

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, October 5, 2016**

**Legislative Chamber**

**Department of Seniors  
Senior Safety Grants**

## **Public Accounts Committee**

Mr. Allan MacMaster, Chairman

Mr. Iain Rankin, Vice-Chairman

Mr. Chuck Porter

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

Mr. Brendan Maguire

Mr. Joachim Stroink

Mr. Tim Houston

Hon. David Wilson

Ms. Lenore Zann

[Mr. Bill Horne replaced Mr. Chuck Porter]

[Hon. Christopher d'Entremont replaced Mr. Allan MacMaster]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault  
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Ms. Tammy Squires  
Assistant Auditor General

### **WITNESSES**

#### **Department of Seniors**

Mr. Simon d'Entremont, Deputy Minister

Mr. Faizal Nanji, Director of Corporate Strategy and Policy

Ms. Jocelyn Yerxa, Acting Director of Programs &  
Community Development Coordinator



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2016**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIRMAN**

Mr. Allan MacMaster

**VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Mr. Iain Rankin

MR. CHAIRMAN (Mr. Iain Rankin): I'd like to call the meeting to order and remind those in attendance to place their phones on silent or on vibrate.

We have on today's agenda officials from the Department of Seniors regarding Senior Safety Grants. I'll ask everyone to introduce themselves now.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: You can proceed with your opening remarks, Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members, and thank you for the introduction. We're pleased to be with you today during Seniors Week in Nova Scotia to speak about the Senior Safety Grant program and other programs overseen by the Department of Seniors.

I want to begin by offering a brief overview of the mandate of the Department of Seniors. I'm pleased to say that Nova Scotia remains one of the few jurisdictions in Canada with a ministry whose sole focus is the inclusion, well-being, and independence of older adults. This, I think, is quite appropriate - we're all aware that Nova Scotia's population is amongst the oldest of any province. Today, there are about 180,000 people aged 65 and older living in Nova Scotia. We expect that number to rise to almost 255,000 by 2030. By 2040, 30 per cent of Nova Scotia's population will be over the age of 64.

We recognize that an aging population challenges our health care and social service systems as well as others, but that's not the whole story. The mandate of the Department of Seniors is broader than that. Seniors, like any other age group, access a wide breadth of programs and services offered by government. Our colleagues across government have the expertise and day-to-day job of looking at issues and future demographics in their areas of expertise in their departments. Our mandate is to provide leadership and policy development and coordination across government to make sure older adults are able to live in safe, healthy, age-friendly communities, and that their contributions - both economic and social - are valued, supported, and promoted.

We see the aging population not as a challenge to be managed but as an opportunity. Among our goals is to promote and support older adults so they can continue to contribute in their communities and to our economy through both paid employment and volunteer work. Older adults already contribute much to our province. In fact, 25 per cent of people 65 to 69 years of age are still working, and 25 per cent of those people over 65 who are working are self-employed. Over 11 per cent of people over 64 years of age remain in the paid workforce as employers or entrepreneurs. As many as 44 per cent of our seniors participate in volunteer service, among the highest rates of volunteerism in the country.

This is the heart of our mandate as a department: to create conditions by which older Nova Scotians can enjoy safe, productive, and healthy lives and to age in place in their homes and in their communities. That's why, earlier this year, we started to work to create Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population. Working with the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging at Mount Saint Vincent University, we opened a conversation with Nova Scotians about how we support older adults. This was intended to change the narrative, to see older Nova Scotians in terms of the value of their contributions to our province and not just as a cost.

Over the course of the summer, we heard from hundreds of Nova Scotians by mail, by online survey, and by in-person meetings. They told us about their priorities, and they told us about the importance of being able to contribute fully to their communities. Based on what we learned from those conversations, we're developing an action plan with sound, achievable recommendations to support our aging population.

Our Senior Safety Grant program is just one of the ongoing initiatives our department supports to make life better for older Nova Scotians. This year, we provided almost \$280,000 in Senior Safety Grants to 14 not-for-profit groups. These organizations

provide support services as well as education and awareness programs that combat elder abuse and prevent crimes against seniors. Our other grant program called the Age-Friendly Community Grant program supports a range of services such as healthy living workshops, regional community planning initiatives, and lifelong learning programs.

These are important tools, and I'm pleased to say the call for the next round of applications for Senior Safety Grants is now open, and Age-Friendly Community Grants will be opening very soon.

This is just a quick overview of our programs and priorities. I look forward to questions from the committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont. Now we'll open up with some questioning. We'll start with the PC caucus, Mr. Houston.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for the opening comments. I notice in the budget documents that there's about \$280,000 allocated for this particular program. How has that amount changed over time? Is that an increase or a decrease?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have been providing approximately the same amount of funding over the last number of years.

MR. HOUSTON: Does it all get used? Are there people who get turned away? There's a listing of organizations that have received funding under this, but have some been turned away or does everyone who has made a valid application get accepted?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We've been fortunate that all those who have made applications that meet the eligibility guidelines of the program, we've been able to fund in the past.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, so everyone is receiving the funding.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: The ones who have met the eligibility guidelines. We continue to work with those who would like to develop into a full-time program, to be able to build the capacity and help meet the eligibility guidelines to do that.

MR. HOUSTON: So would you envision the funding for this particular program increasing, going forward in the future?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We would like to be able to do more within our resources that we have. We have many competing priorities and we have many demands on our resources, but this is an area that we would like to see developed. We believe it delivers good policy and good programs for seniors.

MR. HOUSTON: Would you have a sense of how many organizations didn't meet the eligibility requirements and got turned away?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think we have just a handful - two to five maybe - that we've been working with in the past, who have been talking to us about that and who we can encourage and discuss more about how to develop their program to meet the different eligibility criteria, which includes other funding partners - we need organizations that are well-connected in their community. We ask that they establish an advisory board made up of members of the community and that they develop the types of programs around senior safety that we hope they can do. We do give them flexibility, though, in their community to define safety in the lens that makes sense for them as a community.

So the first senior safety program started in the Valley actually, as a result of crime, house break-ins against seniors. The RCMP wanted to take a proactive step to be able to do something about that. Other programs that developed include driver safety training, protection from financial fraud, and physical abuse.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you have any criteria that would look at an application and look at an organization that is applying and kind of look at their ratio of administrative costs to program delivery costs? Do you do any kind of analysis on applicants as to where the money is going, I guess?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, we have a list of eligible expenses that are allowed so we allow travel expenses but not travel expenses outside the province, for example. They also require a number of other funding partners, so for the most part we're funding maybe around one-third of the costs and two-thirds are provided by other partners and we have a list of eligible expenses. There's always plenty of eligible expenses, I think, to cover our contributions, and other partners are throwing in on top of that to cover the balance of expenses.

We also have a biannual reporting period where applicants give us reports and we're able to analyze those to make sure we're achieving the results we want.

MR. HOUSTON: If you had an organization that came forward looking for funding and had partners in place and stuff, and they said well, half of our costs are for administration costs and half are for the program delivery, would that raise any flags or would you be looking for applicants where most of the money is going to the program?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Given that a large part of the program expenses are actually the employee who does the work, the coordinator's salary, and the cost of moving around and doing your business and holding workshops - if you include the employees' salary as cost of administration, the cost of running the program are largely in that area, but we would analyze the proposals to make sure. If something was out of whack, compared to other regions and what others were doing and how far the money was going, we would be able to work with them in that regard.

MR. HOUSTON: In that example, sure. The person who is delivering the program their salary would be - I wouldn't call that administrative, I would call that program delivery.

I guess the reason I am asking is when I look at the department's budget, almost half of the department's budget goes to administration - it's just called administration - and roughly half of the budget, maybe a little more, goes to seniors' initiatives. It strikes me that if you have a department where half of the money is going to seniors' initiatives and half of the money is going to administration, it seems a little bit disproportionate to me. I don't know if you've looked at it through that lens, or if you can shed any light on that for us.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Certainly, that is a result of the nature of how we are as a department. The Department of Seniors is primarily a policy central agency within government. We do deliver a few programs, but the senior agenda is distributed all throughout government. Nursing homes is through the Department of Health and Wellness, housing is at Housing Nova Scotia, justice and safety are at the Department of Justice - all the program spending for the most part happens in those areas.

We are a policy central agency and an advocacy agency within government whose job it is to advocate for seniors' issues with colleagues in other departments. So part of our expenditure is needed to be on policy staff, analysts and to do the types of analysis that we need to be able to engage those other departments on those issues. The subject matter expertise and, for the most part, the programming and the funding is in those other departments.

MR. HOUSTON: There used to be something called the Seniors' Secretariat, I don't know if you're familiar with that - the department is kind of filling that role, I guess, at the moment. You mentioned the advocacy work that the department does on behalf of seniors with other departments that are looking at seniors' policy and of course, I can't let that pass without asking about what role the Department of Seniors might have had in the proposed Pharmacare changes. It was a terrible, poorly thought-out idea to frighten seniors with from the outset, but it was ultimately withdrawn. Did the Department of Seniors have a role in coming up with that policy before we all read about it on the news?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have a permanent advisory committee to the department called the Group of IX. Our role was in opening the door to be able to have conversations with those folks and for us to be able to reflect the thoughts of the senior community in the development of different opportunities and changes in programming.

At the end of the day, government made a decision to forego the changes, except that they decided to apply the policy where people who would benefit from changes to the policy - the 12,000 Nova Scotians who are paying no or smaller premiums as a result of the change - got to keep the benefit, and those who would have had to pay more did not have to pay.

