

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

Legislative Chamber

**SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population
and Age-friendly Communities Grants**

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Public Accounts Committee

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Mr. Gordon Wilson (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Ben Jessome
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Mr. Brendan Maguire
Mr. Hugh MacKay
Mr. Tim Houston
Hon. David Wilson
Ms. Lisa Roberts

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb,
Chief Legislative Counsel

Mr. Michael Pickup,
Auditor General

WITNESSES

Department of Seniors

Mr. Simon d'Entremont,
Deputy Minister

Mr. Faizal Nanji,
Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2018

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Gordon Wilson

MR. CHAIRMAN: I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. This morning we have the Department of Seniors with us as a witness, to discuss Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population and Age-friendly Communities Grants.

I'd like to remind everyone to place their phone on silent so we do not have interruptions. We'll start with introductions, beginning with Mr. MacKay.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to talk about the work the Department of Seniors and our progress to date in the first year of the SHIFT Action Plan. Before I begin, thank you to my executive director Faizal Nanji for joining me here today.

I am especially glad to have the opportunity to be here now as we mark the First Anniversary of the launch of SHIFT, Nova Scotia's first comprehensive action plan on aging. SHIFT identified a dozen priority commitments with more than 50 specific actions, an ambitious plan by any measure.

I am proud of the work of our team and our colleagues throughout government and our stakeholders across the province. They've really stepped forward to own the SHIFT and in doing so, we've come a long way to ensure that older Nova Scotians in all their diversity are reflected in the work we do every day.

SHIFT is based on three pillars. These are the themes we heard over and over during our consultations with Nova Scotians in 2016: the need to value the social and economic contribution of older adults; that we need to promote healthy, active living; and support aging in place connected to community life.

If you are familiar with our plan, you'll know that most of the actions in SHIFT live outside the Department of Seniors. Our role has been to help bring people together, ensure the needs and interests of older adults in all their diversity remain top of mind across government and to create an overall policy framework for coordinated action.

I mentioned that SHIFT was an ambitious undertaking, but I am pleased with the progress we have made against our plan in the first year. Let me give you just a few highlights. First of all on seniors' health, while treating illness after it happens is important, a key theme in our consultations was keeping seniors healthy in the first place. While we have followed closely the expansion of the caregiver benefit program and new investments in home care and additional support for family doctors, there's much more we can do for healthy living.

In line with SHIFT, and especially our goal to promote healthy active living, are projects like the Mobile Food Market. The Mobile Food Market is a service that provides fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables to communities where food security is a real issue. For older Nova Scotians, food security can become an issue even in communities where fresh and wholesome food is abundant, due to low and fixed incomes and lack of transportation access, to name a few. A \$110,000 investment will maintain the Mobile Food Market's current location and help the service expand outside of HRM.

On January 1st, the Department of Finance and Treasury Board also increased the basic personal exemption for low-income Nova Scotians. As a result, taxes will be reduced for more than 500,000 people, with more than 60,000 no longer paying provincial income tax. This will have a real impact on the lives of many older Nova Scotians living on low and fixed incomes, which brings me to another important action out of SHIFT - that is the \$2.4 million funding commitment to expand community transportation options across the province.

My colleagues and I hear time and time again about the importance of reliable, affordable, community-based transportation to keeping older Nova Scotians connected in the communities where they age. As a result of the funding commitments made under the federal Social Infrastructure Fund, new, affordable housing units are planned for Mahone

Bay, Amherst, Yarmouth, Wolfville, Greenwood and in the Sydney area over the next two years.

The Mahone Bay project, for example, is currently under construction and will provide 26 affordable housing units, including three units that are barrier free. The project is being built with enhanced seniors features - for example, all units will have walk-in showers in lieu of bathtubs.

On the workforce side, the Department of Labour and Advanced Education has invested \$200,000 to expand the Works for You Program to better support older Nova Scotians who are transitioning back into the workplace or find themselves unemployed. We've also worked with our colleagues at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to create and offer a free, online training module for employers about the benefits of hiring and retaining older workers and creating an age-friendly workplace. All of this has been done in partnership with our department, but also led by others, which demonstrates the reach and impact of SHIFT.

Our action in the Department of Seniors out of SHIFT that has been led by seniors, for example, is creating a new social innovation lab - NS GovLab, we call it. Two members of our team are dedicated full time to advancing the work of the lab where 24 "fellows" are working hard to understand the complex issue of an aging population and to present system-designed solutions that address those issues.

