



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 29 – April 9, 2014**



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Twenty-Seventh Legislature**

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Delbert Kirsch, Chair  
Batoche

Mr. David Forbes, Deputy Chair  
Saskatoon Centre

Mr. Mark Docherty  
Regina Coronation Park

Mr. Greg Lawrence  
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. Paul Merriman  
Saskatoon Sutherland

Ms. Laura Ross  
Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

Ms. Nadine Wilson  
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:00.]

**The Chair:** — Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. I'm Delbert Kirsch. I'm the Chair of this committee and Deputy Chair is Mr. David Forbes. And with us is Mr. Mark Docherty, Mr. Darryl Hickie, Mr. Paul Merriman, Mr. Roger Parent, and Ms. Nadine Wilson.

**General Revenue Fund  
Social Services  
Vote 36**

**Subvote (SS01)**

**The Chair:** — This afternoon we will resume our consideration, vote 36, Social Services (SS01). Minister Draude is here with her officials. Madam Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon to you and to the members of the committee. I'd like to introduce the Social Services Deputy Minister Ken Acton, who's with me this afternoon as well as the officials from the income assistance and disability services group.

We have today Bob Martinook, the executive director of community living services; Jeff Redekop, the executive director of service delivery; Gord Tweed, executive director of program and service design; Doug Scott, acting director of program effectiveness; Miriam Myers who's the executive director of finance; and Jessica Broda who is executive assistant to the deputy minister.

The work of the income assistance and disability services division represents a major priority for our government as we work towards realizing our vision of Saskatchewan as being the best place in Canada for people with disabilities to live. Overall the 2014-15 provincial budget includes \$446.2 million dollars in funding for people with disabilities. That's an increase of \$84.3 million over last year and more than double the funding provided in 2007-2008. The majority of the increase in Social Services budget reflects our commitment to supporting people with disabilities through increases in SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] and various other programs and initiatives.

One of the most important pieces of work we are undertaking is the development of a comprehensive disability strategy for the province. Our 15-member citizen consultation team has been meeting for several months now and is making good progress on the broad directions for the strategy. The strategy will focus on the priority areas of employment, education, transportation, housing, community inclusion, and support to caregivers.

The citizen consultation team will lead public consultations in April and May, which will help to identify key barriers and key opportunities. We are leading the strategy, and we are working closely with the ministries of Health, Education, Advanced Education, Government Relations, Justice, and the Economy. This collaboration ensures that we have a one-government approach to improving the lives of people with disabilities. Our

goal is to release this strategy in the winter of 2015.

We also continue to enhance the Saskatchewan assured income for disability, or our SAID program. The response to SAID has been very, very positive. We have passed our original enrolment goal of 8,000 to 10,000 people. SAID will probably grow to more than 12,000 households over the next year.

In June the living income provided under SAID will increase from our further investment of 5.1 million to improve the quality of life for those enrolled in the program. With this funding, we're not just investing in a program, we are investing in people. And we are truly changing lives. SAID has changed the life of people like Bonnie in Prince Albert. Before SAID Bonnie had trouble making ends meet. She was often behind in paying her bills, and sometimes she didn't have enough to eat. SAID has allowed Bonnie to take control over her finances and, maybe even more importantly, has given her dignity and independence.

We'll continue to work with our community partners on a program implementation advisory team, or PIAT, on benefit design, including asset and earnings exemptions and disability benefits.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about the current income assistance caseload. Thanks to our strong economy, Saskatchewan's dependency rate, the proportion of people receiving income assistance, has remained at about 5 per cent for the last several years, even with the increase in population.

As we said in our growth plan, economic growth is not an end in itself but a way to improve the quality of life for all Saskatchewan people. We are doing that through programs that will help people move more quickly from social assistance back into the workforce.

Between April 2010 and February 2014, the number of people on social assistance who are employable decreased by over 40 per cent. In fact the number of employable people on income assistance caseload has declined to a record low level. And that's something that we're very proud of.

Social Services works to help people make the transition to employment by a number of ways. Firstly, linking clients with employment services and other community supports, and offering income supplements that bridge the transition to employment and help low-income wage earners avoid the welfare system altogether.

I'd like to quote from a letter from one such client, a woman who got helped through our income assistance program at a time when she needed it the very most. The letter is addressed to, and I quote, "Everyone who helped me, guided me, and took a phone call, and did the paperwork." She said:

I was on the income assistance program when I was pregnant with my son, as I was unable to go to work due to a complicated pregnancy. At that time, I didn't have enough money saved or enough EI hours or maternity leave. I was young and I wasn't heading in the right direction financially.

Social Services helped me with a damage deposit and an allowance for crib and baby clothes on top of the monthly allowance. I was really blessed and shocked they helped me because I had nothing more than a package of diapers ready for my son. The TEA program stepped in and helped while I was in the process of getting a job to support my son.

I did go back to school and ended up getting my diploma, and I finally found a job working full-time. I would never have been able to land this job without the help of all of you — the staff, the social assistance program, and the TEA program.

This letter describes better than any numbers or stats that I could give you what our programs do and what they really mean in the lives of Saskatchewan people. Our 2014 and '15 budget will continue to support people like this young woman as they strive to support themselves and their families and participate in the workforce.

Also in 2014-15, we'll invest an additional 20.4 million, for a total of \$165.7 million, to support people with intellectual disabilities. This commitment will support the Valley View Centre transition and help us to keep up with the new clients who require our services.

We will continue to implement the recommendations of the Valley View Centre transition steering committee, all of which were adopted by cabinet. And I'd like to thank them for their work.

One of the steering committee's key recommendations was that we develop a safety net assessment and stabilization system which includes respite, includes outreach and auxiliary services, before we transition people from the centre. We're fast-tracking this recommendation. We're developing two new homes in Moose Jaw, and we've purchased a home in Saskatoon that will be operational this summer.

We are continuing our resident-first approach to the transition, developing person-centred plans for each of the 187 people living at Valley View. A great deal of work is being done to understand each person's needs and aspirations and the wishes of their families. We now have enough information to begin planning for appropriate services in the community. We are identifying and negotiating with potential service providers and looking at several options for the next year. We are targeting to move as many as 20 Valley View residents by March of 2015.

The steering committee has also recommended that we look at self-directed funding to give persons with intellectual disabilities more service options. We'll be running a demonstration project with 10 or 15 clients this year.

Also in our budget, our government will continue to deliver on our commitments regarding the seniors' affordability plan. In July, benefits under the seniors' income plan will increase again at a cost of \$800,000. We'll also be increasing the threshold under the personal care home benefit with an investment of \$300,000.

In closing I want to read this sentence from a letter written by

the executive director of Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres, Amy McNeil. Amy says, "We're a leader in the country, if not in North America and the world, in supports for people with disabilities. And it's something the Saskatchewan Party should be proud of."

We're very proud of the investments we have made and the work we've done together with our community partners. We look forward to continuing that good work in the coming months. Thank you, and I'm open for questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Forbes, you have questions. You have the floor.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your opening comments and for the officials to be here. And we have questions. And I appreciate your opening remarks, and we'll take the next couple of hours to go through that part.

What I want to do is . . . actually I want to start right at the beginning with central management services part. We'll skip over child and family services, right. You know, we had talked about maybe that would be later, but then we'll go to client support and income assistance. That's sort of where my thinking is. And I hope you have all the officials here that could help with those, and if not we can take notice of questions that could be answered after our next time. But I thought we'd start right at the beginning because I think that's often the best place to start. Some of those questions might be answered in the global sense.

So with that, right off the bat, and I know we did talk a bit about this with housing, but I just want to be sure and I'll ask this question again about the general, all of the Ministry of Social Services, in terms of lean. What have been the initiatives cost of that and if you could let us know about what's been happening with that, with lean, over . . . going into the future, but in the past year or two?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Thank you to the member, and I asked the officials to get this information for you. I think we have all the appropriate officials here. If we don't, then we'll take note of the questions and we'll answer them for you next time we have an opportunity to get together. I think we should be fine today, but we do have one other opportunity to answer questions.

**Mr. Acton:** — Ken Acton, deputy minister. If I can just clarify, you're looking for costs or . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — The costs and the initiatives, costs and initiatives. And I'm focusing on lean, but I know that you've also alluded to business . . . You had a term that you used in housing, and I'm not sure if that applies right across the board here.

**Mr. Acton:** — Ken Acton, deputy minister. And you're correct, we have a business process improvement unit that provides support to all areas of the ministry. It provides assistance with change management. It certainly, the staff there facilitate process mapping of either existing processes or new processes. And they certainly provide some business analysis on internal

projects and are encouraging business improvement. So they do all of those things.

They've also taken some basic training in lean early on when, across government, lean was being introduced. So it was a pretty good fit. We were already down that road in terms of trying to improve processes and streamline things so that we could focus more on our client. And so that's been kind of the process all along, is can we clean out redundancy or duplication and allow us to stay more focused on providing services to our clients?