The government made a strong commitment to be able to consult with Nova Scotians further and that commitment still exists. Government will be consulting on the Pharmacare program and any changes before they do so. We will be having further conversations. They will be having conversations with me and our team, as well as we will open more conversations with the Group of IX, which is our permanent advisory council on the consultation plan and what changes to the program would be appropriate in the future.

MR. HOUSTON: I certainly don't speak for the Group of IX, but my recollection is they were pretty disappointed with what the government came out with. I think they felt that their role in the process leading up to the announcement was certainly mischaracterized or misrepresented. The changes that were put on the table weren't something that they feel they were part of a consultation process. That's my sense of how the Group of IX felt. Is that a fair summary, that they were pretty disappointed with what came out based on what they had been speaking about? Is that fair?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We had several conversations with the Group of IX members and at the end of the day I think we could have done a better job in communicating more detail perhaps, or a better understanding of what other consequences or issues might come up as a result. So we agreed that we could have done a better job of doing that. In the future when we have these types of conversations, we'll make sure we take the time to do a really good job in doing those types of consultations and conversations.

MR. HOUSTON: So at the time, the government did a bit of damage of control obviously and said we're not going to do that, we're going to do something different, but first we're going to consult. Are those consultations taking place? I haven't seen any of the consultations on a "new" Pharmacare initiative - I haven't seen an announcement of any forthcoming consultations. Are they actually taking place right now?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: They haven't begun yet. The department is doing the research and needed to come up with a consultation plan that they could be content and confident is comprehensive, asks the right questions, and meets the needs of what Nova Scotians expect from a dialogue about an issue that had a lot of profile and requires further conversation before making any more changes.

MR. HOUSTON: That would be the Department of Health and Wellness doing some analysis, let's say, of what should be proposed and the Department of Seniors - your role in that process is to kind of nudge them along and make sure they have the consultations? Would that be your advocacy work there?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, we stay in connection with them as they do their work and we ensure our commitment to meet with the Group of IX on the consultation plan. As we consult, we have a good knowledge of who the stakeholders are and how best to reach them. We learn great practices by being in the field and doing our consultations



this summer. If you want to advertise seniors' consultations you put up a bulletin in the church, for example. We learn through experience and that's the type of experience we bring to other departments. We know our stakeholders, we know how to connect with them, and that's the type of experience that we bring to the table as well.

MR. HOUSTON: I guess seniors are worried; you must be hearing that through your department. I hear from them all the time that they believe this is going to come back and they are kind of antsy as to, we were told they were going to consult with us and nobody is. So every day that passes, they get a little bit more anxious, and I would say that given the history on that particular file, rightfully so.

Do you have a date, as we sit here, as to when those public consultations might start? Is that something that might be this Fall? Do you have any sense of when we might see that come back?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We don't have a date or a time from the Department of Health and Wellness yet, but they are doing their research and analysis and they are going to make sure they are doing a good job, so they are taking the time to do it right. I am sure the department or the minister will advise us and make public when the consultations start.

I expect there will be some public disclosure, some advertising done. We expect there will be a web presence and there will be ample opportunity for groups and seniors individually to be able to contribute to the conversation.

MR. HOUSTON: And to the sinister person who says that will probably happen two months after the next provincial election, you would say what?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I can't comment, nor is it my place to.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. The seniors' programming has gotten kind of a rough ride here over the last few years so there's a heavy weight on your department to do that strong advocacy work.

If I look back just under the last couple of years even under this government and some of the things that the McNeil Liberals have cut from seniors - obviously the staffing from your department is down quite a bit from what it would have been a few years ago. But just since Premier McNeil was elected, the things that he has cut like the 50+ Seniors Expo, the Remarkable Senior Awards, the Intergenerational Awards, the Art and Photo Gallery Awards - all these things were really inexpensive acknowledgements and pats on the back for seniors. Do you have any recollection of why? Were you part of the cutting of those programs? Can you shed any light on why so many of these things are just being cut away from seniors?

It's small things, small in the terms of financial need, small in the budget need but huge things for seniors. You can imagine how much they looked forward to the 55+ Games and you can imagine what it would have meant to a senior to receive a Remarkable Senior Award. These are important milestones for them and yet we have a government that cuts them away and I can't see the sense in it. Are you able to make any sense of all those types of cuts?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Most of those that you mention happened before I arrived at the department. Governments have to make difficult decisions. Obviously they have limited financial resources, they have to choose amongst many competing priorities for funding availability.

This government, though, has also increased funding for things like home care by \$59 million in the last three years. We have tax reductions and tax credits for low-income seniors. We've made increases in investment in low-income housing. On balance, there's still lots of incremental investments made to a growing part of our society which we need to continue to do.

MR. HOUSTON: Is there any move within your department to try and reinstitute some of those inexpensive programs and awards that I just mentioned? Is that something that's talked about in the department, that maybe we should bring these back?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We're trying to align our activities in the conversations around our strategic priorities which are around helping people live healthy, active lives, age in place in their communities, in their homes, and contribute economically and socially to their community. Where those types of initiatives fit what we do - for example, the 55+ Games and so on - we will partner with organizations, and we're happy to take on new initiatives within the limits of our resources. One interesting initiative we took on in your geographic area last year was the Silver Economy Summit, where we spent some time in the community with community leaders, municipal leaders, and business leaders to talk about the positive economic contribution of seniors.

Part of our motivation there is to start changing the conversation around seniors as being a cost always. There's a huge opportunity in the housing sector and in the health care sector. There's economic opportunity around the aging phenomenon. As well, the increased workforce participation and seniors' entrepreneurship are topics that we like to talk about and try to spend more time talking about whenever we can because that's part of changing the dialogue and making Nova Scotians realize that seniors can be an asset.

In doing so, we'll actually combat ageism, which is a predisposition to think that seniors are of less value or can't make their own decisions because they've reached 65. The reality is we're living 10 years longer than we were 50 years ago, and 20 years longer than 100 years ago. We still, as a society, act like 65 is a magic day in your life where you go from being a contributor to consuming resources and so on. That's a dialogue we need

to change, and we need to change it by having events like the Silver Economy Summit, where we talk about the positive contribution.

MR. HOUSTON: I certainly agree. I asked a friend of mine his thoughts on this topic before I came in. He said, I'll tell you when I'm a senior. He's about 73 years old.

Again, the point that you're making brings me back to a lot of things that were being done, like the games and the awards and the expo. I would just urge the department to look at those things again because in this province, we've been kind of beaten down by successive governments. We see things that happen, and we shrug our shoulders and go, well, it's all we can afford, or, it's the best we can do, or something. Governments have made an effort to set the bar extremely low, and it's too bad. So there were things like these that some people might call feel good or whatever, but they're important things that show respect. That was a long list of inexpensive ways to show respect to seniors, so I'd urge the department to look at those again because they're important.

Back in 2005, there was something released called the Strategy for Positive Aging. It set nine goals at the time, and that was in 2005. Are you familiar with the nine goals, and has the government met those nine goals?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I am familiar with the nine goals, and the plan. I believe there were 195 or so actions in the plan. Over the last decade, successive governments have been working to try to deliver on the directions in the plan. The plan was very directional as opposed to necessarily specific, but different government departments have been making good progress against those. What we're looking to do though, with the consultations we did this summer and coming up with the new strategy and the new action plan is to refresh that a decade later to be in line with some of the new emerging themes facing seniors. Because of their increased longevity, there are new issues that maybe we didn't spend enough time on 10 years ago that we do now.

For example, a couple of decades ago, only 4 per cent of the workforce was made up of people over 65; now it's 11 per cent. People are working longer, so we need to add the economic agenda. Twenty-five per cent of people over 65 who are working are self-employed, so senior entrepreneurship is actually a big deal. This is a new emerging theme that might not have been captured in enough detail in the former strategy. It's a good time to modernize strategy to be in line with the new trends working with seniors so that we can continue to drive the seniors' agenda.

MR. HOUSTON: I'll just quickly ask you, before we move on to the next person, about nursing homes. Does the department know the staffing ratio for CCA hours per resident per day in a nursing home?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We do not. Those are the types of subject matter expertise, types of knowledge, that would more likely rest within the departments that are delivering those programs and that are doing that type of analysis.

MR. HOUSTON: But you would certainly be advocating for better care in nursing homes?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, we open the door again to the Group of IX, who meets regularly. We bring in . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has elapsed for the PC caucus questions in this round. We'll move to the NDP caucus. Mr. Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Sorry I'm a bit late, but it seems like everybody wanted to get to Halifax at the same time this morning. Traffic was heavy.

I appreciate you being here. I think this is a topic that often is kind of in the shadows of some of the other issues that we see, but I have to say, in the constituency office, seniors' issues are always top of mind. Seniors are a big bulk of the work that I do and my office does try to assist them and try to hopefully improve their situation or find an answer to a concern that they have.

I read that the mandate of the Department of Seniors is to “. . . consult with seniors and ensure their views are considered by the province in the development of policies, programs, and services.” To what extent are you engaged with the other departments? I know there has been a decision by the current government to minimize the impact that your department could have with the reduction of budgets and staffing and just the makeup of how the department is now.

How do you work with the other departments to ensure that the government, when they change policies or change a budget line item, that the seniors and the issues that seniors have are there? Housing, for example - housing is a big issue. Pharmacare is a big issue. How are you plugging into the Department of Health and Wellness? How are you plugging into housing issues in the province to ensure that the consultation that runs the mandate is happening and that government truly hears what seniors are going through and the changes that are in front of us will address their concerns?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: That's a great question. There are both formal and informal mechanisms by which we exert policy influence on other departments. I as the deputy minister have the good fortune of sitting with my colleague deputy ministers at all the deputy ministers' committees. I sit on the Audit Committee. I sit on other committees made up of deputy ministers where we talk about the upcoming agendas that are developing in those.

