.

**M. MacFarlane:** Yeah, underspent. Sorry, I'm looking at it cross-eyed. Why was that?

**Karen Stanley:** You'll notice it was underspent, but the salaries were overspent. Instead of hiring out consultants, we actually ended up hiring them as casual employees, some of it, so it was just a movement of money.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, and was a large part of that money spent on that Live Well project?

**Karen Stanley:** The consultants that we did spend? No, most of the Live Well expenditures will be in the health promotion, which is next.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. The funds, then, for the Live Well project are in the next section.

**Karen Stanley:** That's correct.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay.

**Chair:** Shall it carry? Carried.

Health Promotion

[3:45 p.m.]

“Appropriations provided to support the health and wellness of Islanders and to promote a proactive process to enable Islanders to increase control over, and to improve, their health. The unit is responsible for implementing the provincial Wellness Strategy across Government, and in partnership with non-government organizations and communities including the development, coordination, and evaluation of a comprehensive and integrated Provincial Tobacco Cessation Program.”  
Administration: 7,200. Equipment: nil.  
Materials, Supplies, and Services: 495,800.  
Professional Services: 427,700. Salaries: 751,800. Travel and Training: 6,700. Grants: 191,500.

Total Health Promotion: 1,880,700

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West  
Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you very much. Appreciate it. We get here every year, and I ask similar questions every year. I’m sorry about that, but it’s important. It’s a good snapshot of where we’re going with health promotion. I think this and the last section are incredibly important; I think that I made it clear.

My first question is: Where is our wellness strategy?

**Karen Stanley:** The Live Well public consultation, the *What We Heard*, was recently released. The report was prepared by a third party, and it was released to the public. It shows what they’re looking for. We’ve moving to the next stages. They have approval to set up a multi-sectoral council to review the program and come up with recommendations to move forward with.

**G. McNeilly:** I’m glad to hear that. A wellness strategy is, again, overarching. There are elements of it within Live Well and the streams of health promotion; I understand that. But it seems like I’ve always asked about how I need an overarching strategy, and those things all fall within it. Live Well is one of those things which we’ve been talking about for a very long time.

What is the anticipated date of a complete wellness strategy for Prince Edward Island?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Budget. (Indistinct) relate it to the budget, the question.

**G. McNeilly:** Do you have enough people in health promotions to deliver a full wellness strategy for Prince Edward Island?

**Hon. M. McLane:** Oh, I think it’s important that we did the Live Well public consultation this year with 1,100 respondents. I think we interacted with 70 organizations in that consultation process, so it is a big part of work. I would say that it’s starting to advance. It has been slow, but I think the last year, the file is starting to get some momentum, for sure.

**G. McNeilly:** And I’m delighted about the work. I’m delighted about the different things. I guess my job is to make sure that we’re keeping you accountable, and that Live Well is making Islanders healthier, and that our wellness strategy, overarching, does that too.

What I’m worried about is the workforce in health promotion. How many vacancies do we have as health promotion officers and managers in health promotion?

**Karen Stanley:** I am happy to say only one...

**G. McNeilly:** Wow.

**Karen Stanley:** ...which, considering where we have been in the past, only one is phenomenal. That is actually due to the recent retirement of the manager. The health promotion officer – who is now acting manager – that position hasn’t been filled yet, but that was just a recent change. Other than that, they are actually a full complement.

**G. McNeilly:** Good. I want to thank the manager who was there for many years and advanced this and did an incredible job. I know she was short-staffed a lot of time. She just did an incredible job moving different projects forward, and her passion shone through.

Put me back on the list, minister. I just wanted to say that. Thank you.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

This is the section on, I see, specifically the comprehensive and integrated provincial tobacco cessation program. What about smoke-free spaces? Is there anything to promote smoke-free spaces?

**Karen Stanley:** There is nothing in here in my notes. That doesn't mean it's not here, it's just not in my notes.

**M. MacFarlane:** I'd be curious if there was something in here because we're moving, obviously with different programs, to support stopping smoking. But then, related to that is the harmful effects of second-hand smoke and the enforcement and the regulation of public spaces being smoke-free; communication surrounding that. I thought that might fit under the health promotion, Chair, I don't know. Maybe not.

**Karen Stanley:** I will look into it and get back to you.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you for that.

The professional services line – I don't think Charlottetown-West Royalty asked the specific question, but we were underspent on that.

[3:50 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** And that is because with some of this funding, I'll admit, when we're budgeting, we don't know where to put it. You'll notice that the consultants is underspent, but the grants went up. It was just a matter of reorganizing it because when we have a lot of money like this, they don't have a plan at the first of the year or when we're doing it in January, so we move the money where it's needed. So, we just moved it to grants.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, but on the grants line, it looks like the grants were also underspent.

**Karen Stanley:** No, the grants were overspent a little bit.

You'll also see that the materials, supplies, and services were overspent. The materials, supplies, and services is where you would find the advertising. So, we took that consultant money that we weren't spending and some of it went to advertising; some of it went to grants.

It was just a matter of looking at it globally and putting it where the money was most needed.

**M. MacFarlane:** I see. You're moving it around within those sections, within the section.

What were the wellness grants? Where did they go last year?

**Karen Stanley:** So, \$83,000 – not quite the whole \$100,000 – went to a variety of different communities. They have a wellness grant program that they have every year. That program actually increased from a budget of \$50,000 to now a budget of \$100,000. Then we also gave out school grants with a total of about \$30,000.

**M. MacFarlane:** I hate to say, "is that it," but was that it?

**Karen Stanley:** Yes. In addition, some funding went to the Canadian Cancer Society for the operation of the 1-800 tobacco quit line.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you very much.