We've had 51 different lean events, some of them not particularly large but all of them having an impact on our ability to deal with clients. And I've got a few examples. In terms of particularly around income assistance, we did some work around streamlining and responding to applications and our intake process to try to speed that up a little bit, reduce the number, the amount of time it takes on a phone with a client to eliminate callbacks so that when people phone in, we could respond right away and reduce the time that we spent there.

Valley View and community living service aside, one of the first ones we worked on was around in the food services delivery side. And through that we're able to reduce food waste from 25 per cent down to below 10. We increased some space to make it a little safer for our staff working in the kitchen just by realigning things a little bit. And our estimate is that we have an annual saving of \$44,000 a year just by some of those small changes.

So child care subsidy program was another one that we worked on, and there we actually engaged or had a child care provider participate on some of that and give us some feedback about what worked for them and what some of the annoyances were perhaps and how we can improve on them. And so we had very positive results there.

We're able to eliminate the backlog in terms of how we process payments, sending them out to child care centres. We introduced a process where they could submit attendance records by email, as opposed to faxing them in or mailing them in. So there was a 50 per cent reduction in processing time and so that allowed us to get caught up and respond more appropriately to the daycare providers and get the funds out there.

[15:15]

So that's just a few of the things that we've done around lean. Some of the others didn't directly, you know, you wouldn't categorize as lean, I guess, but a review of our travel in province and the use of video conferencing and links, so that if we have to have meetings with some of our staff at another city, we can connect them with a video link and have the discussion and not have to travel from one city to another. So some of those initiatives have been quite helpful.

We've also worked on reducing the amount of office space we require just by moving to cubicles and actually working with staff in terms of, well I would say traffic flow patterns, in terms of which other branch or co-workers are you working with most closely. Do you find yourself having to go up and down a flight

of stairs or, you know, across town and can we co-locate you, get you to the right spot just to make life easier for staff and improve efficiencies and hopefully reduce office space as well. And we've had a significant reduction in space.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So in this unit, the business processing, how many staff members are . . .

**Mr. Acton:** — Well two and a half folks. I realize the half is a little charge. We have a person in charge that dedicates some of their time to this. And so we have a manager and two staff that work in this area.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And so do you use outside consultants?

**Mr. Acton:** — We did use outside consultants in '10-11 and '11-12, which I mentioned when we were here the other day. Those were Westmark Consulting, and they were obtained through a broad proposal or request for proposal, I believe, from central government. So the first couple of years we used them to help lead some events and help us learn. And we worked with them and then from that we've been doing — with the exception of one project — we've been doing the rest of it ourselves.

And the one project that we have used an outside consultant in the last, in '12-13 and '13-14 was McNair Business Development. And we used them to help us design the office space at 2045 Broad. We were looking to make sure that we had our space so that it would serve our clients better. And we were hoping, and we will actually achieve, a merger and we won't require as much space. So we'll be able to move staff from what's currently in the Palliser Building operating our call centre. They'll all be able to move over into 2045. So the resulting financial saving, it'll be about \$600,000 a year.

So it's exciting. We're not done yet. But this consulting group helped us map that out, worked with our staff, worked with . . . tried to figure out, you know, the clients, make sure that all our client services as much as possible can be on the main floor so that we don't have clients having to go up and down to, you know, the third floor and back down again, and just really planning it out so that we're as efficient as we possibly can. So that project is still going forward. We're into the construction phase now, in the renovation phase.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And two questions from that. So the McNair contract would have been worth how much?

**Mr. Acton:** — It was \$33,500 in '12-13 and 16,500 in '13-14.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And then the second question is the construction costs. Are they in this year's budget? Are we seeing them somewhere in the budget here?

**Mr. Acton:** — Yes. There is an increase this year on capital renovations of \$1.393 million. That's not the total cost of the entire renovation project. And I apologize. We're just having trouble pulling up that exact number, but we can get that for you.

**Mr. Forbes:** — That would be great. All right. And then the other question is, when I look on page 115, I see that the

employee or the staff complement goes from 1,748 to 1,733. So it's a loss of 15. Where will those 15 positions be eliminated from?

**Mr. Acton:** — Those are anticipation of a cottage closure at Valley View Centre. So the population gradually, you know, has been declining over . . . Well since we quit taking new clients in a number of years ago. And about every couple of years, there's a cottage closure, so we expect that will happen again. And of course then we'll also see some clients move to other facilities. So that's what that is.

**Mr. Forbes:** — There was some closures: Red Willow I believe and Dales House, if I'm correct.

**Mr. Acton:** — Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now were they in last year's budget? The plan was . . .

**Mr. Acton:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Their closure was. Okay. Okay, thank you. I want to go over to page 117 and client support. And now when it talks about case management, I see by that line it goes from 13 million down to 8 million. Could you explain the reduction?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Thank you to the member. This relates to the computer program, the Linkin project that we're using, so we can discuss that more. We felt we'd probably discuss it next week at child and family. But this is what . . . It's really about the computer program.

**Mr. Forbes:** — The Linkin system.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Yes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So I actually do have a lot of questions, but the people aren't here for that. The people that are in charge of Linkin aren't with us today?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — No.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, so there'll be lots of questions for them. Not that we're going to finish early today, but bring them for sure. I have some concerns about that. Okay, so and then the service centre client support. Is this where you were talking about the renovations, the service centre client support? It goes up 200,000. It's not a huge amount.

**Mr. Acton:** — That line is for support staff we have in our various offices across the province. So that would be primarily cost of living, I expect.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, very good. Thank you. Then we should go then to income assistance and disabilities because that is obviously a very important part, a significant part of the work that Social Services does. So I'm interested in . . . So you talked about the social assistance program. Now it's going down about 30 million, 29 million. And why is that?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Gord Tweed from the ministry. Mr. Forbes, could you just . . . I just had trouble hearing the question. I'm

sorry.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I look at the Estimates on page 117, and the decrease from the estimated 2013 was \$181 million set aside for Saskatchewan assistance program. And it's now a hundred and fifty-two, five hundred million, so approximately \$29 million decrease if my math is correct. And then what is the nature of that decrease?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The decrease in the Saskatchewan assistance program and the budget associated with that is primarily attributed to the transition of cases or clients from that program through to the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program or the SAID program.

You will recall last year, Mr. Forbes, that much of that transition actually happened quicker, more expediently last year than we had anticipated, so the budget line for last year for the social assistance program was too high. We came to supplementary estimates, you will recall, in the fall and did a bit of a correction there. So this is really what that transition reflects. It's that shift from social assistance through the Saskatchewan assistance program to the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program.

**Mr. Forbes:** — When I look at the caseloads here, now there are . . . And I look back and the high was, you know, somewhere in the 22,500 or 600, August of 2009, and now we're at . . . This past February it was 14,188.

But what I see when I look at the combination of SAID and TEA [transitional employment allowance] and SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan], that we're actually seeing an overall increase in caseloads. Correct me if I am wrong. When you add the three together, the number I have for February 2014 is 28,101 and that, from when I started keeping records in January of 2008, is the highest number of the three combined. Why would that be?

**Mr. Tweed:** — So your question as I understand it is to look at the combined caseload.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right.

**Mr. Tweed:** — SAP, SAID, and TEA. And it's a well-founded question. Our budget caseload for last year, for '13-14, for the three programs combined was 26,559 cases. There's going to be lots of numbers here, Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Yes. And that's all right because it'll be in *Hansard*.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Okay. The request for 2014-15 would reflect 28,054 cases, an increase of about 1,495 cases for the three programs combined.

You recall again from last fall that one of the positive impacts of the introduction of the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program or SAID was that many people who had previously not come forward to receive social assistance applied for and were eligible for the SAID program. So growth in the caseload is attributed to that factor.

Interestingly, if you want more detailed numbers yet, when you look at our forecast information for the '13-14 budget — we're just through that year — the forecast caseload would come to about, again combined, 27,745 cases. So the caseload actually is really quite stable from where we end this year, heading into next year. In fact we're only factoring in about a 300 case increase, 309 cases.

So again the impetus around change is driven by forecasted increases in SAID still as other people enrol in the program; an actual decrease, as you see, on the Saskatchewan assistance program; and a decrease on the transitional employment allowance.

So the caseloads that service people that have the opportunity to move into the labour market, TEA and SAP, we see declines. In the caseload that we would see supporting people with significant and enduring disabilities, we see increasing, but much of that increase has occurred already.

[15:30]

**Mr. Forbes:** — So do you see the increase in SAID . . . So some of that I think may have been whether it was unanticipated, but do you have a better sense now or is there a way of understanding how many may be coming on to SAID or applying for SAID? And I'm not sure how you would know that, through health records or what, but . . .