I'm able to bring the seniors' lens to those discussions and to say, have you thought about the impact on seniors of that policy or program change? So sitting around the table being part of the conversations allows me to influence that way.

I also act as a door opener a bit. People come to me because I'm an obvious advocate for seniors and seniors' groups within government. They come to me and say, in my community we're talking about X, Y, Z, what do I do about it? I'm able to open the door. I do introductions. Just yesterday I sent a couple of email introductions to deputy ministers, CEOs of provincial agencies, and said I was talking to John, and John and Mary would like to talk to you. So I open those doors. I book meetings with officials in other departments, with seniors and seniors' groups to be able to bridge those connections as well.

Also, when I joined the department the first thing I did was to go around and see all the deputy ministers and say we're here, we're available, we'd like to be an area of expertise that you can tap into who know our stakeholders well - we know how they want to communicate, we know their desires, and we can be an avenue for you to open the door to consult with them.

For example, you mentioned housing. Just at the last Group of IX meeting, we had folks from Housing Nova Scotia come and present to the Group of IX to talk about what types of things they're looking at. The Group of IX is able to advocate and say, don't forget about this - I'm hearing from my members, this is important. Of course it educates those senior officials with what the brewing agendas are, what things are important - energy efficiency is important, reducing the costs of operating your home is important. They can take that back to their department and look at their policies and programs to make sure they've got an appropriate lens to meet the needs for seniors.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know over my career - just over 13 years - often housing has been a huge issue over time. Of course, top of mind the last year and a half, two years is an impact like Seniors' Pharmacare. It got a lot of attention and a lot of concern. I was blown away by the amount of engagement that seniors in my community had with my office. Honestly, with all the issues that are in front of us, I heard from a lot of seniors. I couldn't go anywhere in the community without someone stopping and talking to me about this issue. I feel that their concerns were not heard in a way that I think the current government needs to make sure they understand the impact of policy changes or legislative changes or program changes.

What role do you have in the budgetary process - not your own department budget but the housing budget, Health and Wellness budget. Right now is when those departments are working on the budget and they have an impact on the lives of Nova Scotians, especially seniors.

Do you play a role, are you engaged in that process? Is that something that at a later date, when they are closer to kind of having their budget prepared, that you would be able to see what departments are doing? Or do you have an early engagement process or is there a process for you to be engaged early on in these departments so that the concerns of seniors are top of mind when government is looking at maybe changing a program, cutting it, removing it or introducing a new program?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: That's a great question. We do from time to time get involved in budgetary discussions about increasing program X - is it going to accomplish our policy goals? But for the most part, it's trying to raise the level of priority of seniors' issues within departments so that when they allocate scarce resources to a fixed number of competing priorities, that we can make sure that the things seniors need are given the attention they need.

As to whether or not they give it \$200,000 or \$220,000, in terms of detailed budgetary discussions, we don't often get to that level of granularity. It's raising the profile of the seniors priority with them to make sure it gets the attention it needs.

As part of our consultations in building our action plan, in the action plan that we'd like to build, we're actually building a road map and a framework that says these are the priorities we should be investing in. Then through that I'll be working with colleague departments to try to increase our level of investment in those areas to make sure that we can deliver the strategy from a big picture perspective.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Are you confident that the departments are listening? I just look at the fiasco of the Seniors' Pharmacare issue last year. It came out of left field, it seemed initially like the consultation and support was there, through the Group of IX. I've engaged with them often over the years as an MLA, as a former minister. I felt bad after all the facts came out on exactly what the impact was going to be on seniors because they were beside them when they initially announced these changes, that they were going to be good changes for seniors and we know that didn't happen.

I know my colleague asked a few questions around the consultation and what's going to happen. Can you give us more of a timeline? We're looking at six or eight months maybe since they initiated potential changes. Is there anything in the works right now on a timeline on that consultation, or is it going to happen the week the budget is announced in the Spring? Sometimes it's a little late to do that.

Now of course there was a huge impact from seniors and their resentment on how those changes came. Is there not more of a timeline now, since so much time has passed since that initial announcement about consultation with seniors around Seniors' Pharmacare?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I don't have any specific timelines but I do know the Department of Health and Wellness is working on preparations for a consultation plan. My expectation is that it won't be last-minute and quick; my expectation is that it will be thorough and comprehensive. If we didn't do a good enough job the last time being thorough and comprehensive, we're probably not going to do the same thing again. I expect there to be meetings in person, online presence, facilitated sessions, meetings with the Group of IX and other groups as well. I expect it to be quite comprehensive and the Department of Health and Wellness is taking the time to make sure they plan the best consultation they can.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I hope that happens because with seniors, especially seniors who have ailments or chronic disease, I've seen first-hand in my former career where they will cut a pill in three to make it last longer, when they are required to take that full pill. I hope the government recognizes the impact that changes like they tried to propose last year have on seniors and I hope there's meaningful consultation.

Around the housing issue, as I said, I've talked about housing throughout my career and I've talked to seniors who struggle, especially now when you see the market rent value, especially in my community - I think most seniors, if they are lucky, they can find if they want to downgrade from their home into an apartment or a condo-style living arrangement, it's a minimum of \$1,000, \$1,100 a month.

A number of years ago a seniors' apartment opened in the community I represent - Millwood Place, I believe it's called - where it kind of helps with the gap between those very low-income seniors who qualify for seniors' housing, I believe it's 30 per cent of whatever their income is, those people who are just over that threshold who found it very difficult to pay \$1,100, \$1,200, \$1,300 a month. It's close to market value but it isn't, it's less.

I've seen it, I know people who live there, very successful, it really is a little community. Is there any talk on trying to move that forward? I would think it's cost recovery, I believe - I haven't seen figures from it but I believe it's a cost recovery arrangement that's there. Has there been any talk on moving that across the province, increasing the number of opportunities for seniors who might be just over that threshold for seniors' housing or seniors' living, to get some support in finding adequate housing?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think Housing Nova Scotia - if you have any comment I'll pass it on to Faizal in a minute. Housing Nova Scotia is always looking at the demand for housing in different geographic parts of the province. They do have a spectrum - I'm not a subject matter expert but they do have a different spectrum in that we have fully paid-for housing, we have subsidized housing, there are a few different tranches as well.

Housing Nova Scotia also offers funding for individuals to make adjustments to their own homes to stay in their homes longer. I believe their budget is around \$20 million, which they give in forgivable grants, forgivable loans that are converted to grants over time, to be able to make adjustments to their home to maintain their independence and stay in their home as long as possible.

They're also doing some different pilots and different ideas around energy efficiency to try to reduce the cost of operating different types of housing arrangements as well. So they're really looking at the breadth and spectrum.

Like I mentioned, the COO came to the Group of IX recently and talked about the types of things they're doing. It was an opportunity for the Group of IX to give feedback on the types of priorities they're hearing about as well.

We know as well that there are probably more housing options that need to be developed over time. In a place like Toronto they have maybe a smaller proportion of seniors than we do but they have a higher critical mass, so it's easier for the private sector to jump in there and fill all the available gaps economically, you know from \$700 to \$800 a month, there's plenty of people so they can build products for that, and \$800 to \$900 and so on.

If we go to Digby there's maybe not enough people in every economic bracket to build the type of product we need, so there needs to be some innovation. There are some great best practices as well in other parts of the country, like co-op housing, where they take old homes and convert them to multi-unit apartments where people cohabitate together. Faizal, do you have any added comments?

MR. FAIZAL NANJI: I just would add really that it is an important issue and that affordable, accessible housing is something that came up during the summer consultations that we had with seniors. They really urged government to look at developing the continuum of options, filling in the continuum of housing options essentially, so that as I think the deputy pointed out, there are best practices out there and that's something that we'll work with our housing partners on.

MR. DAVID WILSON: There's still a huge wait-list out in my area and I think people in the community - and maybe I'm a bit complacent too - as soon as they call, the first thing out of my mouth is it's well over a year or more. That hasn't changed in 13 years. There's still a great need out there. Often that's what I do is try to find out where they are on the list and how long it's going to take to get them into a seniors' place. It translates into long-term care also, another huge issue.

We're very fortunate to have a long-term care facility in the community now. We never did for many years but the wait-list is huge. I was talking to someone the other day who is three and a half years now. Of course they want to be in the community of Sackville so they only put one facility down, so they're going to wait longer.

When the government recently changed the criteria for long-term care wait-lists, they said it was a great success because the number of people on the wait-lists has reduced, which is fine. Changing that criteria means that people come off that list. Have you seen or have you been engaged with the Group of IX or any other kind of seniors on where those seniors are going now? Did you see an increase in requests to advocate for more services for seniors who might have come off that long-term care list? I know there has been an investment in home care, but the wait-lists are still huge around the province in a number of areas. So just maybe your take on that change in criteria for wait times for the long-term care wait-list - did you see a change in the needs for seniors in communities?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: My understanding of what happened there was that people were getting on the wait-list, but refusing the offer when they got it because they were getting on it in advance of thinking they might need it, but they got called and



people were actually saying no. So they instituted a policy change where the people who were on the list but refusing were slowing up the system of getting placements.

The wait-list has shrunk on nursing home placement by 50 per cent as a result of that policy change, which has also been complemented by an extra \$59 million in investment in home care, which I believe is taking up some of - supporting those people who are taking longer or want to take longer to get to the nursing home, providing that support to stay at home.