In plain language, that means we have 24 Nova Scotians from all backgrounds and walks of life engaged in thinking about how our world must change to support a population that would be older from now on, and bringing forward ideas rooted in research that help close the gap. This is really incredible, innovative work and I look forward to sharing the lab's progress with you in the coming months and years.

Our Age-friendly Communities Grants have also supported many important projects over the last several years. This year, we're supporting 47 projects in communities throughout Nova Scotia, from conferences, awareness projects, tools, programs, services that support physically-active lifestyles, and strong, connected communities. This is important work and I hear from our senior stakeholders every day that it's continuing to move the dial on this province.

One of the challenges outlined in SHIFT is proving a harder nut to crack, and that's ageism. Ageist attitudes and stereotypes in our society perpetuate the notion that getting older is a problem rather than an actual part of life. Ageism is engrained in our thinking and our ways of relating. We see it anytime someone is thought to be too old for something - a new job, a physical challenge, a style of clothing. We hear seemingly light-hearted jokes like "I'm having a senior moment", but this is still a challenge for us.

What has been so clear my colleagues and me during the creation and implementation of SHIFT is that ageism is so pervasive, the effect so powerful, that we come to accept it as fact. I will say my work on SHIFT, and in this portfolio, has opened my own eyes to these biases, but my small and mighty team at the department and our partners in the community are working hard every day to change the dialogue on aging.

As you can see, we've made steady progress in our first year with lots left to do in the years ahead. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today about the exciting work underway throughout government in support of SHIFT, and I look forward to answering your questions this morning.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston of the Progressive Conservative Party caucus, you have 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you. Is there a budget for SHIFT?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Because the work of SHIFT is spread around many departments, when we launched SHIFT, we announced a \$13.6 million-dollar investment that had been recorded at the time. Since then, we've made incremental investments and the budgets that followed, for example, included extra investments to deliver on the commitments of SHIFT.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you have any idea of how much?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Some of the things are hard to determine right down to the dollar. For example, the increase in the basic personal exemption in tax revenue is about \$85 million, but the exact proportion to seniors is a number that we've been trying to get and is a little bit hard to nail down exactly. Certainly, it would be in the several tens of millions of dollars.

MR. HOUSTON: When the budget was introduced in September, there was a nice sign beside the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board that the five priorities of the government were: healthier people in communities, investing in early years in education, safe and connected communities, inclusive economic growth. That's four. At that time, there was also a fifth one that said caring for seniors.

When the most recent budget was introduced, that same sign was beside the minister talking about the priorities of government, but caring for seniors was gone. The five priorities that the government had in September had reduced to four.

Did you know that the caring for seniors had dropped off as a priority?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I didn't see those materials and can't comment on them, as I'm not aware of them.

MR. HOUSTON: I think it was kind of something that government was hoping would slide by and nobody would notice, but I did notice that that priority had dropped off and that's why I'm glad that the department is here today, because seniors represent 20 per cent of Nova Scotians, but the budget for the Department of Seniors is like 0.25 per cent of the overall budget - a couple million bucks on an almost-\$11 billion budget.

I don't always like to draw a line with the thing but when I see the priority of caring for seniors is gone, from the main literature that the government is putting out, and a small budget like that for 20 per cent of the population, it gets my attention. Even in the budget for the Department of Seniors for this year of \$2.7 million - when I look through that, \$1.5 million of that is administration and only \$1.2 million is grants for seniors programming. Really, what we're talking about is \$1.2 million of an \$11 billion budget is allocated for grants for 20 per cent of the population - \$1.2 million in grants for our entire senior population.

What's your reaction when you hear those types of things? It troubles me.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: It's due to the way that the role of the Department of Seniors is designed within government. The Department of Seniors, for the most part, is a policy central agency whose job it is to design and lead policy frameworks directionally for government. But the delivery of all the programs related to seniors rest in those subject matter expertise departments where there's the expertise to run those programs - nursing homes are run by the Department of Health and Wellness, housing is run by Housing Nova Scotia.

We have, by comparison, maybe a higher administrative budget because most of our work is policy work done by a policy analyst, and we need to pay the salaries of the policy analysts. We have a few programs that we run that are best suited to be in our department, like the Senior Safety Program, some age-friendly grants, but most of the work of the department is policy work, working with other departments, and we lever the horsepower and the budgets of those other departments.