**Mr. Tweed:** — Very, very much so. You recall that when SAID was introduced back in 2009, it was made available to individuals with significant and enduring disabilities who resided in residential care settings. So we had a very good sense of that population. When it was expanded, when the program was expanded and the eligibility criteria would change to include people living in independent arrangements in June of 2012, and as the minister observed in her opening comments, we had actually forecast that we would achieve a caseload on the order of 8 to 10,000 households. We since have surpassed that and now approach 12,000 cases on SAID.

So we now have a couple of years experience with the program. Our shift in the caseload from SAP to SAID is interesting. We would've observed in total about 1,900 new applicants coming through to the program, the balance moving. So the migration from SAP to SAID is much easier to forecast. It's greatly slowed, and the enrolment of people who were never involved in the system or hadn't had recent involvement in the system has slowed dramatically as well. So forecasting seems to be a bit more certain this year.

**Mr. Forbes:** — How many were not . . . How many that are now enrolled in SAID had not been involved in a program, a support program?

**Mr. Tweed:** — We had about 1,430 new cases enrol in the system during '13-14, and our anticipation is that about 470 new cases will arrive throughout 2014-15.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Pardon me? Say that last one.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Four hundred and seventy cases, new cases.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay.

**Mr. Tweed:** — So you can observe that the trend has slowed dramatically.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right. Okay. I have some questions about the number of children in families that receive social assistance, and it seems to be floating around 12,200 or 12,500. Is that correct?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Again do you want the response to be for the combined programs?

**Mr. Forbes:** — No, just in SAP.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Just in SAP. So I can give you the outright number if we do a calculation, but 45 per cent of people involved in the Saskatchewan assistance program are children.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And has that been static for . . .

**Mr. Tweed:** — It's very stable, always centring around that 40 to 42, 45 per cent range. One of the changes that occurs is that single people migrate to SAID, single individuals with disabilities, so the percentage of children as a proportion . . . But what's perhaps more important in the context is that there are fewer people relying on the Saskatchewan assistance program in total.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I think that the other thing that I'd like to add is that we know that the number of children living in low-income families has declined by nearly 36 per cent in the last . . . in our first four years.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I'm sorry, if you could repeat that. I didn't hear.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Children living in low-income families has declined.

**Mr. Forbes:** — What are you quoting for that?

**Mr. Tweed:** — That would be information as provided by Statistics Canada and their after-tax low-income cut-off information and the proportion of residents that have incomes below that threshold.

**Mr. Forbes:** — The numbers I'm looking at, and I'm surprised, you know, they have gone down, and they seem to fluctuate around the 13,000 to 12,000 kids who are in families that received social assistance over the last four or five years. And so that is concerning that whether these are families that are part of the . . . I'm not sure if this is the term, static caseload, that are on social assistance for a long term.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Mr. Forbes, for February of 2014, 45 per cent of the people on social assistance were children. That would equate to about 12,400 children.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And my charts, based on the written questions I have, you know, in 2011 the average . . . 2010 was 12,900 kids; 2011 is 13,358; 2012, it was 13,174; in 2013, 12,418. And as you have alluded to, it's about more or less the same, which

seems to be, you know, should be a concern that children are in families that are receiving social assistance which obviously. . . And I'll ask some questions about rates and stuff in a little bit, but I just want to know if there's going to be any initiatives to really address that number.

Because if I flip over, when I also asked about families, in 2008 the average from my numbers was about 6,029. It went up to 6,049, 6,227. In 2011 it was 6,270. In 2012 was 6,106; '13 it was down 5,722, so that's about 400 families. So my point is, this should be a target, a concern because that's an alarming number for me.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'm going to use the statistics that the low-income cut-off information that Stats Canada use. And since 2007 Saskatchewan has seen a larger reduction in the incidence of low income — both adults and children — than any other province in Canada.

Saskatchewan has the lowest rate of low income for all persons and children in Western Canada. Saskatchewan has the second-lowest incidence of low income for all persons in the country, and Saskatchewan has the third-lowest rate of child poverty in the country. And between 2007 and 2011 the number of Saskatchewan residents living in low income declined by 23,000 people, and that includes 8,000 fewer children.

So we've been doing things like increasing the minimum wage. We've been implementing the personal income tax cuts and increasing the disability tax credits, expanding the active family benefit so parents can claim a full refundable tax credit after \$150 a child. And I know that there's always more work to do, but this is an area where we put one of the largest increases in budget since we became government has been Social Services, making sure that we are looking after vulnerable people.

As I said there's always more work we can be doing, but the other area that I'm very proud of is the fact that we've put considerable money into adult basic education so we can help parents move off the social assistance roll and into the workplace. We've had an increase in our population, so as I said when I gave my opening remarks, our dependency rate is still around the 5 per cent, which is lower than the national average. And it's something that we continue to look at all the time, not just in my ministry but across ministries.

It's one of the reasons why the child and family agenda is important to us because we look at the reasons why people are not able to be working in a province where you have over 15,000 jobs on saskjobs.ca. So we ask the question, why is that? Working together we come up with the discussions on things like disability strategies, mental health and addiction strategy. Why can't we do more? Why can't we do better? Overall plan is to definitely keep our numbers moving in the right direction, having fewer people on assistance, fewer children that would need to be not only in care but supported through a government. And that can't be done just by Social Services, but it's done by the ministries working together.

**Mr. Tweed:** — If I can just supplement one additional piece of information. You may be familiar or may be aware, Mr. Forbes, that the ministry is in the process of a demonstration or a pilot project in Prince Albert involving single parents who have been

in receipt of social assistance for extended periods of time. And they come to us for any number of different reasons, but many have very challenging personal circumstances.

So we initiated this project in the fall. And in that project, we work with many community partners and other government providers to really try to learn what barriers, get more in-depth personal information around what barriers these parents might face to help them move forward. The pilot, as I said, is very new, about six months old. It's relatively small-scale and involves just over 20 parents.

And what we've learned through the course of the first few months is that it takes time for some people to be able to move forward. But these individuals now are all engaged with a dedicated case management service through an income assistance worker in Prince Albert. They have all been connected to other community services. They all have established goals. For many of them it's education, to achieve a higher gradient of education to help them move forward in the labour market or perhaps to other studies.

So as I said, we're very early on in the process. We'll do an evaluation at the end of the year, determine exactly what steps or what things that we have learned that we might apply to families on social assistance to help them even more.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you. So in this 6,000-families average that are on social assistance, what is the average length of time that a family would be on? And can you describe the, you know, maybe the percentage breakdown of families who are on longer than a year, longer than five years, longer than ten years. Do you have that information?

**Mr. Tweed:** — We wouldn't have that degree of granularity in our information. In terms of the Saskatchewan assistance program, we would have information as to average continuous months on assistance. But it wouldn't be broken out by family type I don't think, but let me check just to make sure.

So of interest in the Saskatchewan assistance program, just with some information available, Mr. Forbes . . . And again I'll apologize because it is not broken down by family type, but it'll give you a sense of duration. So for those on the Saskatchewan assistance program — so that's not the transitional employment allowance program where people move more swiftly through our services — continuous months on assistance, one to three months. So of the entire caseload population, about 16 per cent would move through in three months or less. Another 10 per cent of our client group would move through in less than half of a year. So about 25 per cent of the caseload would move through our service system within the first six months of their involvement. Seven to nine months, 7 per cent; 10 to 12 months, another 7 per cent. And then you'll get a sense of some of the nature of the challenges that people face: from one year to two years, 16 per cent of the caseload; and for two years plus, 44 per cent.

So for people in the Saskatchewan assistance program, there is sort of a clustering at the front end, people who move through a little more quickly. And then for those who have a longer duration, they generally stay a bit longer. And those are people with significant challenges, whether they would be mental



health issues or other types of barriers that they might face to moving forward, and that's why we're running the pilot.

[15:45]

**Mr. Forbes:** — I congratulate you for that, and I just think that this is something that I think is important. And it's important, you know, because . . . And I've been a supporter of SAID. I've said that all along. And I know the people who are involved with lobbying for SAID said this is not just about for people with disabilities. It's for everyone who finds himself in a vulnerable situation. So it's also for that 44 per cent who are trying to break out of it.

So I hope that we can see attention to that because clearly for some reason things aren't working the way that they should. And you know, whether it's minimum wage or training in particularly mental health I think has a huge, huge impact. So I appreciate that. And I really want to say this is something that we should really focus on, I think, when we see children and families in this situation. It's an important part that we should focus on.

I just want to also ask a question because I did take a look at the dependency rate on page 6 of the plan for 2014-15, and I see that it's not as clear as it might be. And I always . . . I'm interested. You know, it's the old grade 8 math teacher who talks about how to make graphs say certain things. And I'm concerned because you really do talk about three different things.