As well, they've been working with the nursing home providers to significantly reduce the wait-lists for the home care providers. I believe the wait-lists for home care have been practically eliminated in large parts of the province and I think the provincial wait-list is like 168 people waiting for home care support. So that has been speeded up significantly as well.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Are you provided with the data to back that up? I take your word for it, but I do like to see the data. That's one of the frustrating things is when we hear the government make a change or say, this is going to happen, often we don't have that data. As an Opposition caucus, we tend to have to file a freedom of information request to find out that data.

So can you provide me with the data about the home care wait-lists? Are you able to do that? Do you have that? I know it comes out of the Department of Health and Wellness, but if they're providing that to you - when you answer questions like what we're asking you - are you able to provide those numbers?

I've asked for so many wait-lists, I don't know if I actually asked for that one with the department. I ask everybody if they can provide me the information. If not, can we get that through the Department of Health and Wellness?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Sure. I didn't come prepared to provide that type of detail. It wasn't a topic we're here to discuss today, but I can be a conduit to the Department of Health and Wellness to ask for that data if you would like. We can have it tabled with the committee as needed.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Thank you. I know my colleague talked on a number of programs that were cut over the last year, some over the last two years. When I look at the budget and the line items and the amount of funding that was cut from these organizations, they have a huge impact on the organization - not a huge impact on government resources overall.

When you cut an organization by \$10,000 in a budget that's billions, it really has no impact. I know that. I've been there. I sat at the table. To me, those cuts hurt more than saying you're going to cut \$10 million from the Department of Health and Wellness because these organizations are often run by volunteers, especially the seniors'

organizations. They're seniors, they're retired, they're volunteers and they run on shoestring budgets. I've engaged with them and supported many of them through advertising opportunities as an MLA.

What rationale did the government give? You must have heard from these organizations since that it's a challenge for them to meet the needs of the people that they serve - whatever it is, the seniors' expo or any of the other groups that have funding cut. What reassurance can you give them that their concerns are reflected or known by the departments that have been cutting these programs over the last two years?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think our decisions within the department have been reflected that way in that the Seniors' Safety Program, which is the only program we fund that has permanent full-time staff working every day, was the place where we didn't make any reductions. So in the last few budgets where money was tight, we actually maintain the same level of funding and maintain the same number of Senior Safety Programs around the province, which demonstrates our . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. The time has elapsed for questioning from the NDP caucus. We'll now move to the Liberal caucus for 20 minutes. Mr. Stroink.

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: Thank you very much for coming in today. When we have such a vast community of seniors - and we have almost 1,000 seniors a month entering into that classification, and those numbers are growing continuously, and more and more people of an older demographic are moving back who want to retire in Nova Scotia - it does become an issue for Nova Scotia and how we're going to deal with it. I guess that's where I'm coming to you and your department from.

We did invest a little bit more money into your department. Yes, it was to put a deputy in place. Let's just start there. How does your department formulate within Nova Scotia and your mandate? What is your role? If we're going to invest in this, we need people to understand who you are and what you do. Let's just start there.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: The role that we play is not largely as a program delivery department, although we do have some programs that try to advance the strategic priorities that we have. The work that we've been doing is to try to set out a long-term strategic vision for how the province will deal with the aging phenomenon as it goes on, again, looking through the lens of opportunity as much as managing some of the challenges that will happen. That's the work that we've been doing within the department for the last year. We've actually been doing all the policy analysis, looking at other jurisdictions, best practices, what's going on. Kind of working with the statisticians at the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, we're mapping out the aging phenomenon over the next couple of decades and saying, let's not just think about what we need to do next week; what do we, as a government, need to do long term to accommodate the shift in demographics?

The challenge for us is we're seeing a demographic shift that we've never seen before, so it's not through the pages of history that we're going to determine what we need to do. We're actually looking to places like Japan and Europe that have older populations than us, that have been dealing with this before we have. We're looking for some best practices and seeing what we can take on as best practices around the world for managing an aging phenomenon and then coming up with a plan - which we're doing right now, a strategy and an action plan - about practically, when we wake up in the morning and go to work, what we are going to do to help drive that agenda forward.

MR. STROINK: I guess that's where you kind of hit the nail on the head in the sense that your department is there for decades, to plan for decades, not today and tomorrow.

I will come back to the safety program, but understanding that yes, we have to make some cuts in certain areas, let's take the Seniors' Expo as an example. They were given a lot of notice. My understanding, if correct, was that the people that were coming were in decline, and the cost was going up. I assume that's your rationale, if you can just comment on that just for a bit, on the Seniors' Expo.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Sure. The Seniors' Expo, we had been providing annual operating funding of about \$100,000 to the event. The last year that we funded it, we actually had to provide an extra \$30,000 in emergency funding, to bring the total funding to \$130,000. Whereas the planned number of people at the event was supposed to be 3,200, there were 819. The costs were going up - we were paying over \$100 per person to go - and the number of participants was going down. The expenses for the event were increasing. It was increasingly becoming a risk and a challenge.

We've got a lot of other competing priorities, for example, creating our Positive Aging Directory, which is very, very popular. We print 60,000 or 70,000 copies of this every year, and seniors love it. We have other competing priorities and other strategic things that we want to achieve, so we have to allocate funding to the right priorities.

We did give them the year in advance of warning to not necessarily expect that they could get funding the next year. It wasn't a done deal, they would need to apply, and we would have to compare what they wanted to do compared to other competing priorities.

MR. STROINK: I guess that's what I'm trying to get to. Your department is trying to figure out a strategy for 40 to 60 years out, and you have programs that are costing more and that aren't working, and the shift in the demographic of seniors, what they're actually doing. It only makes sense that you would create this kind of a program.

The other positive thing is the Silver Economy. I know we talked briefly about it. But I think what we need to understand for seniors is that more and more seniors are becoming self-employed. More and more seniors are volunteering or becoming mentors to help within the entrepreneurship world. Can we just chat about the Silver Economy as a

whole and how that's changing and shaping your department and how you're supporting that group of individuals?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Our analysis is telling us that 40 per cent of the nation's wealth is held by people 75 years and older. That's where the money is. They are investors, angel investors in companies, they are entrepreneurs; 25 per cent of the people over 65 who are working are self-employed where the entrepreneurship rate in the general population is 9 per cent, so there are more senior entrepreneurs proportionately than the balance of the population.

They are huge influencers of the private sector and we need to help them exert that influence. They should be speaking with a loud financial voice. In terms of businesses, they should be catering to their needs because it's a smart thing to do, which will only be beneficial for seniors if they have more products and services designed for their needs.

In Toronto I met with my counterpart in Ontario and talked about economic development activities. Again, they have fewer proportional seniors but more critical mass. There's a lady in Toronto who has a business, the Downsizing Diva, that's the name of her business. She helps people downsize their business because there's a growing business for that. She helps them pack, helps them find a new place, and helps them decide what to keep and what to throw out. Those are the types of economic development activities we need to continue to propagate and promote.

We also need to work on the workforce participation of seniors. APEC did a study several years ago that counted how many jobs are going to be created in Atlantic Canada over the next number of years. They figured out that we're not going to raise enough kids to fill all those jobs. The kids will fill part of the jobs, we'll fill a few more with immigrants, and there's a number of jobs that will go unfilled because there's no one to fill them. The only way we can fill those is to take parts of the economy and the workforce that is underrepresented - like persons with disabilities, First Nations, African Nova Scotians, and older workers - and we need to find productive ways to take down barriers to make sure they can continue to work.

We also need to myth-bust the myths that seniors are not productive workers. BMW, the auto plant, had someone several years ago who said we've got a rapidly aging population in our workforce, what can we do about it? They actually took older workers and put them purposefully on one production line to see how a workforce 10 years older than average would do, and with \$30,000 in tweaks - buying orthotics, putting in some rubber mats, changing the shift a bit - they increased productivity by 9 per cent. So we need to go there proactively, just busting the myths about productivity of older workers and changing the narrative about the contributions they make. I think the economic one is an obvious one because of the housing sector and the health care sectors that are going to bloom and grow because of a business opportunity.

MR. STROINK: I guess coinciding with that comes the volunteer piece because I look at my mum as an example. She spends roughly about 25 hours a week on the Oval in the wintertime, skating with kids and teaching kids speed skating, especially the underprivileged kids from the North End. That to me just shows that seniors play a huge role in that. How is your department kind of managing the volunteer piece and educating community groups that seniors are an asset? I see that as your department's role if you're advocating for seniors on a broader perspective.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We actually see driving volunteerism as a strategic action that we can take as a department to help seniors, for two sides: they both benefit from being involved in volunteer activity, it diminishes social isolation, gets them involved, gives them a mandate; and also they're huge beneficiaries of volunteer efforts in their community to help them age in place in their communities.

There's a great project on the South Shore in Mahone Bay that actually takes both and puts them into one project, it's called Helping Hands. It used to be called Seniors Helping Seniors. Basically what they do is they go out into the community and ask anyone over 65, are you a senior who would like to contribute to your community or are you a senior who has needs in your community?

Basically they deliver two lists and then they spend the rest of the year matchmaking services: I need a ride, I'm willing to give a ride. They matchmake services that way, so it's good for everyone. Actually the results of evaluations on, for example, people getting rides, the seniors who were getting the rides don't actually say in the evaluation thanks for the ride, they say I loved the conversation. So getting more social interaction and so on through the volunteer activity is beneficial for both the givers of volunteer services and the folks who receive them.

MR. STROINK: I guess that's what people need to understand, where your department plays a role in government sort of thing.