The grants – I mean, in comparison to the overall budget, they're really small. They have increased, and I'll give you compliment for that, but they're nowhere where I do believe they need to be for health promotion on Prince Edward Island if they're taking the lead on a lot of these things.

The \$83,000 in community grants that went out – what's the forecast? Is it based on demand, or are we looking at getting both that and the school grants up next year?

**Karen Stanley:** Right now, we're looking at status quo for next year.

**G. McNeilly:** Is that because the grants were...?

I mean, when I look at this – I've seen all the programs and stuff and I can't do the math right now, but did we spend to where we thought we were going to spend to? Did anybody get cut off from those grants, or did we spend the full amount?

**Karen Stanley:** It's my understanding that no one got cut off. As you can see, there was still about \$17,000 that did not get spent, but these are relatively small grants. They are not big dollar grants.

**G. McNeilly:** Exactly, and the whole thing with grants is it doesn't provide consistency from year to year, normally.

**Karen Stanley:** No, they have to apply every year for these grants.

**G. McNeilly:** Exactly. I've run into different seniors programs that are thinking about applying, and then they get stuck in the application process. I know that's difficult.

I don't know how to solve that, necessarily, but I would like to see more people and more funding go into those grants because I think that they're very important. That's maybe just a statement.

I do have a question, too, outside of that.

**Chair:** I'd love a question. Go ahead.

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you. I didn't know if I was going to ask questions on that, but I thought I'd ask questions on this, too, instead.

Recently, last year, the Finance minister talked about releasing some funds from the sale of alcohol on Prince Edward Island over into health promotion. That's where it was going to sit, under the chief public health officer and health promotion, as I see it.

Can you give me dollar figures? Do you have the dollar figures for how much money Health Promotion got?

**Karen Stanley:** \$150,000.

**Chair:** One more, and then I'll go back to the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** So, \$150,000 went in, and that money's already come in, but yet, I don't see it deflected anywhere here.

[3:55 p.m.]

**Karen Stanley:** That was how much money they got for '24-25. So, they spent what they spent.

What I mean is, we got \$150,000; they probably would have spent the \$150,000 anyway because they still spent what....

**G. McNeilly:** I'll ask more questions on that.

**Chair:** Okay. Thanks, hon. member.

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Chair.

I see some of the efforts at meeting the mandate of this section comes through professional services, some of it comes through grants, and as Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty said, it's not always easy to predict a year-over-year budget based on grants. It seems to me, looking at it, that it's a bit of a scattered approach with a little bit of money sprinkled here, there, and everywhere around.

When we look at something like smoking, it was a major concern of our Public Health Office, who made it quite clear that we need to do more to get Islanders to quit smoking. I'm just wondering if the strategy is working to accomplish that particular goal when we see this – Take Breath campaign, \$8,500; smoking cessation graphic design and materials, \$1,435. I doesn't seem like there's a lot of money being invested into this particular initiative, and I just wondered...

**Karen Stanley:** We do spend \$300,000 annually on the smoking cessation drugs to assist Islanders with quitting smoking.

**Hon. M. McLane:** We also expanded into community pharmacies this year for them to deliver the smoking cessation program.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, \$300,000 on drugs. But that's not in this section, I guess.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes, it is.

**M. MacFarlane:** Oh, it is?

**Karen Stanley:** It's under materials, supplies, and services.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay.

In addition to that, I see the 1-800 tobacco quit line. Is there anything else – and I'm trying to flip between the grants and the professional services – I guess just specific to the smoking cessation mandate of the section?

**Karen Stanley:** In the promotion portion of it, primarily in advertising, almost \$100,000 was spent on promotion for tobacco.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay, but in this section, in addition to tobacco, we have alcohol as well.

**Karen Stanley:** And \$72,000 was spent on promotion for alcohol.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay.

**Karen Stanley:** Promotion for less is best.

**M. MacFarlane:** But also, it's the section on general Health and Wellness as well.

**Karen Stanley:** Yes.

**M. MacFarlane:** Okay. I just want to make sure that I'm understanding that. It captures a lot of different things.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Maybe this will be the time for one last question, or whatever, before we change over.

I'm glad to see that \$150,000, but you said that they spent what they spent. But this is the budget, and I don't see it anywhere in the budget.

**Karen Stanley:** So, if they were able to spend the additional \$150,000, we would have added it to the expenditures. They just didn't spend it.

**G. McNeilly:** They didn't spend it?

**Karen Stanley:** No. They didn't spend \$150,000 more than their budget. So, they could have, but they were not able to. We did not restrict them.

**G. McNeilly:** Okay, so where is the money?

**Karen Stanley:** It's in our revenue at the moment, but that was for last year.

**G. McNeilly:** So, it came into general revenue of the Department of Health and Wellness. Can you table the plan that health promotion is going to use to spend that money?

**Hon. M. McLane:** I do know a couple of the things. I don't know if Karen is familiar with this. So, we did hold the big policy forum.

[Interjection]

[4:00 p.m.]

**Hon. M. McLane:** Okay, well, that's in the Confound Films. We did a 30-second video and two 15-second videos for socials for our youth audience, and I did some other policy work

within that. That's from my update at that time because myself and the Minister of Finance kind of coordinated on that.