And I look at other graphs in here, and they're quite good. I look at the one, actually on the next page, where you've broken out children in care, ministry; children in care, First Nations; and non-wards. So people have a sense of what's changing and what's not changing. And it's a little bit more. Here you don't break out what's happening with SAID and what's happening . . .

And actually you know, I really do have to say, percentages when it comes to social assistance can be so misleading. Because when you're talking about two different variables changing, the actual number of people who are in a program but also the overall population's changing too. If the overall population was static and always the same, then a percentage could be meaningful. But when you're having two things that are changing at the same time, a percentage is not a good measurement because it doesn't really say, it's the population of the province growing to 2 million and all of a sudden that's why there's a change here. Or what's really happening? Or is it because there's nobody on social assistance anymore?

So I really say percentages are not very informative. But I would really say what would be informative here are to have those three support functions — the TEA, the SAID, and SAP — as part of the bar. So that could be more informative. Because I think what you would see, you should see the transition to SAID, which is a good news story, but that's not . . . that's buried in here. You can't tell that SAID's actually happening. TEA is changing as well. SAP is a question mark that we have. While it's gone down significantly, there still is that number that we have, family and children, that we really need to pay attention to in Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I do hear what you're saying. So I just got the information. If I would take the number of SAID recipients out of the 5.0 per cent in '12-13, we would be down to 3.5 per cent. So that is exactly what you're asking for, and that's exactly what we're doing. So at 3.5 per cent we would be definitely better than the national average. And then when we look at the fact that we are looking at the mental health and addictions strategy which you acknowledged, and I know you're aware of the fact that there are a number of people that are on assistance that have difficulties that will not allow them to go on SAID, and yet they're not able to go into the workplace until we find other ways of dealing with issues and their condition.

So I am pleased with what's happening right now, the direction that we're going. I think we are a model in Canada, especially because of the SAID program and now the fact that we've got the two strategies starting between mental health and addictions and disabilities. We'll continue to go on the right lane. I will always say that there's more work to do, but I know that from my discussions with various jurisdictions that we are leading.

**Mr. Forbes:** — But I would like to go on record as saying, is that the bar graph or the graphs on page 7 are more informative than these ones here simply because of some statistical stuff — as I said, the changing population of the larger group, the population of Saskatchewan. And it doesn't recognize that there are three programs that are in play here, two of which there's been significant changes. And well their third one, there's still some questions. It's not as clear as it might be.

**Mr. Acton:** — If I may just add, thank you for your comments. We've certainly given consideration to that. However with the change to SAID in the last year, I think we need to . . . My sense is to let that settle out and then review kind of how we report on those, because there was quite a bit of transition over the last year. And so we certainly consider how we can improve our reporting.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. Thank you. Because I do think that these are all . . . I mean it's like any statistic though. They're always worthy of discussion and they cause discussion — that's the point.

But I do have more questions around the assistance rates. And I just pulled this off the website just an hour ago, and it's the Saskatchewan assistance rates. And I'm looking at what an adult allowance is. So I'm just curious about what's gone up recently and what has not gone up. I know SAID, the benefits have increased, and I know that's been welcome news. But I am concerned that these may not have, but correct me if I'm wrong.

So when we have an adult, adult allowance is \$255. And these are all per month, I assume. Right?

**Mr. Tweed:** — That's the monthly rate, Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Monthly rate. And has that . . . When did that last go up?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The allowance, the adult basic allowance is what you're referring to. \$250 . . . \$255 per month was last adjusted I believe in May of 2007.

**Mr. Forbes:** — 2007, so that has been quite a while. The basic allowance.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — That's correct, Mr. Forbes. That hasn't gone up for a while. What we have been spending a lot of time and money on is looking at people, the reasons why they're on assistance.

If we have . . . You know that we just talked about SAID and the reason that we have between, instead of 8 to 10,000 people we have 12,000 people that we know need to have support. They've had a considerable increase. We've had, and it's . . . and you know that there's another increase promised for July of this year and again next year. We also are giving the money for people, for our seniors. There's also an increase. We also have adjusted the shelter index nine times in the last number of years. So we are looking at making sure that we are giving allowances to people that are most vulnerable. And then the other side of it is finding out why people are on assistance. We've discussed this earlier.

I need to know as the minister, and as our government we want to know, why in a province like Saskatchewan, why are people on assistance? We need to make sure they have a roof over their heads, they're warm, that we can supply the basic necessities of life. If they have children then we're looking at that. The increase in the Saskatchewan employment supplement and the number of people that qualify for it, that's increased as well. We're protecting our most vulnerable. Otherwise we have to find out why people are on assistance.

My goal is to make sure that people can move on and meet their own potential. Adult basic education, even life skills, is part of what we should be looking at as government to make sure that people have the feeling that they are part of . . . not just an economy but having a family.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Have you advocated at cabinet for an increase to the basic allowance? Or is this your answer that you give to your cabinet colleagues, that you want to find out? It has been seven years since the last increase.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — What I advocate for at the table with my colleagues is making sure that those who are on . . . that are most vulnerable and those that have children, that we are looking at them and we do it all within a balanced budget. That is, there's two lenses that I put on everything. Making sure that we can do our work within the guidelines that the people of the province want us to do, and looking after the most vulnerable. We have 400 individuals who are no longer on a wait-list. We've supplied it. We've supplied life supports for them and given them a life that they didn't have a number of years ago. I continue to look at the most vulnerable and I continue to ask myself, why would people in a province like Saskatchewan not be working? We have to find out why. So I do advocate for the most vulnerable, and I do advocate knowing that we're going to do this all within a balanced budget.

**Mr. Forbes:** — There are 12,000 kids in this province and have been since you folks have formed government. It's been seven years, and here you have seven years and you haven't adjusted the basic adult allowance.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I think, to the member, he's aware that there's been just about \$100 million increases to income assistant benefits since 2007. There's also been 100,000 people more come into our province. Then when you talk about the number of children that may be in care, we know that there is a percentage of that number will be children as well.

So we do know that as families move on and their children have an opportunity to be part of the system, we are . . . we look at those that are most vulnerable and see how we can help their parents. I think there was an increase in 1992, and then the next time there was an increase was in 2005, so that's a considerable amount of time as well.

So I think that we . . . I don't think anybody can do any pointing fingers here about what we should be doing. I believe, and so does everybody on my side of the floor believe, that our goal is to allow people to have the best type of life they can.

**Mr. Forbes:** — It's been seven, seven long years. Seven long years. And your officials can hand you all the data that they want. Seven long years and 12,000 kids will go to school tomorrow . . . and I take a look at this. And you can throw out the 100 million and you can do your canned speech all you want to do, Minister, and eat up the clock and talk about adult basic education which . . . And I have said many of those things I support, but I am not hearing. And is it going to be another seven long years before you increase the adult basic allowance?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I don't know what's going to happen in the next while. I do know that what we have to make sure is that we are supporting individuals. I believe in person-centred planning. I believe in knowing and looking at the reasons why people are where they are today, and that includes the parents and the children. We have spent, even through the child and family agenda, we've spent another over \$60 million in the last, since 2010, looking at reasons why parents and children are living on the other side of what I would consider the living allowance where they should have.

We've got to look at the bigger picture here and where there are some things that we're going to agree on and some things we don't agree on. When the next time the adult basic allowance will change is, I'm not sure. But I can tell you that we're looking at those individuals to find out why they would still need allowance. Why would they be on social assistance? Is it mental health and addictions issues? Is it transportation? Is it something to do with disabilities? What is it? In the meantime we've looked at shelter allowances. We've looked at ensuring that people on Saskatchewan employment supplement, there is more of them. We can have increases in areas where we can support those that are vulnerable. I don't have a canned speech. What I do have is a belief . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Minister, I hope that this does take some attention. And you said you're looking for reasons why this situation is the way it is, and I hope . . . And I know, and I get approached about why is it that some of these numbers are frozen. Others do increase, but we hope that we can see, particularly when we have 12,000 kids on social assistance and that number is not changing and hasn't really changed, that's something that should be of concern, should be of concern, and should be of urgency. And so I would urge you to take a look at

that. That's really critical.

[16:00]

Now I want to turn to SIP [seniors' income plan]. And we have talked about this and, of course, and I have been on record about supportive . . . [inaudible] . . . We've talked of past records, and I think that this was an important initiative of this government to increase the allowance and to increase the numbers of seniors on this. There are a couple of areas on this that I do have some questions, and that is that I have questions around the analysis of what's actually happening to seniors when they get onto the Saskatchewan Income Plan.

So the high point for a number of seniors on the income plan was back in 2009 when the current government had increased the allowance and the ability for seniors to get on and it went up to 18,763. And then the low point was back in 2012 where it hit about 15,000. We're at about 15,437 I think in February. Is that correct?