One of the things I do want to touch on, just why we're here today, is the Senior Safety Grant program. I guess one of the things that people might not understand is where it started from because it just didn't appear overnight. So understanding that kind of came from the RCMP, I think, my understanding of that. Could you just walk us through where that program came from, where it is today, and how it's impacting? I know in Digby County there's a great fraud program there, led by a woman who was defrauded. Those are good-news stories in the sense of what this program is for, so maybe if you could just walk us through that a bit it would be great.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Sure, I'll tell you about that and maybe Jocelyn at the end could add a comment about one example of the types of work that the senior safety coordinators do on a regular basis.

Basically the program started informally through volunteers and so on in communities, but back in the early 2000s - or maybe in the 1990s, sorry - it started in the Valley where the RCMP were noticing theft in seniors' homes and decided that we needed to organize and mobilize to help seniors stay safe. That work continued informally. Some people had volunteers. Some people had paid staff.

Eventually in 2008 we created the program. There were already a handful of programs that had been run in different places and we launched the program in 2008 to be able to formalize the fact that this is a great practice and we need to roll it out and we need to help this community of practice, of people in the same business learn from each other. So we created the program, and since then have been adding applicants and continue to work with different applicants. They do great work in the communities.

Like I mentioned earlier, we asked them to set up a board of advisers, board of directors, to advise them on what safety means in your community. We allow them a little bit of room to be flexible to the needs in their community - so financial fraud, elder abuse, safe driving, and these types of things.

There are some neat things that happened. We partnered actually with the Insurance Bureau of Canada to do some safe driving courses to help seniors make age-appropriate decisions about when to stop driving. We also do fraud awareness. There have been some fraud cases recently. Financial fraud is always something, so the coordinators are out there holding information sessions about combating financial fraud. Our evaluation that we did of the program tells us that people who were participating in the program feel safe, feel better engaged, feel better prepared to manage some of the risks that might come their way. Maybe Jocelyn can give just one example of the types of things that happen in communities on a practical day for a coordinator.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Yerxa.

MS. JOCELYN YERXA: It has been my great pleasure to work with these programs since 2009 and I think the real benefit is that the coordinators are able to work one on one with seniors in their homes or wherever they feel comfortable to meet with them. Because they're able to do that, they build up rapport with seniors and are able to find out things that a senior might not be willing to share.

Elder abuse is a hidden issue that we have in our country and in our province. Seniors often don't want to talk about it. They don't want to report issues to the police. They often don't talk about it with anybody, but the coordinators are able to build a rapport with them over time and find out issues that are happening within families and work with the senior to help put safeguards in place to stop abuse and prevent abuse from happening in the future.

So whether it is issues with seniors who have given their bank card PIN to a family member or somebody that they've trusted who has used that in a way that they shouldn't

be using it for their own benefit, they're able to get those PIN numbers changed, to take them to the bank, to work with them on those types of things - to have powers of attorney put in place or sometimes to have powers of attorney revoked. So they're able to work with them depending on what the situation is for any of those types of issues.

Really the program started around fraud prevention, elder abuse prevention and crime prevention and that's where they work and the real strength and benefit is working one on one, as well as providing workshops, to be able to reach broader numbers of seniors in community as well.

MR. STROINK: I guess going with that, these groups have to apply every year, which can be a little bit cumbersome for some of these community groups because some of it is volunteer based and some of it is paid. Is there any discussion in your department to look at multiple year funding for these programs instead of this - and maybe I'll leave it to you to answer that.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Right now, for accountability purposes, we have them apply every year, give a twice-annual report, and we review the results and renew the funding agreements. We've been doing it for a number of years now so I think those programs are comfortable that things are constant enough. I don't think they're turning over staff because they're not sure about next year's funding.

That being said, it wouldn't be a bad practice for us to be able to look at multi-year funding with annual accountability checks to make sure that if something went awry we would catch it in time, type of thing, but also giving the security and safety that they can hire staff long term or confident the mandate will continue, they can start building capacity in their communities this year for something that you'll only see the benefit for the following year. Unless you have a long-term arrangement, sometimes it's hard to make yourself think that far-reaching. We're open-minded about those types of things and we'll be working with our partners and with Finance and Treasury Board and so on to see whether or not we can make progress. Maybe we will make some baby steps, start slowly and work our way forward.

MR. STROINK: That's great news to hear. I think a lot of groups would appreciate that kind of support from your department. I guess you are talking to these seniors' groups quite a bit and you hear what the issues are and how those issues impact their lives. Can you share some more of that? We touched briefly on it that elder abuse is a huge hidden problem in Nova Scotia. What are you learning in the sense from other issues and how are you creating support mechanisms for those issues?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I can start off and Jocelyn can continue. We work with those communities. As I mentioned, we allow them some flexibility, some room to define safety in a way that makes sense for their community. If there was a community, for example, that had a rash of break-ins, they've got the flexibility to sit down as an advisory

board and say this is something we need to give some attention to and turn their attention to that and hold a workshop, for example, on break-ins and bring in the RCMP.

By the way, I have to say how much the RCMP is a great partner for us. We actually get \$50,000 from the Department of Justice to help us with the program and in my experience, they get good value for money. Last year, I did the rounds around the province, meeting with Senior Safety program groups and partners who were interested in the program. The RCMP showed up at every one of the meetings.

Actually the coordinators are co-located with the RCMP in many communities. The way an RCMP member told it to me was, if the Senior Safety Coordinator wasn't there after the snowstorm to take the phone call from a senior who was snowed in and couldn't dig their way out, one of my members would be taking the call and going there and shovelling them out. So I think that for the \$50,000 that Justice gives us, they are getting their \$50,000 and more in value for them to focus on the law enforcement and the other great work they do in the community.

I mentioned safe driver training. I've been to the Valley, they have a driving simulator there. They bring people in to go through the driving simulator to make sure their skills are sharp enough. The reality is that it's not right to stop people from driving just because they've reached a certain age - that's what ageism is - but it's also not safe for them to continue driving past the point where they are safe to do so. So to be able to do those check-ins - as I mentioned, we partner with the Insurance Bureau of Canada actually to work with some of the groups that have been doing this type of work in communities as well. They also have a lot of education workshops and different things. Maybe Jocelyn can give another example of the types of activities that take place in the community.

MS. YERXA: One of the things that many of the programs are doing across the province - we talked about the 50+ Expo, but many of the programs work with their local partners in their area to provide expos and information delivery mechanisms for events for their area.

For instance, this past weekend there was an expo in Yarmouth. They had over 35 exhibitors in the area who came to share information about what services and programs are available to seniors who are local in Yarmouth County that they can access. They also had various breakout rooms and breakout workshops around topics like frauds and scams, healthy relationships and dating over 50, caregiver stress, history of recorded music, and home safety, as well as Alzheimer's education and dementia education. That's just an example.

They have a similar initiative in Hants County that happens in Windsor every year, Digby, Kings County, Queens - I could name many of them. They also offer that sort of joint initiative with the partners they collaborate with on a regular basis.



Also this past year in southwestern Nova Scotia the Senior Safety Coordinators partnered with the RCMP, with the Royal Bank branches, as well as with a number of schools, to offer elder abuse awareness. They had T-shirts, ribbons and they offered information in all the Royal Bank branches around financial fraud and scams and how to protect yourself.

In the one-on-one working with seniors, there are a number of issues that they work on with seniors. Mainly it's around navigating the services and systems that are available. So if it's home care services through continuing care, they are able to navigate the system of how they get those supports in place for a senior in their home, what would meet their needs, coordinating with the VON around transportation services. They are very connected with the Aging Well coalitions and with providing falls prevention to seniors . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, time has elapsed for questioning from the Liberal caucus. We'll move back to the PC caucus, and we have 14 minutes for questioning. Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Bienvenue. Simon and I go back a long way, so I apologize if I seem a little mean on some of these questions. I want to get to the basics of where this Department of Seniors started and where it's going. You listed it off pretty well in saying that you advocate on behalf of seniors in policy-making at the level of deputy ministers and that kind of thing.

How do you work with seniors in getting their needs heard by government and how do you get government's needs and wants heard by seniors? That's your advocate role as a department. For years we had the Seniors' Secretariat. In 2005, we had the creation of the Department of Seniors. It has gone through a number of different morphs over time. I just want to get your ideas and thoughts on how that advocacy role really works.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Merci beaucoup. Number one, a big commitment that this government is making obviously to seniors is that it have a Seniors' Department; there are only two other provinces that have seniors in a department somewhere, but we're the only one that has a Seniors' Department per se.

There's kind of a few ways that we do advocacy with departments and as well open the door and find out what's going on from seniors and be able to open the door both from seniors to government and government to seniors. The Group of IX, our permanent advisory council, is one of those ways in that we meet on a regular basis. On a regular basis we bring in people from government to present to them on upcoming policies and programs, the things that we're planning on doing, and we get their feedback to be able to make sure we have the appropriate lens on the work that they're doing.

They also have a list of strategic priorities that they think are important to advocate to us and they selectively ask us to go within government and get the people they want to talk to and bring them in. So it's both a little bit - we use the opportunity to talk to them

and they say, we specifically want to talk about these things and bring people in. So we have a way of connecting that way.

I also go on the road a lot talking to seniors' groups in different communities to try to make sure I've got a reasonable pulse on what's topical. I was in Yarmouth a couple of weeks ago speaking. I meet with the executives of all the Group of IX on an annual basis. I do the rounds and speak with their executives. I go to a lot of annual general meetings. I don't just go out there and speak and leave, I sit there for a bit and listen to what's on your mind, what's topical with you. So I get that information and use that.