For example, a large proportion of housing units at Housing Nova Scotia are for seniors, but the budget rests there, the staff rests there, we work with them. It's the same thing with the \$800 million budget for continuing care in the Department of Health and Wellness - devoted almost exclusively to seniors, and rests in that department and not with ours.

We're actually lucky that we have a Department of Seniors in Nova Scotia; we're one of the few provinces that do. Ontario just added one last year, but before that we were the only province that had a stand-alone department just called the Department of Seniors. In Alberta, they have Seniors and Housing, and when we talk to that department, the only thing they do is seniors housing. They don't work on other seniors' issues like transportation or increasing the workforce participation of seniors.

When we go to the federal/provincial/territorial meetings, most provinces look at our arrangement with envy that we have a dedicated department and a strong mandate to work with all departments across the province.

MR. HOUSTON: How much of the budget would you say your department is helping to lever towards seniors? How much of the \$11 billion - do you have a guess as to how much?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: How much is spent on seniors? We've tried to do some basic analysis there, but it gets too complicated. The exercise would be quite lengthy and challenging. We'd be making quite a few guesses. For example, there are some types of activities that we do, and we don't know what proportion of the population that uses that service is over 65 because we don't ask age questions and so on. There's not an easy way to determine that work, but we know of the \$4-and-change billion budget of the Department of Health and Wellness that a large reasonable proportion is going to seniors. We know that about 60 per cent of Housing Nova Scotia's units are devoted to seniors and so on.

There's that type of work, and in the tax system, we know that a certain amount of tax credits and so on go to seniors. But the exercise to actually come up with a defined number would be quite large.

MR. HOUSTON: The \$1.2 million in grants that your department has, that's just a stopgap - nothing in any other departments addresses that issue, so we need to put some money in your department for that program?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: In part, it's that we're the best place for that to rest. We don't primarily want to be a program delivery department in that if there's a better place. If there's a new housing program that we're working on developing, we'd rather go to Housing Nova Scotia. In the last budget, we got some new funding for transportation, but we didn't want to deliver the funding. Communities, Culture and Heritage is delivering it. Where there's expertise in those departments, we'd rather it be there.

Many of our grants have helped deliver commitments in SHIFT and we find they're better off within our department, where we understand what we're trying to achieve under the plan. We have a lot of expertise and connections in seniors' markets and with seniors' groups. The Senior Safety Program, for example, rests with us because the Department of Justice is not in the business of grant delivery to communities, so with us is a better place to be. It keeps us connected with what's going on and with our partners, as well, which is not hurtful.

MR. HOUSTON: You mentioned the Department of Health and Wellness. I did some math, and the \$1.2 million in grants that your department has control over - the Department of Health and Wellness budget will consume that much in just the two hours

that we are here. The \$1.2 million is what the Department of Health and Wellness will consume in the two hours this committee is meeting.

[9:15 a.m.]

That \$1.2 million in grants that your department has - it's interesting, because there are about 200,000 seniors, I guess - 188,000 seniors. If you take that \$1.2 million in grants, it works out to \$6.59 per senior per year. It's about the cost of buying every senior in the province a sandwich. Would we be better off just to take that grant money and give every senior in the province a \$10 Tim Hortons card?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Using that money, we do a number of things like create our Positive Aging Directory. We use the money within the department to advance initiatives like this, that do have a cost in horsepower and in money to do, that many seniors get to benefit from. We publish about 60,000 to 70,000 copies of this for 170,000 seniors. We have a good reach with this, and it's a good product, plus we also use the funding to leverage - we grease the wheels of progress on our SHIFT strategy.

There are initiatives there that maybe government can't do alone, like supporting healthy active living for seniors. Community groups come to us and say, we're willing to put on a walking club to help exercise and stay healthy. Supporting communities to be able to do those types of things is helpful for us.

MR. HOUSTON: The grant application for the department grants - the last question on the score sheet for that relates to the budget of the program that somebody is applying for. The question is, to what extent is the use of the resources efficient? That struck me as an interesting question when I think of the way the department is structured, where most of it goes to admin - \$1.5 million to admin and \$1.2 million to programming.

If an application came before the department that had that much administration versus that much delivery, would that be something that would pass muster?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I would say proponents aren't really designed like government, in that they don't have policy work to do. We're designed by the nature of who we are, as a policy department within government, and our budget is appropriated and arranged accordingly.

I would say that we have been able to add to - we're not ashamed that we've been able to add to the budget of the department by adding a few FTEs to do more policy work, because it's through this policy work and working with departments that we're able to move the markers.