**Mr. Tweed:** — 15,436, Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well there you go. I was giving you one credit. Why the falling numbers?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Could you repeat the question, Mr. Forbes? I'm sorry.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Why the falling numbers? Why have we gone from 18,700 in 2009 and here we are five years later, 15,400?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I think because it's . . . I'll get Gord to give you the numbers, but I can tell you why there are fewer people on seniors' income plan right now. Because it's income tested. So we have more people in the province now that are not in . . . [inaudible] . . . low income, but we have the third-lowest percentage of seniors in low income in Canada.

So what we did was double, we actually when we became government, we doubled the number of seniors that were eligible for SIP, but we tripled the benefits. By 2015 it will be tripled. That's going to be about \$2,100 more per year for low-income seniors than there was before. So what we are again looking at, that those who need our support the most, that's where we're putting our emphasis. Maybe Gord, you could give some numbers.

**Mr. Tweed:** — I can supplement some of that information, Minister, and Mr. Forbes. So the SIP program just very naturally will have an attrition in caseload. As seniors enter the age of 65 or as they turn 65, as people turn 65, increasingly more and more seniors bring with them other sources of income that their predecessors would not have had. Many seniors would have access to the Canada Pension Plan, for example, that perhaps my parents may not have had.

So the caseload will decline very naturally over time. The change that you observe year to year is to be expected on a go-forward basis actually. And it would be the long history of the program. As it started, the caseload declined over the course of many years.

In 2009 there was the dramatic increase in caseload when both the benefits were increased, and that effectively when you increase the benefits on the program, it effectively captures many more seniors because of their income levels, an income-tested program. So the caseload basically doubled back in 2009 and ever since that time has been slowly declining.

Another interesting bit of information, just to support the opening comment that I made around seniors entering with more and more incomes, is that over the course of the past five years or from 2006 to 2011 — so that would be the information that we have most recently available to us on an aggregate basis — average income for seniors, it increased by 11 per cent in the province. So an increasing income threshold would suggest that fewer seniors would qualify for the seniors' income program.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay. So now it's income tested. But when it's income tested, that means how you get into it. You don't get into it and then your income is tested. Right? Once you're in . . . Everybody gets in and then you get tested. Is that how it works?

**Mr. Tweed:** — You qualify by virtue of your eligibility for the guaranteed, the federal Guaranteed Income Supplement program.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right. And they do it based on . . . How do they determine whether you're on or not?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The . . . Sorry. Spoke a little loudly there. If the senior in Saskatchewan, the single senior in Saskatchewan has annual income of less than \$4,560 outside of their OAS [old age security], GIS [Guaranteed Income Supplement], they would qualify for the program.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right. So do you know how it . . . And then are you suggesting that . . . What is the average length of time a senior may be on this program?

**Mr. Tweed:** — I don't have that information available here, Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Your staff that looks after the senior income plan, how many people are actually involved in that?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Three provincial employees are involved in the administration of the program.

**Mr. Forbes:** — What do they do? Are they policy analysts or are they . . .

**Mr. Tweed:** — No. They administer the program. The program, as you're aware, would be delivered through the federal platform. It's being backed on to the OAS . . . Sorry, I don't mean to use acronyms — the old age security and Guaranteed Income Supplement programs. So there's an interaction with the federal government in terms of an exchange of information and then clarity around eligibility for the benefit.

Eligibility is re-established each July on a go-forward basis. So some of the information that you've been provided through your written questions would show that there's no information available in some instances for the month of July because that's the reassessment month, and then you'll see dramatic swings as

it relates to other months in terms of the number of seniors perhaps that fall off the program for that one month and then their eligibility is re-established.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I do look at that. And I do see the, you know, incredible numbers that . . . You know, last year it was 1,929; the year before, 1,958; and the year before that it was 1,600. In that year, 2009, where we had the big increase, we had over 3,000 fall off.

But we don't see when people go back on. We don't see, you know, 1,500 get back on the next month. You know, the numbers — I'm just trying to find the sheets here — where if you're losing 1,900, you may see 200 or, you know, 600 in total, so your net loss is quite significant. It's well over 1,000.

And you do have regular people coming through every month I assume because they are turning 65, you know, and people being cut off because they're either moving away or they're passing away. But is there a comment you want to make to that effect?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The matter of reassessment in July, people will leave the seniors' income program for a couple of reasons. One is death. The seniors age out of the program. They would, the new senior who enrolls in the program or turns 65 would be a person with arguably more income availability through private pension plans or the Canada Pension Plan.

The other thing that happens in July is it's the establishment of the benefit period for the upcoming year, and it's entirely dependent on the senior's filing of income tax return. So if that's done on a timely basis and the federal government has responded with their eligibility test, we in kind can respond. If for some reason a person has filed late, and that's the experience of some seniors, assuredly, then the eligibility comes into question.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now how much advertising do you do other, to specific senior organizations to, first, alert them that there is this program and (b), you know, that they should be careful to make sure they do file their income tax because if they don't, they could lose this? What kind of things do you do with that?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — To the member, my officials have indicated that we work with the federal government. They don't have to apply. It's when they have their income tax done and their information is sent to the federal government, it would automatically trigger it back to us.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well I don't think that's quite accurate because they do have to apply for the Guaranteed Income Supplement and that does take some . . . And that takes a phone call. I know in my office I have a little handout to seniors: please phone this number. It's actually fairly straightforward, but you do have to make the call.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — That's correct, Mr. Forbes. They do come directly to us through the federal program but they would have to apply there.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Right.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I don't know how many seniors . . . I don't know how you would figure that, how many seniors do their own income tax now so there is nobody advising them. So that would be my other question but it's for the . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — It's a good point you raise, Minister, because I understand today — this is not my question — but we are not able to file our taxes by mail anymore but it's online. That's what the news was today.

**An Hon. Member:** — No.

**Mr. Forbes:** — No? Is that . . . I stand to be corrected if . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I understand that for somebody who's watching there, somebody needs to clarify that for me so that if somebody does think that they can't send their income tax in by mail, I don't think that information is correct.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Can you get that clarified because actually I think I would like to know more about that. Because that's . . . And we'll have maybe a follow-up next week with that because . . .

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'm going to ask Gord to . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — Maybe the officials could do a check on their iPads in the back because that was the big news on CBC [Canadian Broadcast Corporation] this morning and yes, about income tax. Or if the member opposite, I see he's working in finding out whether that's the case . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — You have a comment, please?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Yes. I don't have the specific answer. I wasn't listening to CBC today. Just a couple of observations. There are community services available to help individuals complete their tax returns. And so if a senior was aware of that community service, they would access a free tax service. But importantly, the ministry each year for the past four years, or for the past three years, as the program has changed, has been in contact each March with the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism to give them information about the changes to the program. And I would hope that many seniors are in contact with that group, that is the seniors with information . . . [inaudible].

**Mr. Forbes:** — I just got confirmation that it is a fact they will only accept online. So if other people are . . . Because this was the news story and this is a big deal, actually. And your official's quite correct. Actually, it was interesting. The business college, if I remember the story this morning, was concerned about the fact that they used to . . . They would like to help seniors but because of this situation, it's causing a bit of a problem. So I'll leave that with you. And I don't mean to alarm anybody who's watching, but it's something that we should be paying close attention to because of the impact.

Has anybody else found that? I'm wondering if the member from Prince Albert . . .

**Mr. Hickie:** — I can summarize, if you like, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Yes.

**Mr. Hickie:** — So by Monday they're hoping to have the online system back up. There's a bug in the system. They're looking at the entire federal government system being shut down to cure this problem. People can still do tax returns as normal. However, it affects only Efile and if you . . . There's another acronym they used here as well. But business as usual so . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — There were two news stories, and so we'll get them. We'll get this, so we'll get this straight here. At any rate, let's shift gears. Yes.

**Mr. Acton:** — Canada Revenue Agency indicates that there's several ways you can send your tax return in. One of them is by mail. So at least that's on their website. You can use a net file system, it's referred to, or Efile or by mail.

And that was, yes, the date of this was March the 10th, I guess, so I too heard that they had a problem with their, with their efilng system, but my understanding based on this is that in fact you still can mail your return in.

[16:15]

**Mr. Forbes:** — Let's shift gears here. I want to, this is a question I asked last year about the appeals and the \$45 appeal fee, and how many people had applied for that and what they had used that for?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'm going to ask Gord to give you the numbers of people that have used this. I think that's what you're asking for. Is it?

**Mr. Tweed:** — One of the challenges that we have, Mr. Forbes, is coding of certain needs on our IT [information technology] system. But what was coded as fees to assist individuals with appeals over the course of the last year was \$675.

**Mr. Forbes:** — [Inaudible] . . . 14 cases. Where were these 14 cases?

**Mr. Tweed:** — I don't have that information here.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I know at that time we were talking about some of the advocacy groups, particularly Regina Anti-Poverty and Equal Justice for All in Saskatoon. And you know, it's really unfortunate that we see, particularly for Equal Justice for All because they were doing such good work, that they are no longer receiving funding.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — We know that the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry and Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition as well as organizations like CLASSIC [Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc.] do help individuals with their . . . work with them as well to help them if they require . . . their appeals, help with their appeals.