Within government, sometimes it's as simple as me just picking up the phone and calling a deputy minister and saying, you guys are working on this, do you have someone from our department on it? Well, no. Well maybe you should. One of the biggest risks we run actually, because seniors are becoming a greater and greater part of the population, probably in the future less and less we're going to do things just for seniors. We just need to do things for citizens, most of which happen to be seniors.

So it's making sure that we don't have any oops moments - oh, I wasn't thinking that would impact a senior differently. For example, Emergency Management reached out to us and developed some tools on their website for seniors for Emergency Management. You can imagine - that's great. If the instructions are - in the event of an emergency of a snowstorm go and dig yourself out and then do X, Y, Z - well if you can't dig yourself out, that's not very helpful. So we just have to make sure we continue to have that seniors' lens on things.

So we open the door, we advocate. Sometimes I have formal meetings with deputy ministers. I've been doing that for the last few weeks actually - doing the rounds formally with deputy ministers saying, these are the things we think you should be doing, can I get your co-operation to do that, or what things are you doing that we can get involved in? Sometimes it's just picking up the phone and being able to call a colleague deputy minister and saying, I heard you guys are working on that, have you heard about X, Y, Z?

MR. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you for that. How often do you meet with the Group of IX? They are your board of directors - I guess would be one way to call it. They're the ones that give you ideas or counsel. Is it monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, annually? How often do you get to meet with them?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have six formal meetings on the agenda, I think, and we end up always having a few extra ones thrown in there to talk about specific topics.

MR. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: What kinds of topics do they bring forward?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: They often bring forward their priorities which are around helping people age in their homes, supporting the economic contribution of seniors. They bring those issues to us and say, how can we best explore this within government? We identify the best officials to come in and have those conversations. We come in and have that as well.

We also have an annual meeting of ministers and the Group of IX where we bring in all the ministers of the departments that are related to their priorities. The Group of IX have an opportunity to talk about what their priorities are, and ministers have an opportunity to listen, to say, oh that's what's on your mind and for ministers to share back what they're doing in their departments that might impact seniors to give them an early heads-up so they can start putting their head around, well if that's what you're working on, how do we go back to our members and start putting up what we think our advocacy position should be around these things?

We talk to them, they talk to their members, they hear back from their members, they come and relate that back to us, and the process goes back and forth.

MR. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: If I go to the Strategy for Positive Aging, and we're talking about 2005 now, one of the main items that I found important in what that document did was Goal 3, which revolved around seniors' health and well-being. That to me is important because it's the kind of stuff that I hear of on a daily basis in my constituency office.

The Pharmacare issue, just to spend a couple of seconds on that one, quickly came back to our constituency offices with people wondering what was going on. I was just wondering whether you guys were part and parcel of what went on there.

More specifically when it comes to health and wellness issues with seniors, how involved are you in counselling or directing the Department of Health and Wellness when it comes to their suite of services? That's what we get on a daily basis in our constituency offices, the lack of service when it comes to long-term care, even home care when there's a wait-list and who's available to it. When you get to a certain age, that 55 to 65 range - I don't know where that really hits, but those issues start to be extremely important. We try to navigate that and it's a terrible navigation. What do you guys hear about that?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We hear from our members through the Group of IX and as well I mentioned I do the rounds around the province and participate in many events. System complexity is an issue for seniors in terms of trying to navigate all the different parts of government - not just the provincial government but also the federal government and access to benefits. These types of things are an issue that we hear as well.

Jocelyn mentioned that our Senior Safety Coordinators often play a role. They might get a referral from the RCMP or the post-mistress who says someone hasn't picked up their mail in three weeks and they go in to see them. Sometimes there are programs that

are available to help them, but they are just overwhelmed and don't know how to access them. They'll sit down with someone and call the VON and arrange for home care and these types of things, so they'll be able to help them with those services.

We're happy that our Senior Safety Coordinators are able to pitch in for that. That's a capacity that I think we need to continue to try to work on and build, to try to reduce system complexity for seniors. Often seniors are trying to access services in times of crisis: a spouse is taking care of someone with dementia, the caregiver gets hurt, and they need to take care of themselves, and find someone to take care of their spouse. That added complexity is a big challenge.

We also work with municipal government, for example, to try to avoid sickness. One of the main things we're doing is helping municipal governments build age-friendly communities. Through our grant programs, we actually give grants to municipal governments to sit down and do comprehensive community planning about how the footprint and all the services in our community are designed to make sure we keep people healthy - make sure the sidewalks are even to prevent falls, as well as create recreational spaces, make sure the community is walkable, make sure there are transportation routes to get around the community.

We work with the municipal government around creating the types of communities that will keep people healthy and avoid sickness as well. We always try to bring that lens, and that's part of our mandate, building age-friendly communities. We're very proud of the work that we've done with municipal governments. There's a WHO certification, and some municipalities have applied for their certification to build great communities. In Mr. Houston's community, the municipal government and towns in that area are co-operating. It's not helpful to have a sidewalk that goes to the county line and then might stop. Transportation systems have to be comprehensive and need to get people around. We continue to work on those areas as well.

MR. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: First of all, it seems that Pictou County is getting an awful lot here so I don't know what's going on but it's interesting.

Again, we hear from seniors and families about the complexity of the systems, the lack of services that they seem to be able to get, the whole issue of the new Continuing Care Strategy that seems to be coming along. These were sort of pieces that when the original Department of Seniors was put in place, they were going to be part and parcel of the decision making on it.

I'm curious on whether you've been part of the design of the new Continuing Care Strategy and how your relationship is with the Department of Health and Wellness. It's a big beast and you're a small department, how do you interact with that department when it comes to those kinds of services?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We are actually co-located with the Department of Health and Wellness which I think is very helpful, actually. You bump into your colleagues in the departments on a regular basis. I have regular meetings with the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness - we share the same minister, we coordinate, we have regular scheduled meetings where we talk about our shared business. We bring in senior officials from the Department of Health and Wellness regularly into the Group of IX for regular meetings as well.

In terms of the Continuing Care Strategy, the Department of Health and Wellness is doing a lot of research on what that could be in the future, but they've made a strong commitment that they will go out and consult. So the five-year plan has expired, they are working on a new five-year plan. They made the same commitment as with Pharmacare - to go out and have broad-based consultations about what the Continuing Care Strategy should look like, what the right types of products and services are that citizens need - home care, nursing homes, what's the right mix, where are the right products and services. They've made a commitment to have a good dialogue about that, so I very much expect that that will be a strong opportunity for seniors and seniors' groups to advocate for what they want and government will be able to make the best informed decision they can.

MR. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Were you aware of the 1 per cent cut to homes over the last couple of years and the challenges that those long-term care facilities are facing when it comes to equipment budgets, food budgets and those kinds of things? Here's the basis of, I think, the responsibility of the Department of Seniors to advocate on behalf of those folks. I know it's a funding issue, it's money but it's also the health and welfare of seniors, so I was wondering how you go back to the department and say guys, you've got to figure out something better than this.

Just to finish off because I've got only a minute and a half - less than a minute now - when it comes to the Pharmacare issue, can you please advocate on behalf of seniors to get that consultation going now, rather than later? These are big discussions that are going to need to happen over the next six months or so before government has to go make a hopefully better decision than they've made and I'm scared they are going to make a worse decision than they made last time.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We did our own consultation this summer on our action plan. I think we learned some best practices about how to best connect with people and we are planning. We've been sharing that feedback with the Pharmacare folks, as well as Continuing Care, to make sure they come up with the best consultations that are the most comprehensive, that talk to seniors in a way they want to be talked to, with information they can understand as well, and in multiple languages - we did consultations in French. As we did with our action plan, we had consultations in French, we thought that was important. I think we learned some good practices.

Also in our consultations we took the extra time to make sure we reached out to communities that we feared would be underrepresented by just having a public meeting, so we reached out specifically to African Nova Scotians . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, time has elapsed for questioning from the PC caucus. We'll move back to the NDP caucus for 14 minutes. Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Good day, it's really good to see you. Economic insecurity is a growing concern among seniors; I hear it in my constituency all the time. The number of older adults now living on low incomes is very high and rising and they say oftentimes single males or single females are a large part of that.

In 2011, over 20 per cent of women and 14.5 per cent of men aged 65 years and over were living on low incomes. I know that when the NDP was in government, we opened nearly 1,000 new long-term care beds, which was very helpful and ensured that there were 18,000 low-income seniors who received Guaranteed Income Supplements to pay for the no provincial income tax, which really helped. Also we expanded the Caregiver Benefit Program, restorative care, self-managed programs that allowed them to manage their own care and stay in their homes longer.

We also increased the property tax rebate for seniors so that seniors receiving the GIS could qualify for a rebate on their municipal property taxes. We also took the provincial tax off power bills and home heating, which helped a lot, I know that. So in the end we lifted about 11,000 people out of poverty at that time, which was something I was proud of.

These days it seems to be - there is a trend that seems to be emerging where a lot of seniors are saying that they just can't afford to retire and so they're staying in the workforce or trying to stay in the workforce longer. Four in 10 employed seniors now work part time in Atlantic Canada, and a lot of these seniors work in minimum wage jobs. Have there been any discussions at all within the department about the impact of minimum wage rates on seniors who are still working?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have a lot of conversations around incomes and poverty as issues that face seniors. We want to do a number of things to improve the lives of seniors including eating healthy diets, participating in recreation, but those things require financial resources to do so.