The cost of administration, per se, in our budget - I believe it's smaller than the \$1.2 million - \$563,000? There's maybe some more, though, for other salaries.

MR. HOUSTON: So the department is leveraging the whole of the government to get services for seniors. So the ballpark of how much of the budget ultimately goes to seniors' services, when you look across the whole government - it's difficult for you to say?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: The total budget of the province, \$11 billion?

MR. HOUSTON: Yes, how much goes to seniors?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: There would be mechanisms to ballpark it, but we'd be taking some wild guesses. There are many services the province offers, and there are many costs that are hard to allocate to individuals, like who is driving on the roads and so on. You'd be making some pretty wild guesses and need some assumptions, because who is driving on the road, for example - you wouldn't be able to say that we just apportion it by proportion because seniors are driving less maybe than other people. It would be pretty difficult.

Some departments, like housing, for example, know exactly that 60 per cent of their housing units are seniors. So on a department-by-department basis, some of them know and in some of them it is pretty hard to.

The reality is that seniors are a large part of our population and they sometimes require services from the province, so it's not insignificant.

MR. HOUSTON: On the policy side, do we have enough long-term care beds in the province?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: On the issue of long-term care, there are policies led by the Department of Health and Wellness. What I can say, as the deputy of the Department of Seniors and seeing the correspondence that come in to my minister, is that we get correspondence from seniors asking about their care in the future.

We don't get a lot of correspondence from seniors saying to build more long-term care beds. The predominant nature of letters we get from seniors is that they want to continue to stay in their home and their communities. They're looking for a lot of support for services to stay at home, as well as the types of supports in the communities like designing age-friendly communities. They want to continue to stay - it's what we call aging in place. Aging in their community is the predominant view that we get from seniors and the stakeholders that we deal with.

MR. HOUSTON: Would your department be advocating for any new government-funded beds for seniors of any type? Is that something you would be pushing for, or do we have enough?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Right now, the Department of Health and Wellness is renewing the Continuing Care Strategy, which is the strategy that basically determines how much you spend on home care and nursing homes, the right proportion of them, and what types of things you spend on. The previous five-year strategy has reached its end, and government is looking to renew the next five-year strategy. That's exactly the type of analysis that they're doing. We are taking part in some of those conversations to try to figure out for, example, the types of supports.

There's an interplay between traditional nursing care in homes like home care, but we're also finding there are other issues like needing services like snow shovelling and so on, to be able to leave the home. There's an intersection between the types of things we do to create age-friendly communities and the need for care services in the home. We're going to get to a point soon where painting the fence and shovelling the driveway may be just as important for someone to continue to age in their home as nursing care.

So there's an interplay. It's not for me to predetermine, but the model may change and drift over time to reflect that people are living so long now that their ability to take care of the home may outlive their ability to stay healthy in their home.

MR. HOUSTON: Is that something that you would advocate for, funding available to seniors for those purposes?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think we need to look at being open minded about our model of funding and what we need in terms of services. There are different models out there, and there may be community supports that might be available. We have some communities, for example, that go to their seniors and look for volunteers who can help out seniors in their community. There's a role for supporting volunteers and community action there as well.

We need a good portfolio of many different things, including designing age-friendly communities - communities that are walkable - to be a good complement to home care programming. I think our role would be to work with them to make sure that whatever they do is a good fit within the portfolio of all the things that seniors need to continue to live in their home.

MR. HOUSTON: You mentioned some of the maintenance around that. I have seen that, talking to people in my own community. What would be the major problems you hear with people aging at home? Would that be it, just general stuff around their home? Is it outside the home, or is it inside the home? What are the major problems you hear for people aging in place?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: The work has been done by the Department of Health and Wellness, looking at home care and actually listing and figuring out what things make you not able to stay in your home. That type of analysis has been done.

In the work that we do around creating age-friendly communities and working with our partners, we do find property maintenance. There was a pilot run in three communities last year of seniors navigators. This was in Annapolis Royal, New Ross, and Guysborough County. After, I was interested in their experience - what they heard and what they learned. I asked them what the number one unmet need was in their communities, and it was property maintenance. Property maintenance seems to be growing in the ratio of things that make you lose your independence because people are living long enough to do that.

Through what we do to tackle some of those things, as part of our plan, we're interested in looking at new types of community support. There's a neat idea that has come out of Japan called time banks. We funded a project in Cape Breton to try that out this year. The time bank concept is one whereby someone volunteers to an organization, and they count their volunteer time to trade them in later. It's easier to explain with an example.