**G. McNeilly:** That's positive.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Yeah. It's good.

**Chair:** I'm going to go to the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora for the last word.

**M. MacFarlane:** So, is there – on access to smoking cessation....

**Karen Stanley:** I can bring you back the details because I just prepared the invoice.

**M. MacFarlane:** It's 4:00, Chair.

**Chair:** Alright. We've reached 4:00, so we're going to adjourn debate here.

**Hon. M. McLane:** Mr. Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

**Chair:** Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

**B. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of supply to His Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

#### Motions Other Than Government

**Speaker:** I'll call on the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**S. Dillon:** At this time, we call Motion No. 26.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

**Clerk Assistant:** Motion No. 26: Broadening the scope of the playground fund to promote outdoor play and wellness for all ages.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, the following motion:

**WHEREAS** outdoor play and wellness initiatives are vital for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of students from Kindergarten through Grade 12;

**AND WHEREAS** the current Playground Equipment Fund provides funding for outdoor playground equipment, auxiliary gym equipment, and other recreation infrastructure at schools within the Public Schools Branch (PSB) and Commission scolaire de langue française (CSLF), matching funding up to \$25,000;

**AND WHEREAS** the existing fund is primarily directed towards playground equipment, which may not fully address the needs of older students and more comprehensive outdoor wellness activities across all school levels;

**AND WHEREAS** expanding the fund's scope to include more flexible, innovative outdoor initiatives would allow schools to create diverse environments promoting both physical activity and outdoor wellness, such as nature-based learning areas, sensory paths, and outdoor fitness spaces that accommodate students across all age groups and developmental stages;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government of Prince Edward Island to broaden the Playground Equipment Fund to allow for greater flexibility in funding outdoor play, wellness, and recreation projects for students of all ages, Kindergarten through Grade 12;

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Government ensure that schools have access to this expanded fund to support the development of inclusive, accessible, and diverse outdoor spaces, encouraging innovative approaches to student wellness and engagement.

**Speaker:** I'll call on the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to begin debate.

**S. Dillon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am excited to stand here today. After spending most of my life either helping to build a playground, or fundraising to build a playground, or providing duty on a playground, I've spent a lot of time watching students on a playground. So, this is really important to me, to the schools in my district, and I think to Island

schools right across our province, in both our French and English districts.

I am urging that the Department of Education expand the scope of the playground equipment fund to better promote outdoor play and wellness for all students from kindergarten through to grade 12. This motion recognizes the evolving needs of students and our communities when it comes to outdoor play and recreation, and overall wellness in our province.

[4:05 p.m.]

We know that access to outdoor spaces is not just a luxury; it's a necessity for both physical and mental wellbeing. Outdoor play that is unstructured creates opportunities for social and emotional growth for children of all ages, promoting problem solving and navigating friendships. Some of our best solutions come from solutions that children bring within friendships.

However, our current funding model primarily supports traditional playground structures, which are most suited for younger children. Other students, particularly those in middle and high school, often do not have the same access to outdoor spaces designed for their age group, leaving a gap in opportunities for outdoor engagement.

Expanding the scope of this fund will allow for the development of more diverse and innovative outdoor spaces, ones that go beyond playgrounds and instead promote movement, wellness, and social interaction across all age groups.

Just to give you an example, Stonepark has recently announced that they are fundraising for a multi-sport court, which I think is very age-appropriate for the children that attend that school. Stonepark offers a beautiful green space, but they really have no place for students to have productive time during their breaks. I think that a multi-sport court gives them the opportunity to play ball hockey or pickleball or basketball or some form of a sport that they want to do in a space that's safe and nice.

Numerous studies show the benefits of outdoor play. When students have access to outdoor play and wellness spaces, they see improvements in their physical health, mental health, and emotional and social wellbeing. Outdoor play encourages movement, reduces sedentary

behaviour, and promotes cardiovascular health. Children and youth who engage in outdoor activities are more likely to develop lifelong healthy habits. Spending time outdoors is also linked to reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. We want kids to be active, try new things, and stay engaged in positive play.

Exposure to natural environments has been shown to improve focus, boost mood, and enhance cognitive function. As well – I previously mentioned but worth mentioning again – play fosters teamwork, problem-solving skills, and creativity. It provides students with opportunities to build friendships, navigate social challenges, and develop a sense of belonging. Sometimes, students who work through their differences strengthen their friendships.

With rates of anxiety and depression among young on the rise, it is more important than ever that we prioritize outdoor space and support not just physical activity but emotional wellbeing. Expanding this fund will allow schools to create environments that meet the needs of all students, not just those in the early grades.

The current funding model, which matches spending up to \$25,000, has allowed many schools to develop high-quality playgrounds. However, its scope remains limited, primarily focused on traditional playground structures. For younger children, these playgrounds serve an important purpose. They encourage climbing, running, and imaginative play. But for older students, those in junior high and high school, traditional playgrounds may no longer meet their needs. If we are serious about promoting lifelong health and wellbeing, we need to ensure that outdoor spaces evolve alongside the students as they grow.

I feel like it's important to mention in here that in 1995, my very first year working at Eliot River School, we fundraised \$100,000 to build the Dream Park. Now, I don't know how many people have ever spent time with their family at the Dream Park, but I know my nieces and nephews used to come from Ontario, and the first thing that they would want to say is, "Aunt Susie, will you take us to the Dream Park?"

We fundraised that money. The community all came together, and we built that structure. To this day, when children arrive from Westwood and they come to Eliot River, the first thing that they want to do is get on the Dream Park and

play. I know just how important play structures are to kids in our school system.

Like I've mentioned before, the existing fund does not fully address the needs of older students. This is a crucial issue. Without spaces to cater to these needs, older students are less likely to remain physically active during breaks and after school. This can contribute to decreased physical activity, increased screen time, and lower overall engagement in wellness activities.