As part of our work that we're doing on our new strategy, we're really hoping to do more workforce participation work, which can include increasing the value of the work. Some people work because they want to. It's good for their mental health. Other people work because they have to. Women in particular are vulnerable because they are often the primary caregiver and not a primary wage earner during their lives and have fewer accumulated savings or a pension built up or a CPP or these types of things as well, so they're particularly vulnerable.

We're very fortunate in the department that we have a strong gender equity, and gender analysis lands within the department. We have policy analysts who talk about that a lot and remind us that we need to make sure that we look at low income, poverty and especially vulnerable populations including under-represented populations, minority populations and women as areas that need particularly good supports.

We're lucky in Nova Scotia that we have supports that other provinces are actually very jealous of. We have a Caregiver Benefit that other people don't have. We invest significantly - we spend over \$20 million a year, I believe, in helping people make accommodations to their homes to be able to stay in their home longer.

We have, as you mentioned, several tax credits for low income, for GIS recipients who don't have to pay any provincial tax, and we have rebates for ambulance fees and things like that that are actually great programs. Tackling poverty is a big issue, but having targeted interventions to help seniors - and especially vulnerable seniors - be able to manage the issues.

The other issue is women especially in rural Nova Scotia with those big old houses - it's a big issue. You've got a big house to maintain. The maintenance costs of maintaining a house with a very low income becomes a pretty big burden. That's something we're also very interested in trying to find a way to get communities to mobilize, to provide all the services that people need.

Some of the things that overwhelm people who continue to age in their home are things like, where do I find someone to paint the fence and mow the lawn and shovel the driveway?

MS. ZANN: And chop the wood.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: And chop the wood, exactly - those simple kinds of community tasks. There are some great best practices. There is a group in Dartmouth out of Ocean View actually that's doing a project in Dartmouth. It's based on a program called The Villages in the northeast U.S. where people actually - kind of like in Florida you'd have a community fee where people in a geographic area throw money into a pot; let's say \$100 a month. Someone collects all the money from the different seniors in that pot and hires a couple of handy people around and then, paying into the pot, you've paid to get a certain level of service back - so many hours a week you get.

So when you need someone to change a lightbulb, paint the fence or whatever, you call in. You've already kind of pre-paid, and the person will arrange for a safe and trusted person who has been screened a bit to come to your house and help you with those chores. Maybe that \$100 a month is a lot of money, but if it's allowing you to continue to age in your home and stay in your community, it's valuable for that. We'd love to motivate more of that.

MS. ZANN: That's why we put the home caregiver allowance in there and did all those things that you listed. I think we did all those under the NDP because we were aware of the fact that seniors do need this help.

Along that line actually, when it comes to - well, let's talk about home care, for instance. It is estimated that the labour of unpaid caregivers in Canada contributes \$26 billion a year to the health care system and unpaid caregivers, especially those caring for seniors, are more likely to be women. So when they do provide care, women are more likely than men to be responsible for care that is more intense, more frequent and generally more stressful. As you said, government places more emphasis on seniors staying in their own homes now.

However, I'm hearing from a lot of people who are home caregivers that they are not able to qualify for the home care benefit and the home care allowance because they say that the system is almost rigged so that they just can't get it. For instance, one gentleman came and saw me, his wife is in a wheelchair, she can't do anything, he has to stay with her 24 hours a day and yet because she was mentally capable, he did not qualify for home care.

Another person, their mother had mental issues and had early Alzheimer's but she could still reach back and dress herself, when she remembered to. She did not qualify for home care allowance because she could dress herself, supposedly.

What I'm hearing is that the hoops are too high to jump through so people are not able to get the home care they need. Has the department conducted any consultation or undertaken any analysis on the potential impacts of this and how you could help to make more people available to qualify?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think caregiver support is a big issue in many circles that I travel. If we break the backs of caregivers and overwhelm them, we are going to have a serious issue.

A phenomenon that is also happening is that we are also having a larger number of people over 65 years, that population is growing, but the population of people under 65 is shrinking, so the availability of people to look after them is actually getting stretched as well. The ratio of seniors to everyone else is continuing to stretch.

MS. ZANN: And they are much older. The people who have been coming to see me are already in their 70s and 80s themselves.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Absolutely, and we have many people in their 80s taking care of a 50-year-old with cognitive impairments or something who needs help at home who are very worried what will happen for people when they move on.



So there's a few things going on. I think when Minister Glavine and I were in Vancouver recently to speak to the federal-territorial ministers for seniors, the minister spoke around the caregiver benefit that we have and we are the only ones, so everyone's ears were perked up, saying you actually have a Caregiver Benefit Program.

MS. ZANN: So we did do a few good things while we were in government, that's good.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Allow the witness to finish answering the question. (Laughter)

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: As well, on caregiver issues we also have an MOU with Mount Saint Vincent University, the Centre for Aging, they actually have a lot of expertise in caregivers and are very interested in that agenda, so that is something we are continuing to do work for.

The other thing that is going on around caregivers is we need to modernize our workplace practices. People are leaving work to go take care of people but the reality is that the workforce needs them so we can't afford to lose them. The reason we are losing them is our caregiver policies or our HR policies are outdated. Most of us can get time off to take care of our sick kids but we can't get time off to take care of our sick parents.

Maybe that policy made sense when it was designed 40 years ago, when there were three kids for every senior, but now if there are three seniors for every kid, we need to modernize workforce policy. That's actually something in our plan we're working on, how do we work with the private sector to modernize policies to be more flexible, to allow people to stay working, stay productive, earn the wages they need, keep their business community going, and still take care of seniors and not have to make trade-offs.

MS. ZANN: That's a very good idea.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: There's great technology available as well that I don't think we're maximizing. For example, people with dementia, you can actually buy a bracelet you can put on them that has a GPS on it. You can actually go online on a map and identify the geographic area within which it's okay to walk. If you wander outside that geographic area, you get a text message or a phone call from a company that offers the service to tell you that that's happening and where to find them. So there are technologies that can liberate us, as caregivers and liberate seniors to have more flexibility in their lives and to be able to maximize the value of their lives. There are technology opportunities we need to . . .

MS. ZANN: There are robots, too, coming, I hear. Robots to look after our seniors.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Well, maybe if we can find ways.

MS. ZANN: The Japanese are doing it.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: The Japanese are ahead of us in a lot of ways.

MS. ZANN: I have one more question which is regarding long-term care. During the 2016-17 budget, the McNeil Government made more than \$3.4 million in cuts to long-term care facilities' operating budgets. Major cuts included \$235,963 from Northwood; \$103,800 from Evergreen Home in Kentville; \$110,000 from Cedarstone in Truro; and \$170,000 from the Mira in Truro. I'm hearing major complaints from both the workers and families of the people who are there. We also are hearing that the amount of money for food to seniors has gone down to something like \$5.40 per day per senior.

We are hearing horror stories about what is going on in long-term care, and this government has not opened one long-term care bed, while we introduced 1,000 over the time that we were in government. What are you doing to try to help involve discussions about the funding and the quality care at long-term care facilities and the need for more of them?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We've been having those conversations with the Group of IX and informing them of the upcoming consultations. The province will be undertaking consultations very soon to try to decide what the plan is for the next five years in terms of nursing homes and home care - what kinds of products, what's the right amount of funding. They will be consulted with on all those things.

We've been telling the Group of IX, this is the time now, before the consultations start, to get your act together. Talk to your members and find out what they think. Get your positions ready so that when the consultations happen and someone asks you, what do you think, you've taken the time to analyze it and figure out what people need, find out what your members need. Many of them have tens of thousands of members. Some of them have great tools. They send out email surveys to their members to find out what's going on. I've been counselling them, get ready with your positions; what is it that you want?

I met with the francophone community. They want to make sure that language - people with dementia, for example, may refer back to their original language, so they're concerned to make sure that language makes its way into our policies going forward. So I said, make sure you've figured out what you want, and when the consultations happen, make sure you're forceful with your points and make sure the policies reflect what they need to.

MS. ZANN: I would imagine that there's going to be more and more as the baby boomers age, right?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has elapsed for the NDP caucus. We'll go on to the Liberal caucus for the last 14 minutes. Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Living in Mahone Bay and representing the constituency of Lunenburg, we have lots of seniors. They are an asset; I don't see them as

being a problem. We've benefited greatly culturally and economically from our seniors in the Lunenburg area.

I must say, the volunteerism that we get now - we've lost a lot of our volunteerism because we have a large sandwich generation, which are a group of potential volunteers who are looking after their children and looking after their senior parents. Those numbers have dropped off, but our seniors have made remarkable growth in the volunteer sector in our area. They lead many, many positive programs, and we have really benefited. They've brought their lifelong skills and knowledge to our communities and have been great assets on boards of directors and running programs and developing programs and bringing really unique initiatives. I'm sure you're very familiar with the seniors' program in Mahone Bay, which I was part of right from the start, sitting on their board, so I'm quite familiar with a lot of the work that has been done there. It has spread out.

I want to talk just a little bit about the Senior Safety Grants because when I think of them, I think safety as in crime prevention, but they go further. I think you were just ending up talking about fall prevention and whatnot. Can you talk a little bit about how safety grants benefit people in their homes?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: There could be two ways - well, many ways. Senior Safety Coordinators may provide direct one-on-one service, so as I mentioned earlier, the postmistress may notice that someone hasn't picked up their mail in three weeks, they call the RCMP and say I'm worried. The RCMP may drop in and say the person is not doing well, maybe give a referral to the Senior Safety Program. The Senior Safety Coordinator may call or visit that person and say, I'm here to help and, as Jocelyn mentioned, may take time to build a trust. Some people don't want to leave their home and go to hospital because they fear they will never make it back so they are sometimes resistant, so it takes time.