Let's say you're not mobile - you're in a wheelchair - but you can bake. You bake five lasagnas for the Boys and Girls Club. They're worth \$10 each, so you have \$50. That gives you \$50 dollars in the bank. Then when you need your face painted, someone else in the community who will volunteer comes and paints your fence, and they have \$50 in the bank.

In Japan, where they have been doing this for two decades, people volunteer a lot in their early senior years, and build up a big balance in the bank. Then in their later senior years when they have more needs, they cash it in. We'd be really interested to see what the Nova Scotia version of that could be and so on. So, there are programs that the province needs to offer and there are sometimes some things that we need to find how to create the enabling conditions for the community to mobilize to provide services because they can do a better job than we can perhaps.

MR. HOUSTON: It's interesting. Is it time to bring back the Seniors' Secretariat?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Well, the Department of Seniors, per se, has replaced the former role of the Seniors' Secretariat as a full department with a full deputy minister. The ability for me to pick up the phone and call other deputy ministers is the leverage that we need. We also have an annual meeting of the Group of IX, our permanent Seniors' Advisory Council, with the ministers of relevant departments on an annual basis to make sure we're continuing to keep in touch and that we're working with all those departments and keeping the lines of communication open.

I'd say the Department of Seniors is doing more than the former Seniors' Secretariat did as a smaller office. Now, as a full department, I think we bring the weight of the full department and a mandate letter from the Premier to our minister that says we have a job to lead the design of senior-related policy in the province.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. So, does the department have a five- or 10- or 15-year plan to meet the needs of older Nova Scotians? You mentioned some interesting concepts you're obviously looking at and thinking about, but have you pulled them together in a plan?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I would say SHIFT is that plan. It's the first three years of the plan but the policy commitments in SHIFT - there are 12 policy commitments. The policy commitments are far reaching. We thought about what we will need in 10, 20, 30 years and the policy commitments are designed with decades - the whole demographic shift in mind. We've picked off three first years and said here are the actions we're going to do in the first three years but the policy directions in it, we believe, are lasting for several decades.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Houston. We'll now move to the New Democratic Party caucus - Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Thank you very much and welcome. I'm interested particularly to know more about your role vis-à-vis housing issues and, of course, housing issues are related to continuing care in many cases. Forty-four per cent of seniors living alone in Nova Scotia are facing either a housing adequacy or affordability issue and 36 per cent are dealing with an affordability issue. What does that statistic mean for the Department of Seniors? Are you worried about the well-being of seniors in terms of their ability to afford to live out their senior years in an adequate home?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, affordability certainly is an issue for us in that we made a commitment in our plan that we would look at the issue of poverty and affordability, especially housing affordability. It was one of the commitments in our plan. That was a big driver and entered into the calculation of the province increasing the basic personal exemption by \$3,000 in the last budget, which added up to \$85 million in cost/investment from the province. A large proportion of that is going to seniors. It kind of flies a little bit under the radar.

The reality is government could have made another choice and given the Department of Seniors \$40 million to work on poverty which would have sounded like a lot of money and we would hire dozens and dozens of staff to deliver it. The reality is with one flick of the switch, we can change the tax code which put those \$40 million or \$50 million straight into the pockets of seniors without the administrative cost of us delivering it, but certainly living in poverty is an issue.

In our work, we found there is a linkage between our three pillars of our plan. Our plan is focused on the economic and social contribution of seniors, helping people live independently and live healthy, active living but living healthy, for example, requires eating good diets and engaging in recreation which costs money and it requires good

housing which costs money. So, being able to create age-friendly workplaces where people can continue to work as long as they want to, to create the revenue to buy the things they need to live healthy is part of the plan. So, all the pillars kind of play with each other.

[9:30 a.m.]

There are big issues around people living in poverty also often living in isolation. Social isolation may actually be, over the next 20 or 30 years, the largest policy challenge of governments to solve - federal, provincial, and municipal. The federal government has taken on social isolation as their number one top priority. Studies show that living in social isolation for seniors is as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. That is the potential health outcome of living in social isolation.

We are also looking at things like how to create connection between seniors, get them out of the home. things like transportation options for them to move around and engage in the community are important as well. We also, through the plan, levered a significant amount of funding for seniors in housing as well.