**Mr. Forbes:** — So seeing that there were only 14 . . . But there were more than that, 14 cases that went to appeals. How many appeals went forward last year?

**Mr. Tweed:** — In '13-14 year to date — that was through to the end of February — there were 267 local appeals or held at the regional level. And 55 of those appeals proceeded to the provincial board.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And how many would have used an advocate to come along with them? Do you know that?

**Mr. Tweed:** — No, that information wouldn't be available, Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Have you set up within the budget line a certain amount for the forty-five . . . for this line, this line item?

**Mr. Tweed:** — No, it's included in the program. You roll it up into the program whether it be the Saskatchewan assured income for disability, the Saskatchewan assistance program, or the transitional employment allowance.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Now the minister had referred to the 440 list, and I know there was a lot of discussion last year about the new list, or that there are . . . well the new list. And how many would be on the new list?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — First of all I will assure you that we don't have a list. What we do have is a recognition that there are people that are going to need our support. As they come forward we're keeping track of them from an early age and working with their families so that we know at a certain time that there will be supports needed for them.

We are working with them, as at the same time we're working with . . . knowing that we need more homes and supports for people through the Valley View Centre. So child and family and our group are in touch with parents who have individuals, or support people or have people who may want to come into government care later on.

A number of them are saying, not right know. Just know that at some time I may need it. So we keep track of the individuals and that's why you have seen not only the 440 individuals, but also over 200, I think it was 215, at the same time were provided supports.

**Mr. Tweed:** — To supplement the minister's comments, in addition to the 440 individuals that received service through that particular initiative, over the same course of time and including this past year, an additional 334 individuals have received services. That would bring the total number of people served in that time span to 774.

**Mr. Forbes:** — How many now are on waiting lists to receive services?

**Mr. Tweed:** — There's no wait-list. And one of the aspects of the 2014-15 budget is about \$20.4 million in additional funding in that . . . I think you see it as disability CBOs [community-based organization] in your display. And that's to ensure that we are able to address those people who come forward.

**Mr. Forbes:** — No one on a waiting list for services for disability? Is that what I'm hearing you say?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — For sure, I can't say that there's no one waiting, but we are aware of what their needs are. Maybe I can ask . . . Do you want to clarify, Gord?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The approach that we use might help clarify. So the ministry uses a forecast approach to identify demand for services. We estimate the resources required to respond to those services and plan on an annualized basis to do just that, so from a yearly pool of funding. And this year we are appropriated . . . are seeking to have an appropriation to respond . . . We would seek to provide services to over 70 more individuals this year. Or pardon me, just, I misspoke. We would look to provide an additional 70 services. One individual might receive more than one service, for example, over the course of 2014-15. The process that's used by the ministry is to assess the priority of the concern and respond in kind based on that analysis.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, good. Thank you. All right, thank you for that. And I just had a message. So we'll go back to my statement from earlier. Because I want to make sure I'm clear that what it was, was that face-to-face centres are closed. You can still mail in your tax, but that it's face-to-face centres. So the CRA [Canada Revenue Agency] service centre in . . . So you can still mail in.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — [Inaudible] . . . federal government employees will be . . . Yes, the ones that are no longer talking to somebody face-to-face will understand that it's really not what we're dealing with. But I do hear that, understand the concern when there's vulnerable people that need support, then we should be aware of them.

**Mr. Forbes:** — We want to be accurate but timely. So I do want to, and we may have more questions about the 440 list, but I know our time is going by quickly. One question I failed to ask Sask Housing, but I think we could get the answer here because it deals with rental supplements, and that is . . . and I see rental supplements are going up and we can have a discussion around that.

Last year the officials said that in 2012, Sask Housing received \$460,000 in rental supplements from their tenants. How much will they receive? What are they planning on receiving this year from rental supplements?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — To the member: on page 17 we've got rental housing supplements. Is that the number you're looking at? Is that what you're talking . . .

**Mr. Forbes:** — I'm wondering how much Sask Housing is anticipating receiving this year from their tenants in terms of rental supplement.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Okay, thank you. We'll get you that. Okay.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Mr. Forbes, I don't have that specific answer, but the way that the rental housing supplement or eligibility for the program is determined, there's a number of different factors, whether that's where you live, the amount of rent that you pay, whether your utilities are included or not, your family composition, and so forth, a number of factors. One of the eligibility criteria is something called a STIR

[shelter-cost-to-income ratio] which is an acronym for the shelter-to-income ratio.

So most residents of the social housing units that Sask Housing would administer or manage through their third party arrangements would not qualify for the rental housing supplement based on the shelter-to-income ratio. Sorry, the answer would be very, very few.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Well they did take in \$461,000 one year. So I don't know if we could get a clarification for next time from Sask Housing because they do have tenants who do receive it. And I mean, if you're . . . Clearly they would want to anticipate or make plans in their budget, I assume, that they're going to be receiving that, something similar to that.

**Mr. Acton:** — We can certainly follow up on that. We don't have a Sask Housing official here, so we can bring that back if that would be all right.

**Mr. Forbes:** — At this point I want to thank the officials for their answers, and the minister. And I will turn this now over to my colleague, and she has a few questions that she'll want to ask. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — Before we start, Mr. Forbes has asked to table a document. It will be HUS 12/27, "Tax time woes worse for thousands without technology." So he has asked to table that. And now, Ms. Chartier, you have the floor.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to talk a little bit first about child care subsidies, if we could. Looking at the number, obviously the child care parent subsidy line here, there is a budgeted decrease between last year and this year. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Yes, I know that's a topic that you and I have spoken about for a couple of years now. We talked about the number of child care assessors there were and the fact that the cases have remained the same. I know from the discussion we've had that the turning point is something that hasn't been looked at, but we also know that families could use their money from the Saskatchewan employment supplement as well.

So we have for 2014-15, the child care budget is \$14.7 million to support 3,136 spaces per month. The average benefit is going to be \$390 per month. And through the Saskatchewan employment supplement, the budget is \$16.1 million to support 5,169 families per month, and the average benefit is about \$260 a month.

So I know that there's options that families have. And I also know that child care is a big part of what the member speaks about when she stands in the House. So I know that we talked about improving the administration of this issue. And at the same time, my colleagues and I are aware that this can cause challenges, and that it's something that should be looked at.

So the Premier has asked that the Legislative Secretary from Moose Jaw Wakamow look into this issue. It's something that we'll be getting information back from him to determine, you know, what the various needs are. And I am waiting to hear what he has to say.

[16:30]

**Ms. Chartier:** — Okay, thank you. Thank you for that. That was a lot in one answer here. Going back here to the beginning of that, I didn't catch the number of families. I know you said it's a \$390 a month average benefits, but right before that I missed the number of families.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Okay, I'm going to ask Gord to give you the information. He'll maybe do it slower.

**Mr. Tweed:** — It's not families, Ms. Chartier, it's actually spaces that we reference. The forecast for the upcoming year would be 3,136 spaces that receive a subsidy each month.

**Ms. Chartier:** — 3,136 spaces that receive subsidy. Can you compare that to the last . . . Can you give me context of the last few years, maybe going back to 2008?

**Mr. Tweed:** — For the past two years, so if I went back to the average caseload in 2012-13, the average number of spaces subsidized, 3,261. The forecast for the fiscal year that we've just come out of, so when we conclude that information, would be 3,195.

**Ms. Chartier:** — So that is a decrease, which I think we could maybe talk a little bit about the turning point. I know the Provincial Secretary had started some consultations last summer. I spoke to some child cares who had flagged for him the turning point issue. And obviously come next October or next fall, we have an increase in the minimum wage, which will ultimately have an impact on all of this.

So right now we have a turning point of \$1,640 before you are no longer eligible for the full subsidy. That hasn't changed since the 1982-83 fiscal year. And the reality is a person right now making minimum wage and working full time is making less than \$20,000 a year and making \$1,600 a month. So the turning point and what you'd be making on minimum wage are very close. So I'm wondering if the minister thinks that that is acceptable. I know you've referenced the comments, or your Provincial Secretary, but I'm wondering your thoughts on that.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Actually it's the Legislative Secretary from Moose Jaw Wakamow, and that's exactly why he was tasked with this opportunity to see what we should be doing. We also are looking at the daycare spaces in general too. There's licensed and unlicensed daycares, where people have choices. So I am waiting to see the information that is given back to me. It's not something that we've been ignoring. We're aware of it. And I know that it's one of the issues that we have to ensure that moms can go to work or parents could go to work. It's something that doesn't escape my mind.