They may be able to provide one-on-one service but also there are times and subject matters where you can't do it one person at a time, you've really got to try to speak to a lot of people. So a crime prevention conference, for example, or a seminar where you bring in 20 or 30 seniors and try to cover a lot of ground, shall we say, in terms of trying to educate a large number of people at the same time. But safety - as you mentioned, we think of crime prevention but safety is economic, emotional, physical and so on, so senior emotional abuse is a safety issue, financial abuse is a safety issue, falls and tripping is a safety issue, and having someone break into your home is a safety issue.

We are very proud of the fact that we let communities define what their priorities are and through their board of directors they get continuing feedback on that. If there's a brewing issue in their community that just needs attention in putting down, they are able to focus their effort and resources on that.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Is there any type of program across the province - maybe it's a unique program in a certain area - where someone will come into your home and sort

of just look for a little - I know that sometimes the Department of Health and Wellness does that when the home care has come in, just to sort of see the layout of the home - are there mats on the floor that could cause tripping, where dangerous items might be placed in the home, et cetera. Sometimes people aren't as good at turning off their burners. I know some people have mechanisms that they can't turn on the stove in their homes.

Are there any safety programs that include that, like helping people with poor electrical systems in their home that may cause a fire? Is that something that is being done anywhere in Nova Scotia, do you know?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: There are a few different mechanisms, depending on the issue. Our Senior Safety Coordinators will go into homes and help people try to access services. They might notice deficiencies in their home, things that aren't safe, and help them find the resources they need.

There are great practices around the province. For example, EHS has a pilot program with doctors in the Valley where doctors will prescribe a drop-in visit to the paramedics and the paramedics will do a drive-by visit and drop in and while they are in they will check the fridge - are you eating? - they'll check the garbage and do that type of checking, report back to say this person is fine or this person needs serious medical attention or needs other types of care or referral. So that is a great practice.

Housing Nova Scotia in their program to help people do home accommodations, like install chair lifts, widen doors, install grab bars and these sorts of things - they can send someone in to do an assessment of what needs to be done as well.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Free?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think it's part of the program - I don't know.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Free is good for seniors.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I don't expect there is a charge related to that. There are many community-based organizations, like Community Links and so on, that do falls prevention that through their community-based organizations they have people who will do kind of check-in visits and these types of things, it's a great service.

Of course as you know, the home care coordinators and the placement coordinators for nursing homes will go into the homes and do assessments of people's needs. While they are there, if they pick up on things that need attention, they can do referrals as well.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Great, that's good to know. When you find a unique project comes forward, when you are reading through your grant applications - I notice that halfway through the program, there's a report that goes back to your department. I'm glad

to see that because sometimes we don't always get a gist of how a program is fitting in to the community and it's good that you are getting that kind of feedback.

How do you share that? When you see a really neat program, how do you go about communicating that to other groups within Nova Scotia that their community may want to look at a program similar to this? Do you do that kind of work in your department?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I'll pass it on to Jocelyn in a moment but yes, we've been fortunate to build up a great working relationship with a network of these coordinators who know who each other are and have talked and have ways of sharing best practices. Maybe I can pass it off to Jocelyn who can maybe give an example.

MS. YERXA: There are two Community Development Coordinators in the Department of Seniors: myself, who works directly with Senior Safety Coordinators as well as some of the age-friendly community grant holders as well; and Jacqueline Campbell who works on age-friendly communities.

With our network of Senior Safety Coordinators, part of my job is about talking to the coordinators about what's happening across the province, having coordinators share with each other about initiatives that are happening, what has worked in their area, what might work in other areas, if there's a particular challenge or issue that's coming up.

For instance, probably about a year or two ago there was somebody who was doing door-to-door sales who didn't actually have a licence to do door-to-door sales in Nova Scotia. These issues kept popping up and we were able to facilitate communication with coordinators across the province to say this is happening, can you get the word out in your community? We were eventually able to connect with the police around having that issue dealt with in the court system and ensuring that seniors were not victims of that any further.

We're also able to connect the programs between each other, so our Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program, our project grants for innovation - what we can do in communities that might have a great impact and have those connected with what's happening with Senior Safety Programs. Also, what's happening with municipalities around their consultation process for age-friendly communities, which includes talking to seniors, talking to their caregivers and talking to their service providers about what their experiences are like in the community, what are the benefits, what are the assets they have in communities and where are the gaps and what things might we be able to do to fill those gaps. So they're really looking at it from an asset-based community development perspective and connecting across communities.

For instance, Victoria County hosted an Age-Friendly Communities conference where they had representation from across the province come and hear about what's going on with age-friendly community planning and how we're organizing our communities. We held the Silver Economy Summit in March where we had representation from right across the province. We had Community Economic Development Coordinators come from

municipalities to hear about potentials for looking at that with challenges comes the opportunity to meet those challenges and exceed them, so how can we look at innovative ways to overcome the challenges we're facing and find solutions right here in Nova Scotia.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, great, thank you. I did want to ask - you did merge the Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program and the Positive Aging Grant Program. Can you expand on why that happened?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, we're a very small department and having a multitude of programs issuing different calls for proposals and the different administrative burden that comes along with managing too many of those is a bit of a challenge for us, and for communities to have to sift through our website and find out, which program am I the most eligible to apply for and which application form should I use?

The reality is that one program with flexibility to do all the things we want to do is better for them and administratively more diligent for us - in terms of reducing our administrative costs - to do that one program, and have one application form that can do all the things we want to do.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: First when I look at the charts and see who receives what, and I see it geographically laid out and look further, I see that just because a community is mentioned, I see like the Mahone Bay Helping Hands, it expands from Hubbards, which is in HRM really - parts of Hubbards - right to Caledonia, which is in Queens County. So I was quite pleased that it is not focused on one community.

I also noticed that MODL addresses the issue of employing and engaging seniors in the workplace. Fortunately my office happens to be in a VIC where they are using a senior who is receiving part of her pay through a grant. Not only is it good for the youth who work in that facility but just the skills and knowledge that these seniors bring into the workplace. We're often challenged, we're torn between giving employment to young people and being very careful that it's not seen as taking jobs away from young people but we really need to engage.

I was really happy to hear before that you did mention that women in particular, because they've been homemakers and often don't qualify for CPP or have limited CPP because they didn't go back to work until after their children weren't home, and they tend to be the poorest of our poor with the seniors. I was glad that you acknowledged that. Seniors can make a great contribution to the workforce.

Can you talk a little bit about this program in Mulgrave, the Future Roots program? I think it's a collaboration between youth and seniors and working together. How is that program going? Is it something that we should be doing - I know we do seniors helping seniors on the South Shore. How can we engage our youth more to be doing these kinds of projects?

MS. YERXA: One of the big areas that we focused on in community development with the Department of Seniors is intergenerational connections and relationships. We really see the benefit of making those connections stronger. One of the things that we found in a number of our projects is if we did a project that was youth doing for seniors, seniors said, we want to do for youth as well. It was this back-and-forth reciprocal relationship that they wanted to have happen.

When it comes to offering programs, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship show a real potential and benefit to have sustainable non-profit programs happening that can meet the needs of seniors who might be on restricted incomes in certain areas. We know things like lawn care and snow removal and those kinds of things are huge issues that are happening for . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has elapsed for the Liberal caucus, and full questioning.

We'll now give an opportunity for closing remarks. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Chairman and committee members, I want to thank you for your interest and your questions today.

About four weeks ago, I participated with Minister Glavine at a meeting of federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for seniors. It was the first such meeting with the new federal minister responsible, Jean-Yves Duclos. Among the priorities the ministers agreed upon was the need to move forward with items such as the promotion of social inclusion of seniors. They agreed to support measures to reduce social isolation and to identify ways to better support the active participation of older adults in the economy and society.

We're very pleased that our federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts recognize - as we do - the importance of including the issues, opportunities, and contributions of older adults in government decision-making. Today, almost a quarter of Nova Scotians between 65 and 69 are still working. We know that many older workers are highly productive and adaptable. Many even embark on careers or start new businesses in retirement.

The Department of Seniors is committed to working collaboratively across government and with our partners in the academic, not-for-profit, and private sectors to support safe, age-friendly communities and workplaces. Our ultimate goal is to enable older adults, in all of their diversity, to participate fully in the social and economic life of Nova Scotia.

Thank you very much, committee members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you to the witnesses for your attendance today.

We have just one item of committee business. There is a topic that was approved by the committee, the Yarmouth ferry topic, and in that record of decision, we had a number of witnesses, one of them being the Department of Tourism, so it was a bit of an oversight there. There is no longer a specific Department of Tourism; there is Tourism Nova Scotia. I think it was a topic put forward by the PC caucus, so I'll just give you an opportunity, if you want, to make the simple change to Tourism Nova Scotia, or if you had any other suggestions on the witness list for that topic. Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: Yes, I think Tourism Nova Scotia would be appropriate there. That would make it Tourism Nova Scotia, Business, and Finance and Treasury Board. I also think it would probably be useful for the committee to have the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal here as well. That's who the witness was last time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are correct, the three entities that would be there are Tourism Nova Scotia, the Department of Business, and the Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

There's a request to the committee to make an addition of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. We'll have to put it to a vote to add that department on to the topic.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The clerk can note that, to invite the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

The next meeting date is October 12<sup>th</sup>, and it is the Office of the Auditor General with the 2016 Financial Report.

With that, we are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:50 a.m.]