MS. ROBERTS: Related to that, you spoke to a number of new developments in housing, including specifically, one in Antigonish. Are those - or maybe it was Mahone Bay - you were talking about new builds of senior-appropriate housing. In the other projects, are we talking about rent supplements or are we talking about actual new builds?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: All of the above. In the budget, there were three or four different items related to housing from Housing Nova Scotia. Some included building new builds, some included renovating existing units, and some included rent supplements, so they have a full suite of things, and I'm pretty sure they increased the budgets in all of those areas.

MS. ROBERTS: And a lot of the money would be flowing from the federal government with the National Housing Strategy?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: That's right. The timing for us was good in the launch of our plan, as we were able to lever - for example, in our plan, out of the first \$5 or \$10 million in provincial money, we were able to lever \$20 million in federal funds during the life of our plan.

MS. ROBERTS: Related to your comments about social isolation, I know in England they have actually created a Department of Loneliness?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Minister of Loneliness.

MS. ROBERTS: Minister of Loneliness. I have to say, these are the real issues that I see in my constituency. I have a number of seniors' manors, and seniors' manors are public housing, so they are affordable because their rent is geared to income.

I am wondering if, from where you sit, you are aware of what I am seeing, which is that as our population ages and, long-term care becomes a destination for the very frail, for the very sick, there are seniors who are living in public housing until they are actually well into their 80s and 90s, not well, and possibly with dementia.

I actually know of a case in my constituency where a gentleman in his 80s with Alzheimer's moved into public housing. That's great, except there are no staff, there are no recreation programs, there is no support for that gentleman, other than that his housing is affordable.

I am wondering what kind of conversations you are having with Housing Nova Scotia about how we tool up our seniors' manors to actually make them complete communities for people who actually have quite a hard time getting outside of it, in many cases?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We've had those types of conversations. I remember speaking with someone in the housing business once, talking about seniors housing, and I asked, what are the biggest challenges for you in seniors housing? The comment was: It's less and less being about the house, and everything about the ecosystem of services around the house.

Seniors housing is becoming less and less about building the building and more about what you put around the building, such as availability of services, availability of community transportation, programming, access to caregivers, and so on. Of course, we need to build the units themselves, and the design of the units over time may change to favour more social interaction.

I have also been working with private sector people in the seniors business, who approach the department and say, we want to get into this seniors housing stuff, we don't know a lot about seniors, what can you tell us? We encourage them to look into the principles of age-friendly community design, which the World Health Organization promotes, and we in the department are developing promotional materials to work with municipal governments on designing age-friendly communities. It's not just about infrastructure, it's about all the services that you need to surround the housing to make sure that people have access to what they need.

MS. ROBERTS: I would suggest that in Halifax now, we actually have hundreds of units of seniors' housing that need to be retrofitted to create those ecosystems of support around them, because I have constituents in their 70s supporting neighbours who are in

their 90s, and not necessarily in really good situations. It's not an ecosystem of support. It's sort of survival within those buildings.

How many units are allocated throughout the province specifically for seniors under Housing Nova Scotia?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I believe it's about 60 per cent of 11,000, which would make approximately 7,700 out of 11,500.

MS. ROBERTS: How many of the units are barrier-free and fully accessible for people with physical disabilities?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I don't have those statistics in front of me, but we could access those from Housing Nova Scotia and share those with the committee, if you would like.

MS. ROBERTS: I would appreciate that. Are you able to break that number down by housing authority?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: No, I'm not - again, Housing would have that. We usually get enough information to help us make our policy direction, how to direct our policy, but we don't have those here. My staff might or Housing would have that.

MS. ROBERTS: What are you hearing about satisfaction with continuing care from those seniors who are living independently? Are you getting copied on correspondence related to continuing care experience and satisfaction?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We do get some. Often that goes directly to the Department of Health and Wellness, but the Minister of Seniors gets copied on a lot of correspondence back and forth.

I haven't seen a lot related to the quality of care specifically, but we do know there has been a great demand for home care. The province's priority over the last few years has been investing in more home care. I believe the budget has increased by \$60 million in the last three or four years. On top of a \$300-million budget, that is quite a significant increase.

The wait times have gone down quite a bit. In terms of the issue of wait times for home care, they have improved significantly over the last few years. For example, I'm not seeing a lot of correspondence traffic on long wait times, which might have been the case a few years ago.