When you reference the minimum wage, I know that the clawback for someone working is . . . Under the last time, and I haven't done the calculation this time, but the last time we had a minimum wage increase, the clawback for someone working full-time would have been \$23.25 per month, and they'd earn approximately \$300 a month more. So we do know that the minimum wage increase is important and that we should be doing that. And the clawback is the reality. But I'm not disagreeing with you. I'm not disagreeing it's something that

should be looked at.

**Ms. Chartier:** — And just to note that for many people \$23.20, the last round, that has an impact, a real impact on people, some of . . . not on everybody. But the reality is when you're living in that less than \$20,000-a-year range, \$23 a month is a big difference for sure. When will the Legislative Secretary be reporting?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'm hoping I get the report from the Legislative Secretary this spring. I don't know the exact date. He hasn't told me yet, but I'm hoping this spring.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Is he finished with his consultations?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — He's finished with his consultations, but I know that there's other information that he's gathering as well. So I haven't had an in-depth discussion with him. I know that he'll be presenting the report to me, and I'm looking forward to it.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Is it your expectation or thought that this would, any changes would happen, could possibly happen mid-year? Or would they have to wait until next budget year?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — We'll have to see what he brings forward and what happens within the budget of the province. I know the member's well aware of the fact that we have a summary financial statement, that we will have a balanced budget, that we have to look at the pressures of every ministry. I'm well aware that it's not just child care subsidies, but there's seniors' issues and schools and roads. And every issue that we look at as government, they all have to be balanced. I think the member is probably aware when they look at the budget for Social Services, ours is one of the top three for increases since we became government.

So it's not just myself, but it's all of our government that's looking at ensuring that we can provide services to people that need our support. So it will be looked at carefully and as soon as we can.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Well I would argue that . . . And there's I mean there's culpability here since 1982 obviously. But the reality is you want people to be employed. You've got the employment supplements. Child care is the key to having people employed and educated. It is an economic development strategy. So I seriously hope that the turning point is something that changes in the very near future.

Moving off the turning point for a moment here, one of the other challenges or issues that I've heard from child cares and from families as well, but it tends to have a major impact on bad debt for child cares, the wait times for processing subsidies. Could you tell me how long the average wait time for processing a subsidy application would be right now?

**Mr. Tweed:** — We asked that very question ourselves this morning, Ms. Chartier, so this is from our staff. So at present the assessors are working on information received over the past two days. The current processing standard is five to seven days, and we're exceeding that standard.

Historically, if you went back over the course of the past few years, the subsidy program has been subject to delays in application times of as much as two to three weeks. So some changes that were introduced, as a result of staff input through one of the lean processes that the deputy referenced, have dramatically changed our ability to keep up.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Do you have any measure . . . So last year we talked about this too, I think, and the year before. And again, child cares have flagged sometimes in the range of three to five weeks were the times that child cares were telling me. So today you're saying five to seven days. How long in the last year, how often do you check in on that?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Frequently.

**Ms. Chartier:** — What does, can you tell me what frequently means?

**Mr. Tweed:** — The administration of the program has been of concern because of some of the delays.

So over the course of the past two years, and really through a lean process that was conducted about a year ago which included providers of service, both centre and home representatives; representatives from the Ministry of Education who have a great stake in the child care system obviously as well; and our own staff, and so what we've seen — and Jeff may want to add or supplement this — is this sort of processing time changed very dramatically over the course of the past seven or eight months. And it can be attributed to how we respond to incoming documentation. It used to be sort of a batch process on month. And now staff interact with information as it comes in rather than going through another administrative process.

It's cut our times down dramatically. We're now having staff who are able to respond more to parents and providers over the course of the telephone conversation much more rapidly than they were able to do so before. We're current on applications. We're current on the entry of attendance information which is key to the subsidy program. All that said, it still is reliant on the parent providing us with all the right documentation.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Okay, if I could just explain what's happened. The discussion that we've had, we had a while ago, we started talking about what could happen through the lean projects. We started receiving electronic attendance submissions in February of last year. And then a lean initiative started in March, and there was a new web-based tool for determining eligibility. And then there was a pilot program began in April of last year, and full province-wide implementation was expected that summer. And so the completion was expected by May of 2013. So we believe, I believe that's now. When you talked about how soon, how often is frequent, it's there. I mean in two to three days or at five days is way better than the time period that people had to wait beforehand.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Definitely. So I just want to clarify then. And obviously there's been some improvements, but one of the things, one of the challenges that child cares had presented is that someone, the director or someone has to fill in the manual

attendance form. And that goes to the subsidy office, and then the subsidy office then has to input that information. So that's changed now. So as of February 2013, it's all electronic. Is that correct?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Yes, providers have the option of using the electronic system as opposed to the old paper-based system, and it is also a measure that has greatly assisted us in expedition of our processing.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Chair, I misspoke, and I'm going to ask Ken to correct me.

**Mr. Acton:** — The web calculator that the minister mentioned is not up and running. We've still had some snags with it. Our objective was to create something very simple that a parent or an operator could punch in the rough numbers and say, yes, it looks like you're going to qualify for this or that. And we still don't have that up and running.

**Ms. Chartier:** — When do you anticipate having that up and running?

**Mr. Acton:** — I'm reluctant to make any comments about timelines based on our thought that we would have it up and running already, and we haven't had that. So we'll continue to work on it. I can't give you a date.

**Ms. Chartier:** — I'm curious if it's in connection . . . Obviously the challenge here is that we've got child care subsidies under Social Services, and then we've got child care under Education. But I know in Education we've talked about how Manitoba has an online child care registry and as part of that, they have a little calculator where you can find out approximately how much you may receive for subsidy. But have you been working in tandem with Education on the possibility of a web-based tool for families to apply for child care and like a one-stop shop as other jurisdictions have done?

**Mr. Tweed:** — So I think the first part of your question was related to an electronic calculator around eligibility?

**Ms. Chartier:** — Yes.

**Mr. Tweed:** — Yes. Thank you. So we have been developing a tool like that that can be used online. We've actually field tested it with a user in a smaller Saskatchewan centre. I got some good advice from that user, and we're just incorporating that into technical changes. And as with many IT development pieces, it takes a bit of time to get it just right. But we thought it imperative that rather than looking at it through our administrative eyes in terms of will the tool be effective, we thought alternatively that field testing it was important, incorporating those learnings and coming with a better product.

[16:45]

**Ms. Chartier:** — The second part of that question, Manitoba . . . And I've raised this in Education. So again the challenge is we've got Social Services here responsible for the subsidy, and we've got Education over here responsible for child care. And in Manitoba they have an online child care registry sort of, and they've got the calculator where you can find out approximately



what your subsidy will be as well. Have you been working in tandem with Education? And I haven't had Education estimates yet to ask these questions there, but I'm curious if there's been any thought to the online child care registry.

**Mr. Tweed:** — So we work closely with the Ministry of Education around the child care subsidy program, and the Legislative Secretary has had meetings with ourselves and with Education and had meetings with officials from both ministries together. So in terms of how the program is organized, I think the report that may be forthcoming may include some recommendations around that, not having seen the report. But certainly the . . . Let me reframe, if I can. I'll reframe. The Legislative Secretary has asked us why we're organized the way that we are. I would conclude that he's giving some deliberation around the same question that you're asking.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Okay. So there is the opportunity for change or making child care in general a more efficient system for families.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Yes. Definitely that's what we're trying to do with all of our programs, to make sure that we're looking through every program through the eyes of an individual not just a ministry or the program. How can we make it better for the individuals that we're trying to serve?

Again when I have an opportunity to meet with my colleagues over, whether it's child care or other education issues, this is something where we're saying we've got to simplify it for the general public. This has got to be more about the citizen than it is about government.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Well I'd encourage you, I know again the child care, the bulk of it falls under Education, but I'd encourage you to look at the Manitoba model and discuss that with your colleagues in Education.

The one thing that that online child care registry does, again it's got the calculator where you can find out your subsidies, but the other piece of it is it's one-stop shopping so you don't have to put your list on 23 or name on 23 different child care lists. And it also helps governments quantify the need for licensed child care. So I think it's a pretty, pretty good system that they have there. So I'd encourage Social Services to take a look at that and talk to Education about that as well.

With respect, moving off child care here . . . Well you know what? Actually just a couple more questions on the subsidy piece here. What is your staff complement now? It sounds like you're doing things. Things are moving quite smoothly on the subsidy processing piece here. What is the complement of full-time staff in the child care subsidy unit?

**Mr. Redekop:** — Jeff Redekop. The staff complement is very stable in that area. We're at 13.5 FTEs [full-time equivalent] right now, which consists of 9 front-line client service representatives, 2 supervisors, an assistant, some administrative function, and a portion of the time of a manager. So it all equates to 13.5, and I believe, going by memory I think the number was the same last year.

**Ms. Chartier:** — I think since 2007 it's been 13.5 actually, or

at least 2007. In written questions, I'd asked that some time ago. So the manager is administrating three different programs. Is that correct?