[4:10 p.m.]

A broadening to allow this fund to include spaces more age-appropriate could include, instead of affixed playground structures, the development of opened play spaces that allow for a range of activities from sports and yoga to community gatherings.

I will also note in here, too, that when we have structures at our school, it's not just school time that they're in use. Many times, community come after school to engage in whatever play structures are being offered at the school. Whether that's a playground facility or whether that's a multi-sport court, I see it not just as a school use but as a community use. It certainly benefits everybody living in the area.

I will mention that one time, we had to write a persuasive essay, and this little boy wrote to the City of Charlottetown – he had lived in Charlottetown at the time – persuading them to put more basketball courts throughout the city. He lived in Parkdale and felt that he didn't have the opportunity to play basketball after school on his own time. It also goes to show just how important it is for kids to stay active after school as during school.

By allowing for greater flexibility in the funding, we empower schools to design outdoor environments that reflect the unique needs of their students. It's about recognizing that physical activity and mental health and outdoor engagement are all interconnected. It's about ensuring that every student, from kindergarten to grade 12, has access to outdoor spaces that inspire movement, creativity, and wellbeing.

This is not just an investment in infrastructure, it is an investment in the future health of our youth. By broadening the playground equipment fund, we take an important step to fostering

healthier, happier, and more engaged students across our province.

I do want to also make note that although I spoke about Stonepark, I really speak about all junior highs and senior highs within our province that should have the opportunity to provide areas of unstructured play to all students to keep our students engaged in positive activities and continue to foster growth.

With that, I will move on to the seconder of the motion.

**Speaker:** Thank you, member.

The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

**H. MacLennan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is with great pride that I rise in the House today to speak in full support of Motion No. 26, introduced by my colleague, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

This motion proposes the expansion of the playground equipment fund, a timely and thoughtful measure that recognizes the vital importance of our outdoor play, physical activity, and wellness for students and community members across Prince Edward Island.

At its heart, this motion acknowledges a principle that is both simple and powerful. Outdoor play spaces are an essential infrastructure. These are not secondary considerations or optimal amenities. They are the fundamental environments that foster the health, development, and social wellbeing of our children, and, indeed, our entire population.

As legislators, it is our responsibility to ensure that the tools for healthy living are not a privilege but a public good, accessible to all.

When many people think of playgrounds, the image that often comes to mind is one of young children enjoying recess, swinging from the monkey bars, sliding, laughing, and playing. This image is joyful, and it is accurate, but it is also incomplete.

While playgrounds are certainly places of fun and laughter, they are also essential developmental environments. They are spaces where important life skills are nurtured and

where early lessons in cooperation, sharing, problem-solving, and imagination take root. Numerous studies conducted by pediatric health experts, developmental psychologists and educators reinforce what many of us already know: play is essential to healthy development.

[4:15 p.m.]

Children who have access to high-quality outdoor play areas are more likely to develop stronger motor skills, enjoy better attention spans, and demonstrate stronger social aptitude. These benefits extend well beyond the schoolyard, preparing children not just for academic success but for success in life.

And yet, despite this compelling evidence, the current scope of our playground equipment fund remains somewhat limited. At present, the fund is designed to support playground equipment, auxiliary gym equipment, and other recreational infrastructure at schools within the Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board, matching contributions up to \$25,000. This is undoubtedly helpful, and we applaud the assistance of the program, but we can do more.

The world has changed. The way we think about wellness and education has evolved. Students today from kindergarten to grade 12 face complex physical, mental, and emotional pressures. As such, we must ensure that our infrastructure evolves in tandem. Traditional playgrounds, while still valuable, are not sufficient to meet the diverse needs of all learners across all age groups. We need to imagine and create spaces that accommodate different stages of development, varying interests, and inclusive experience.

Expanding the playground equipment fund to support nature-based learning areas, outdoor fitness circuits, sensory paths, community gardens, and inclusive recreational spaces would be a transformative step forward. These initiatives provide more than just places to play; they offer a bridge to wellness, equity, and innovation in education.

Moreover, we must think beyond schools alone. Public outdoor spaces that serve entire communities are equally important. Parks, greenways, walking paths, and accessible wellness areas create opportunities for all Islanders to engage in physical activity and connect with one another.

Slemon Park, a district in my riding with about 500 residents, currently faces a challenge. Its aging playground is in dire need of replacement, but the cost of doing so is very high. This financial barrier affects not just Slemon Park, but also other schools and communities across the province. To address this, I am working to secure funding for an outdoor multi-use court that can be enjoyed by people of all ages in Slemon Park.

A few years ago, Tyne Valley received a new playground complete with facilities for rollerblading, a dedicated pad for road hockey, and some green space. It has quickly become a highly valued community space, demonstrating the positive impact that such investments can have. These spaces support children, yes, but also seniors, families, individuals with disabilities, and newcomers to our province. In this way, outdoor wellness becomes a community-building initiative as much as it is a health one.

Expanding the scope of the fund allows us to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches. It encourages communities and school boards to pursue projects that reflect their unique needs and values. It gives schools the flexibility to support not just early learners but middle and high school students who might benefit from more age-appropriate outdoor activities such as fitness equipment, climbing walls, gardens, or team-building challenge courses. It invites collaboration with local non-profits, health organizations, and municipal governments to develop multi-use spaces that serve both educational and recreational purposes.

As we plan and build the outdoor spaces for the future, we must do so with the understanding that every person deserves the opportunity to enjoy them. That includes children and youth with physical disabilities or neurodivergent conditions. It includes elderly community members who may require seating, shade, or smooth paths to walk on. It includes families with limited resources who may rely on public spaces as their primary access to recreation. Designing with inclusivity in mind ensures that no one is left behind.