MS. ROBERTS: As we talked about earlier, loneliness and social isolation are significant issues for seniors. A continuing care assistant might be the one person entering the home on a regular basis. One of the things I'm hearing is that it's often a different

continuing care assistant at each visit, to the extent that the senior can't even keep track of the name of the person who is coming in and doing personal care for them. Is that an issue, in your view?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think it's an issue, and it's an issue that has been looked at. The Department of Health and Wellness worked with their home care providers over the last couple of years on improving things like scheduling and so on. For people with dementia and so on, changing a caregiver on a regular basis can be a challenge, obviously. They're trying to reduce the amount of time that people are travelling in cars, getting from location to location. I think they have achieved some efficiency improvements over the last few years, but it's not an area I can go into a lot of detail on.

MS. ROBERTS: The age-friendly community grants are not a capital funding program. They can't be used for operational funding either. They cover salaries, honoraria, professional fees, materials, and meeting-to-meeting expenses. Can you give us some sense of the demographics of the individuals benefiting from the projects undertaken through these grants? Are we looking at the younger, more active senior? Who are we looking at?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I would say we probably have quite a bit of variety and range. We get requests for grants to do Meals on Wheels to help support more aged seniors who are in their homes and require that support. On the other hand, we get grants to support walking clubs for people who want to stay active.

We love doing intergenerational work. We have given grants in the past for youth to provide training at CAP sites on Internet skills and digital literacy to older adults who want to learn how to use the Internet and use technology.

The main beneficiary needs to be an older population, but we're not terribly worried about the definition of 65. If a group wanted to come forward, and they want to focus on helping 60- to 65-year-olds find work after being displaced, we would be happy to support them. It's an older population generally. The 60-year-old will become a client of the province as a formal senior over 65 in a few short years. As long as older adults are being helped, we're fine with that.

MS. ROBERTS: I worked previously in the non-profit sector, so I was aware of people submitting applications for these sorts of things, and of course there's always a desire to package something as new and innovative in order to be granted the money, but in fact, a lot of the needs are just ongoing, and a lot of non-profits are chronically performing a lot of services with not a lot of resources.

What is your view moving forward? Do you expect that projects will get maintenance funding if they show great success? Are you expecting that you might scale up or scale out projects that are showing impact? Are you even tracking the impact of the projects?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We are, and it's certainly a challenge for us. If we were to say, with our small budget, they we were prepared to fund operating funding, it would mean that we would start the year with no new money, we would be funding everything else, and all the new ideas that we want to experiment, pilot, and try out - things like time banks that have never been done before - we wouldn't have an opportunity to try something new. The reality is, we probably need to continue to try to find new things. We're facing a demographic shift we have never, ever seen before in our history, hence it's not through the pages of history where we're going to find out what we need to do - we need to come up with brand-new solutions.

As the oldest jurisdiction in North America - because us, New Brunswick and Florida, we're all tied for the oldest jurisdictions in North America - we're at the coalface of this change, and people are looking to us to be the innovators. While it's unfortunate we can't give maintenance funding, we probably do need to keep enough money out there to do pilots and new things and so on, which we're doing.

Certainly, I think over time, as the population ages, we will need to understand that there are some things that are maintenance funding that aren't transitional. There are needs that people will incur, like the need for home care, that you can't just give home care for a year and walk away. So, for something like that, it's regular operating that goes on until you don't need it anymore. We probably need to continue to explore which one is which - which one is the need for regular, permanent operating.

Transportation is an example. As part of our plan we got approval for another \$2.4 million in community transit - not just for seniors, it's for everyone - but seniors are a great beneficiary of that. It's not one-year funding, it's ongoing funding, because we realize this is something we need to do and need to continue to do.

MS. ROBERTS: In case you weren't aware, Chebucto Connections actually ran a time bank for a number of years.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We know that - I'm sorry, I am speaking out of turn. I read the evaluation, actually.

MS. ROBERTS: That's okay. It has been done. I know the social worker who ran it for a number of years.

Back to housing. In the SHIFT plan, one of the specific actions that was undertaken in 2017-18 was to, "Review the Statement of Provincial Interest on Housing to determine if it adequately directs municipal planning and zoning to support a range of options that bridge the gap between independent living and long-term care."

I would like to understand that, so if you could explain it to me?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Sure. Statements of provincial interest are tools by which the province outlines a clear policy interest and works with municipal governments to try to get them to help deliver on it. For example, the Statement of Provincial Interest on floodplains gives guidance to municipal government, that when you're doing your planning, make sure you don't plan for housing in floodplains.