**Mr. Redekop:** — Yes.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Yes. Okay. So that would . . . Would that child care subsidy employment supplement . . .

**Mr. Redekop:** — Just give me a second here if you would . . .

**Ms. Chartier:** — Okay.

**Mr. Redekop:** — So my colleague, Mr. Tweed, tells me it's rental housing supplement . . . And what was the other one?

**Mr. Tweed:** — Employment supplement.

**Mr. Redekop:** — Employment, Saskatchewan employment supplement. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Tweed.

**Ms. Chartier:** — How many applications do you get on average in a month for child care subsidy?

**Mr. Redekop:** — You ask a very good question. I don't believe we have the data with us, but it might come.

**Ms. Chartier:** — It might come.

**Mr. Redekop:** — As we're sitting . . .

**Ms. Chartier:** — If you could endeavour to get that, if not today, on the next, that would be great.

**Mr. Redekop:** — We'll do our best to answer that before the end of the session today if we can.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Okay.

**Mr. Redekop:** — There might be a technological issue that would get in the way. If I could, I'll take the opportunity to quickly answer one of your earlier questions about how often we're checking on the processing time and the statement that Mr. Tweed gave you earlier about our being very caught up and within our standard. We've been achieving that standard now for between 10 and 12 months, so it's not just a one-time occurrence. It's quite stable.

**Ms. Chartier:** — I'm curious, what are you hearing back from child care? That bad debt piece was a huge issue for child care. So what kind of response are you getting back from child cares?

**Mr. Redekop:** — I think in terms of the overall process improvements, we've heard very positive comments from both . . . well from families, from child care providers. It's been overwhelmingly positive in terms of the changes that we've made particularly with the email opportunity to report their information.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Have most child cares taken that opportunity to file electronically?

**Mr. Redekop:** — I don't have the exact number. I think it's

between 25 and 50 per cent that have taken us up on that opportunity. We hope that will increase obviously.

**Ms. Chartier:** — I'm just curious how that works. So are they just forwarding a spreadsheet then? Or is there actually a program where they punch the numbers in?

**Mr. Redekop:** — I believe it's an email they send to us with information contained within the emails. Now it's not an online reporting process. It's an email communication process. But of course it's more quick than sending it through mail or having to make phone calls or some other less efficient method.

**Ms. Chartier:** — In terms of the number of applications that you get in a month — and I know you said you didn't have that number as well — sort of in tandem with that, I'd be interested in knowing how many applications on average are rejected in a month as well? So those two pieces of information would be great. And maybe take me back a few years, as much data as you . . .

**Mr. Redekop:** — We will do our best to see what we can gather.

**Ms. Chartier:** — That would be great. With respect, moving on here, I see that we're running out of time here. But employment supplements, when was the last time . . . And we've had this conversation here a couple years ago as well.

I think I brought a case of a family forward who . . . both parents worked. She in fact ran a child care day home and he was a custodian. And he had gotten a small increase in his wage, and that bumped him off the employment supplement. Which the employment supplement piece itself wasn't the problem for them, but he was diabetic and their children had had some health complications, so they lost the employment supplement, but more importantly in tandem they lost the family health benefit.

So I see that number going down, the employment supplement going down in this budget from more than 19 million to 16 million, and so I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Members should be aware the Legislative Secretary has also made some inquiries about this as he's doing his work. When the changes were made, there was nearly 6,000 families benefited from the largest increase that had ever been in the Saskatchewan employment supplement, and they receive an average of \$275 a month. I'm not sure what other kind of information you would require.

**Ms. Chartier:** — When was that threshold last changed?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — 2008.

**Ms. Chartier:** — So in the '08-09 fiscal year?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — That's correct.

**Ms. Chartier:** — I'm curious. Do you see this . . . Obviously the goal is to have people employed, and the employment supplement was created under the last administration to help

that, deal with the welfare wall and help people stay employed. But 2008 is a few years ago and obviously wages have gone up, as have expenses. Is that threshold, I know you've said the Legislative Secretary is looking at it, but has that been something that you've discussed and advocated for a change in at your cabinet table?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — To the member, one of the things that we're trying to do is ensure the affordability for everyone in the province. And what we've done in the last little while, with not only increasing the minimum wage which is now, I think the increased minimum wage is at 28.3 per cent since we became government and the average weekly earnings have grown by 27.6 per cent as well.

So we do know that there is always more that we can be doing. We've had a 7.4 per cent increase in our last budget in Social Services, and we look at all the programs that we have to ensure the people that we're protecting and supporting those that are vulnerable. The most important thing we can do is help people get on their own feet if we can do that.

So all of these programs are looked at through the eyes of how we can help our citizens. They're all looked at through the eyes of how we spend taxpayers' money within the balanced budget. And so yes, everything is looked at. I know that we had a lot of catching up to do, and I know the member has put into the comment a couple of times it hasn't changed since 2007 or 2006. You know how long seniors didn't have an increase? Sixteen years. So there's lots of increases that have to be looked at.

**Ms. Chartier:** — We're talking about working families here. With all due respect, we're talking about working families who the ultimate goal is to ensure that families don't have to slip back on to social assistance. And this is a program that does exactly that. So I'm wondering when the last time you've reviewed this program?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — Every year during budget time we look at all of our programs. We see what we can be doing within the budget we hope to get when we go to treasury board. We make an argument, a discussion every time and say this is something that we should be looking at. We believe that this is something that may help a family get on their feet so they don't have to be looking at government at all.

So some of the programs that are being reviewed now by the Legislative Secretary, he's looked at this one as well in a, I'm not going to say as thorough a measure as maybe we will be doing. But altogether we are looking at how much, the affordability issue in the province. So child care subsidies, seniors, income plans, employment supplement, child care — all of it. All of it is our goal within this ministry. We have a huge responsibility to not only support those who are vulnerable but to help them get on their feet. So I'm really pleased with the support I have from my colleagues as well.

The fact that adult basic education spaces are things that we're looking at as well saying, how do we help, how do we best support our families? There's always more work to do.

But I assure you it's not something that we just put on a shelf

and say, I'll look at that in three years from now. If there are ways that we can see us as support in this area, we'll help families. That's where we'll be. But we do it all within the realm of a balanced budget and ensuring that we can look at it through the eyes of the individuals as well. Every person is different. Their needs are different.

I had the opportunity to speak to your colleague a few minutes ago about a couple of the strategies that I'm really proud of that we're working on to share the disability strategy and the mental health and addiction strategy. How can we put all our programs together and the funding that we have as government to support our individuals? What's the best way to do it? There's lots of input we get and is needed. So as we move forward, I assure you these programs won't be put on the shelf and ignored.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Well these two in particular kind of have been over the last recent years. But I'm curious, obviously these are two things that I see very tied to employment. You've got the employment supplement, which is to support low-waged working families. You've got child care which is meant to support working families. All things that we all want people to do. Work not only feels really good to people and people want to be employed, but it's I think good for all of us. So I'm eager again around your Legislative Secretary's report. And I know you said you weren't quite sure, but I'd like to pin you down a little bit more on that. Was he given a timeline to report?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'm hoping that I receive the report this spring. But I know that I can't give you a deadline or a time frame on it because I want to see the quality of the work that's given to me, and making sure he can look at it from various perspectives. I'm very interested in it, but at the same time I want it to be thorough.

**Ms. Chartier:** — I know that he was doing some of his work already. I think as of last June I had encountered child cares who had spoken to him already. So when did he start this process?

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'm not sure the exact date that he started, but I know that he did a lot of work on this issue and the foster families issue over the last number of months. He's had a tremendous number of meetings with groups that wanted to give him their input. And it's a big province going across from . . . And I know that he circled the province very well, making sure we get good input, not just from urban, but from rural as well. So it's a lot of work, and I really thank him for what he's doing.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Could you just let me know which areas he's covering? So we've talked about foster care, child care subsidies, Saskatchewan employment supplement. The other areas . . .

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I believe that that's what he's looked at. There isn't anything else he's looking at.

**Ms. Chartier:** — Well thank you for that. Our time has expired here, so thank you very much to the minister and to the officials. As always, we really appreciate the information that you bring and your willingness to talk about issues that are important to people. So thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Draude:** — I'd like to thank the members of the committee very much for being here tonight, and for your questions. And of course, for the people that are with me here today, they've done a tremendous amount of work. I think we had an agreement with . . . Member Forbes said the next time we would be speaking about child welfare, I believe it is. If there is any questions that you have asked that we haven't answered today, we'll get the answers to you as soon as we can. So again, Mr. Chair, and to everyone here, thank you very much.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Madam Minister, and thank you to the committee. It being now past the time of adjournment, this committee stands adjourned until April 10th at 2 p.m. Thank you, one and all.

[The committee adjourned at 17:01.]