[4:20 p.m.]

The benefits of investing in outdoor play and wellness are not merely anecdotal, they are well documented. Increased physical activity reduces the risk of chronic illness. Regular engagement

with nature improves mental health, decreases stress, and builds emotional resilience. When students are healthy and emotionally balanced, they are more likely to attend school, engage positively with their peers, and achieve academically.

From a policy perspective, these outcomes represent a high return on investment. Every dollar we spend today on building supportive, inclusive, and active environments pays dividends towards tomorrow in reduced health costs, improved educational outcomes, and more vibrant communities. We know that healthy children grow into healthy adults, and healthy adults build strong economics and strong civic institutions.

This is why Motion No. 26 is so important. It is not just a proposal to expand the fund; it is a call to action. It challenges us to think bigger and do better. It invites us to recognize that our public spaces should grow and change with the needs of the people who use them.

We should have a goal to ensure every school on Prince Edward Island is surrounded by vibrant, flexible, and inclusive outdoor spaces. We should envision communities where children, teens, parents, and grandparents can come together in shared spaces designed to foster wellness, creativity, and belonging.

This is a future worth investing in, so today, I urge all members of this House to stand together in support of this motion. Let's send a clear message that we believe in building healthier communities, that we recognize the essential role that outdoor play and wellness spaces have, and let's take this opportunity to invest, not just in infrastructure, but in our values.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West  
Royalty.

**G. McNeilly:** Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak to this important motion.

It is something that is pretty fitting because we just had health promotion on the floor of the Legislature, where we see investments that need to be made and have come up very slowly, but haven't matched where we need to get to, given the state of where we are with our wellness and

activity levels in Prince Edward Island. I applaud the mover of this motion for bringing this forward.

It's very simple. It's really about promoting and getting more funding so that communities don't have to worry about that. They can worry about playing together and having the facilities there for them to do so when they need them.

The seconder just talked, too, about – he's lobbying for a court in Tyne Valley. Good for him.

[Interjection]

**G. McNeilly:** Slemon Park, sorry. They probably need a court in both places. So, that's very good. I'm glad to hear that and I hope you get it.

Once you start to look into that as an MLA, I think it's harder than you think it is to get this going. It seems very simple on paper, and it becomes more and more difficult. I look at a situation in Prince Edward Island recently where there was a council that became at odds because of pickleball courts. I don't know the details of the story. I don't know what happened, or who was right, who was wrong, but it was over pickleball courts.

The biggest thing about that was that it hurts rural or smaller communities because they don't have the tax base to build them and maintain the courts as well as going into that approach. It affects people in rural Prince Edward Island's physical activity more than it would in a bigger centre. That's what I got out of that as well.

[4:25 p.m.]

These things are expensive and they're very scary to put in. If you're looking at pickleball, if you want to put them in at Stonepark, there are a lot of processes to do and it's very expensive to do that right now.

When you look at children's playgrounds, in that respect, the cost of the playgrounds nowadays is incredible. You have to bring them in, make sure they fit, and test them out, and installers come in from out-of-province. We don't make those playgrounds here in Prince Edward Island. It becomes very expensive, and to have the same amount of numbers – it doesn't promote wellness. So, it's something that we either have

to look at bringing the threshold up, or you look at funding the program.

In this Legislature, I've heard before that there is the money for it. On that side of the House, I've heard that they have lots of money and it's there. Well, let's invest it into health promotion and this wellness activity for our kids, because movement is absolutely key, and kids move in different ways. Some play with the playground, some don't, but if their friends do, they'll go over and hang out. They'll go over and participate. They'll go over if it's there for them.

If you just give them the opportunity, they will explore it, and that's what we need because movement patterns are created at an early age in society, and it lasts right through until the moments where you're in the hospital. What do we do in the hospital? We get people up. They have to get up, no matter where they are. It's movement. It's getting up. That's the sign of life.

We need to create this and be bold about our actions here in Prince Edward Island because we have the numbers about obesity. Nationally, they just came out with different strategies, physical activity being one of the things that you do to curb obesity, but it's more part of a holistic plan about how you're going to take on these major challenges. This could be very much one of them. So, I think that this motion is good.

It talks about older students too. It's not always just about playgrounds. The existing fund is primarily directed towards playground equipment which may not fully address the needs of older students and more comprehensive outdoor wellness activities across all school levels. That's where grants from health promotion come into play for the older students.

I'm working with I do believe a very amazing teacher who wrote me last year. I think I passed that forward, and you actually funded some of his programs in the Morell area. That was good. It was only \$1,000, but.... So, he's back looking for that money again to make sure that the kids have that continuity of a program. A simple little investment can change outcomes.

So, when you get into older high school students, you need that funding so that they can look at exploring the outdoors, exploring Indigenous trails or what happened years ago, or have those informative nature walks. Make it more interesting, and use people in the

community to tell stories. That's how you get people moving.

When you look at the work that this government did with the active transportation trails across Prince Edward Island, that was no easy task. That was no small feat to connect.

But how do we get more people using the trails that you built? Don't just stop there at building it, and say that they're going to get out there and use it. We have to do programming on those active transportation trails and make sure that people are getting more active.

It can be part of the school system, where there are various different things: "If you get from point A to point B, that's where we're going to have a get-together and then walk back." Make it more interesting and dynamic for an older-age demographic.

But at a younger age, that school fund has just not kept pace with the price tags, and Sherwood School is a primary example of where they will raise a lot of money, I'm sure – and they have already, I think to the tune of \$100,000 – but there's federal funding that will match if you get to a certain area. That money becomes more difficult to get to when you're in a smaller province with less population.

[4:30 p.m.]

We need to move more. We need to tap into government support, both municipally and provincially, and federally as well.

Students shouldn't have to worry about selling 50-50 tickets. They should worry about how they're going to chase their friend up the monkey bars. That's what they should be worrying about, and being active, instead of burdening them in communities with fundraising. It should be used to connect people together.

This is an important thing. It's for some reason, and I don't know what it is, that it's been government policy for decades not to fully fund playgrounds, to support that. But is this the time that we can change that, and how do we do that as well?

I don't know, as I'm finishing up my comments, just about – I love this motion. In the therefore be it resolved, I was thinking about making an amendment to it, but I might just talk about it

just to take it one step further and keep the integrity of the motion out of respect to the mover of the motion. It says: "...urge the Legislative Assembly and the Government of Prince Edward Island to broaden the Playground Equipment Fund to allow for greater flexibility ... in funding outdoor play."

I think – allow for great investments for outdoor play. We don't need flexibility with that. The students and the schools don't need flexibility. They need the funding, and they need the investment from this government. That's the only thing that I would really change is the word "flexibility" out there, I don't need them getting money at different times. I need them getting more money so that they can fund those school programs. That would be the only thing that I picked in the therefore be it resolved.

Other than that, I think this is a wonderful motion. I support the mover. I'm voting for this important motion. I look forward to getting an announcement from the Minister of Education that he would just simply double, triple, or even quadruple, because that's how much more money needs to go into this funding program. The Minister of Finance – hopefully, she can get some money going for this too.

Congratulations. I hope this motion passes with success and we see a lot more money for our kids to play.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

**Hon. R. Croucher:** It's a pleasure to rise and talk about something that's pretty important and a big part of my portfolio here.

I appreciate the mover, the seconder, and the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty for speaking to this motion. It definitely is an important one. Like it was said here, movement is well documented as being beneficial for our physical, our mental, and our emotional wellbeing. That's especially important for our students, and that's our students of all ages.

I'd like to actually give the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere a shout-out for her advocacy for Stonepark. I chuckled when she mentioned that multisport court because we've talked about that a number of times. She's a

great advocate for the school, playgrounds, and more movement for our students.

Our department is committed to outdoor learning spaces, play, and wellness initiatives. That's why we have a number of programs that support health and wellbeing activities for our students already in the province.

[4:35 p.m.]

The playground equipment fund that we talk about is available for home, school, and parents. They fundraise for that with the help of different organizations. We've made a commitment of a \$25,000 contribution, and we'll match. I think we are the first government potentially to do that. We're not just opening new schools and creating more capacity within our system; we're also working with our Home and Schools and our communities to make sure that the playgrounds and outdoor play spaces are there for our children.

We have the capital outdoor learning fund. That will be launched in the school year '25-26. That's going to help fund things like outdoor learning spaces. So, that's coming online. The outdoor learning grants that have supported over 200 teachers this school year – that's something else that we're doing.

But the playground equipment fund is the focus of this motion, and that program was created in the fiscal '22-23, I believe, to help support projects that normally would have been completely funded by fundraising and community donations and the efforts from our communities. I'm proud to say that since its launch, the playground equipment fund has helped get 29 projects completed. These projects are worth a total of close to \$800,000, with close to \$300,000 funded by the Province.

Now, that's a significant investment, especially when I hear my friends across the floor here talk about deficits and how we need to curb spending and whatnot. And here we are, we have a \$300,000 commitment to playgrounds. I think that's pretty significant. I think that's something to be applauded. I'm certainly proud of it.

Like I had said, each successful applicant can receive up to \$25,000 or 50 percent. It's a great opportunity to bring new, safe equipment which will help encourage movement for our students, for use during, before, and after school. And that before- and after-school thing is interesting

because I heard – I'm not sure who said it, but we talk about our newcomers to our province, and the after-traditional-school-hours play.

I know we've got a great playground in front of the Souris Regional School. We do need to get something done – I'm looking at the Minister of Transportation here – with the surface, where the grass is, because the kids play on it so much, there's no grass left there. They love that playground. And when I drive by there in the evening, any evening that's fit at all, there are children playing on the playground and their parents are sitting at a bench or a picnic table and watching them. It's great, and I do see a lot of newcomers utilizing our playgrounds.

The motion that the member put forward is looking for us to be flexible and open on what's eligible, and I would suggest that it already is. We always want more, but we have to be fiscally responsible, spend within our means when we can, and be responsible. We don't list out what you can buy. We only require that it is CSA approved, has a one-year warranty, and is located at either a Public Schools Branch school or a CSLF school.

This can look like a lot of different things. It doesn't have to be your traditional monkey bars, teeter-totter, or merry-go-round. It's things like playground structures, obviously, frisbee golf sets, sandboxes, traditional or inclusive swings – we've seen some of those popping up so that some of our littles that have disabilities can actually get out and play and utilize the playground equipment; I think that is so important. I'm so happy to see those kinds of things moving into our playgrounds and our schools. It can include basketball nets, soccer nets; any kind of auxiliary gym equipment for the junior and the senior high students.

So, there are things that are already being done and that are included in that package that we offer.

**S. Dillon:** Multi-sport court?

**Hon. R. Croucher:** Pardon me?

**S. Dillon:** A multi-sport court?

[4:40 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Croucher:** A multi-sport court? Well, member, I anticipate you and I are going to have

many more conversations on how that might look.

I'd also like to add that we funded 19 projects in '23-24, and so far, 10 for this year alone. As I said earlier, we also added auxiliary gym equipment to give intermediate and high school students optional additions for our older students.

I would like to point out, however, that this fund does not cover things like the paving, like the installation, and that's because we want this fund to reach as many of our 62 schools as possible. I acknowledge that there's a big cost associated with those and that it can be a challenge for our Home and Schools and our community groups to come up with that money, but having said that, it allows us to stretch the funds that we have a little bit further to reach each and every school.

I'll tell you, across this province, we have some of the best Home and School organizations. You look at the Sherwood Home and School and what they're doing. It's phenomenal. It's fantastic. So fortunate to have volunteers like them in our communities.

Then, of course, our organizations – whether it's the Souris Lions Club or the Rotary Club up in my neck of the woods, our fire departments across the province, everyone is willing to step up and pitch in. In some of these things, it takes the whole village. It takes the whole community. Again, I'm really, really proud of these organizations and Home and School groups that do step up. It's very important.

This is a great program, and I'm proud to see how much has already been done by this government to benefit not just our students but all of our Islanders. I know that our two school authorities have shared this program to all Island schools through their usual communication channels, and I expect that is going to be ongoing. Any of the schools that I talk to – the principals, the Home and Schools – they're asking, "How about that playground fund? How can we tap into that?" They're excited to hear about it, and excited to know that they can get that money.

If it's helpful to the members who have put this motion forward, I'll have staff from the department reach out to the boards directly to ask them to distribute information about the playground fund throughout our school

communities again, because I do really think it's a great initiative. We'll make sure that that information gets sent out again so it's readily available.

Having said all of that and listening to what everyone in the House here has said, I certainly support anything that we can do to make this program better. How can you not explore other ways to do it better?

The flexibility and the eligibility and getting more playgrounds in, having them open and available to our older students – I think that's really, really important. I think there are all kinds of great ways. We talk about the active transportation work that's been done. I think that's been a huge success, and I believe we'll continue to build upon that.

I'm not going to talk any further. I'd like to see this get to a vote. I'd just like to thank the mover and the seconder for putting this motion together and for speaking so passionately about it, the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll adjourn debate.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the mover and seconder for bringing this motion forward.

[4:45 p.m.]

I also consider this to be a pretty important motion. Play is – for younger children in particular – the way that they learn. It is learning. It is development. Risky play is part of that as well. So, whether it be climbing over a log in a forest, climbing the stairs or a ladder to get to a slide, those are all crucial muscle developments with pathways to the brain that, without play, just wouldn't develop. So, play is a very crucial part of the development of a child as they grow into adulthood. I guess I've come to a point where understanding the importance of play and the connections made between muscles and the brain is something that I've been rooted in for the last number of years.

I always found it very strange when I came into this position and realized that playgrounds weren't a part of the school building in terms of the funding because, to me, that is just as important. I recognize we're trying to branch out, but I'm just going to use this as an example:

a playground to an elementary school, to me, is just as important as a desk. It's just as important as a pencil for young kids because I would say, would argue, that for young children, we could throw that stuff out the window and just have playgrounds, and just be outside, and just be in nature.

As I say that, I consider that a little bit of fundraising for a community and a school community is really great because it gives people opportunities to work together. They learn new skills. When I think of – West Kent Elementary just finished fundraising and just opened up their Tracy Ellsworth basketball court, and the pride that those students had and have in that is incredible. I don't think that the pride would be as evident if they didn't have a hand in making that happen. They fully understand that it's their work and their family's work that – with support of the Department of Education, of course – made that happen.

So, I think that a bit of fundraising is great. I think that getting the school community involved, there are lessons to be learned, there's all kinds of things to be learned, and working together as a team is one of them – lessons that you wouldn't normally necessarily learn naturally like that.

I guess I say that, and I look at the \$300,000 budget line for – how many schools do we have, 64, something like that – 62 schools. I can't divide that in my head right now, but that's not a lot of money. I recognize that not all schools need a playground, but as this motions calls for, it's understanding that there are all kinds of different structures, different areas where young people play.

I would say that \$300,000 is a little drop in the bucket, and to me, I would love to hear – I know that outdoor classrooms, for example, have been funded. I don't know if outdoor classrooms fall under this...? No. I guess I would like to see more money put in there.

I know, as we're debating the budget and there's always, like, "You're telling us we're spending too much money, and then you're asking us to spend more over here," but I really and truly believe if we looked at efficiencies, if we took advantage of that inclusion review report and revolutionized our education system, we would find all kinds of inefficiencies, and all kinds of money that would be better spent on

playgrounds, on recreation projects, on funding outdoor play.

When I think about the differences between school communities, the example that the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere gave about.... Oh my gosh.

[Interjections]

**K. Bernard:** The Dream Park at Eliot River. I worked there and I had a brain fart on what the name was. When the students would be going from Westwood to Eliot River, the Dream Park was a huge part of excitement from there, especially the Halloween activities.

[4:50 p.m.]

When I consider the differences in the communities that are fundraising, I know Stratford did some fundraising, but then I think of other schools that are much smaller who don't have the socioeconomics that others do. And even if they do it, when they're much smaller, they don't have that base of people to pay into that. I think that that's really, really unfortunate because it makes it that much more difficult. It's taking the equity of play, really. If you've got a community that their playground isn't able to be used anymore and they're trying and trying and trying and trying and trying, how many years did those students go without a playground? How many years do those students go without the luxury of being able to fully develop into healthy, functioning older people? So, I do worry about that.

I think, too, about rural schools and, in some cases, think that rural schools have an advantage when it comes to outdoor play. I think of Gulf Shore in North Rustico where I worked for a year. When I went outside on duty, there was a line of trees that lined between the outdoor play – the yard – and a farmer's field. One of the teachers on duty with me – it was my first day there, and first day on duty – she said, "Go down and look in the trees down there."

So, I went down, and I looked, and the forts and the quality of forts. They had their bartering stations where they had little things that they would trade. The skills that those kids were learning at recess on that little strip of land – and they would all run out to that. Some of them wouldn't even go to the playgrounds, they would just go right down there and play.

I appreciate the flexibility, and I think that rural schools have a bit of an advantage – not all of them, given – where their location is to take advantage of outdoor play areas.

The idea that play is ageless, just because you're in high school.... I remember debating a motion on outdoor play a few years ago, and there were some members that didn't agree that – I'm not saying this to start anything – older students needed spaces like that because they didn't play anymore. But I strongly disagree and think that we need to make those spaces available. They may not use them all the time, but as you get older and you see other people using them, that's going to naturally encourage you to go out and do the same thing.

I think that it's really important that we do ensure that this is all ages. I do think that there's more cost associated when they're younger because of the structures themselves that are required, so I would really like to see that \$300,000 increased. I know that's not what the motion calls for, but I think that's an important piece of being able to do this, to urge government to broaden the fund or make it bigger.

I think that there are lots of inefficiencies that we could look at within government to fund important things because we know that a healthy society starts with ensuring we've got children who are developing healthily, happily, to the best of their ability – whatever that looks like for them. That's the best indicator of a healthy future.

If we look at some of the money that government is spending right now – I don't even want to list them, because I don't want to make people mad, but the NHL contract. When I look at all of these different things – the KPMG contract. When I look at all of these different ways that government is wasting taxpayers' money, I could think of a much better place to put them.

So, when I consider, also – I noticed one of the things that I advocated so hard for when I first was elected was adverse childhood experiences and understanding what that does to a child as they grow into adulthood. I mentioned it here before, so I'm not going to say it again, but the support that we had to study that on the committee – I was pleasantly surprised that other members wanted to know more about this.

Now, I see in the budget, there's money in there for Brain Story Training for people who work within government; that's fantastic. I think that it is such a great use of money to be able to use trauma-informed approaches with people who are struggling because they didn't have healthy development as a child.

[4:55 p.m.]

So, if we look at the way that we do things right now – again, I'll go back to revolutionizing in the education system because we have an increasing amount of kids that our education system is just not serving. I know the allocation numbers are based on, I believe – I'm going to get a bit wonky here – about 7 percent of students are considered with complex needs, but that number is actually more like 13 or 14 percent. So, looking at the allocations, I just think that if we truly understood the money that we would save by helping children develop healthily and happily, this fund would not just be \$300,000; it would be much higher.

With that, I obviously support this motion and encourage government to add a whole bunch of money to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion. One of the things that struck me when the mover was talking was the fact that back in 1995, I think you said, \$100,000 was raised. That's still a pile of money of course, in any community, even today, but to do that back in Cornwall, which was a lot smaller community back in 1995 than it is now, is quite an extraordinary feat.

You can see that 30 years later, that money was well invested. As you say, you have family who come from away, and that's the first thing that they want to do. My own kids played for, oh my gosh, hours and hours and hours on the structures there, and they're in great shape. The investment was well made. That was not a cheaply made or put together playground.

Even going back to my own childhood, I'm very aware of the value of being able to play at the

school to which you go. I went to a variety of schools. I started in an elementary school in the Highlands of Scotland, basically a one room schoolroom where the playground was going into the farmers field next door or climbing up a tree – that’s what it was – or going down to the beach which was just around the corner. That was a wonderful way to go. It was free; there was no need for anybody to raise money for that.

In a much larger urban centre in Glasgow where I did my high school, things changed. Nature was not as readily available there as it was in my elementary school. When my younger sisters went to school there, in elementary school – primary school, it being Scotland – the use of the playground was very much part of their lives. Back then, it was on tarmac – often came home with skinned knees and elbows, but it was a very valuable part of the school.

That was in a very poor neighbourhood in Glasgow. I know this has been touched on by the Leader of the Third Party in her remarks, but for me, part of the success of an education system for the community is making sure that the opportunities to learn are equitable across the system. It doesn’t matter where you live, you should have access to the same quality of education. I would argue very strongly that that should also be true when it comes to recreational facilities like playgrounds.

The Leader of the Third Party touched on this in her remarks that, for some schools who may be large or are located in affluent areas, raising \$100,000 through the parents, the friends, the folks in the neighbourhood is not a big task.

But some smaller schools either because of their size or because of the socioeconomic areas in which they are located – I’m thinking here of, of course, rural areas more importantly. I think Georgetown is the school with the smallest enrollment on Prince Edward Island with – I couldn’t tell you; it’s less than 100 kids, I know that. That would work out – if they were to raise the money by themselves – to \$1,000 a child.

That’s an enormous task, and that’s why the \$25,000 that’s available is a wonderful gesture.

**Speaker:** Hon. members, the hour has been called.

**P. Bevan-Baker:** Oh, I’m so sorry, Speaker, I missed that.

**Speaker:** Can you move to adjourn?

[5:00 p.m.]

**P. Bevan-Baker:** I move to adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Speaker:** Thank you, members.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**S. Dillon:** I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that this House do now adjourn until Friday, April 25th, at 10:00 a.m.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

[The Legislature adjourned until Friday, 24 April 2025 at 10:00 a.m.]