The other types of Statements of Provincial Interest - we've been talking to the Department of Municipal Affairs about the effectiveness of those and how they can work and what they're doing. So, that work is still ongoing right now. The challenge, in part, is that Statements of Provincial Interest only apply to municipalities who do formal planning. If you don't do formal planning, it doesn't apply to you, so it's a bit of a blunt instrument in terms of achieving your policy goals. It can be helpful, but it doesn't cover all the ground.

They're continuing to do work, and there's a committee on which we have a staff person who works with Municipal Affairs around statements of provincial interest. They've been exploring things like healthy active living, housing, and so on. That work is still ongoing, I think the interest of the Department of Municipal Affairs is to beef up the planning capacity and work with municipal government to increase their planning capacity, so that these types of mechanisms can work better in the future.

MS. ROBERTS: As you talked about, there's a need for community transportation, there's a need for active, walkable communities. Many people certainly point out to me - and I can see examples of it - a provincial government either ignoring actual municipal planning or else just showing a preference for the low-cost, by-the-highway-interchange recreation centre, which actually does not support an active walkable community.

[9:45 a.m.]

We certainly have seen it in the case of rural schools, but I think we also see it in hospitals and in recreation facilities and so forth. Is the province living up to its own direction when it comes to supporting zoning that does create a potential for people to age in place beyond the years when they can drive a car, potentially, and also promoting health throughout life by encouraging people to engage in active transportation?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Because it's spread all over government, I would say it's one of those things that we're continually advocating for. Someone asked us once what we do for a living - we're influence peddlers. We go to other departments and work with them to try to influence their policies.

We do have a couple of mechanisms to formally try to advance that. Number one is, we fund municipal governments to design age-friendly community plans. We give municipalities \$20,000 grants for the walking-around money or the cost or to hire a consultant to go and work with their community to design the planning around what the community needs to be. Those plans can include "if you're building new recreation, here's

the best spot in the community” or “if you’re building new transportation, make sure it goes here.”

We fund those plans with municipal governments and are happy to do more. We think it’s an important part of creating winning conditions for people to age in their home as long as possible - to make sure that the recreation is connected to the transportation, connected to the walking path, connected to the park, and so on, and that the seniors’ housing is in the right place in the community. So we’re often working with that.

To formalize that mechanism, as part of our plan we’ve prepared an MOU with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities. It’s ready. We haven’t launched it yet, but we will very soon. It will be a formal collaboration between us and municipal governments to advance the types of issues that help seniors in their communities, including looking at things like zoning. We have R-1 zoning in parts of the province where you can’t have a granny suite in your basement.

MS. ROBERTS: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will go to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. d’Entremont and Mr. Nanji. I think I am probably the only senior actually sitting here today - I shouldn’t say that, but maybe I am - give everybody a compliment.

Your department certainly is intertwined within government. There’s no doubt about that. The Public Accounts Committee is a place to learn, for sure. We always have questions, and I think it’s very interesting the way you are answering the questions to show how integrated you are within all of government. I would also say, by the way you’ve been addressing most of the questions so far, it is a big priority of government. I do want to commend you on the work that is being done, right off the top.

One of the most interesting questions, right off the bat - and I’d like to go back to it - was the fact that you are a clearing house for seniors. You work with the Group of IX, you are intertwined, you are the front door of government for seniors, I would say. You’ve probably heard an awful lot in the last few years, and we have come a long way.

What was interesting, and I’d like to go back to, is what you said you hear from seniors. They say a lot. I’m sure they do. But it’s important for us here to also know what you are hearing. We hear what we do in our constituencies on the ground, but can you frame for me the major concerns, the major focuses that we should be putting towards seniors with government that you are hearing?

MR. SIMON D’ENTREMONT: When we did our consultations for the SHIFT plan, we went out to a number of communities. We went out to eight geographic

communities - Yarmouth, Kentville, Bridgewater. You can just imagine what they were. We wanted to make sure we didn't leave voices out that deserved a voice that might not just show up to our regular meeting. So we reached out intentionally to First Nations communities, African Nova Scotians, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI, immigrants, francophones - hope I didn't miss one - to have those conversations as well and we asked them, what's on your mind?

Some of the big trends of things that came out - I'd say 20 per cent of what people asked for was, wouldn't it be great if there was a place you could call to find out where you can volunteer in your community, get access to services, or find a caregiver. The reality is that it exists. It's called 211. It's a great product and we are a big believer in 211 but the awareness in some markets is less than it should be.

This last winter we ran a 211 promotional campaign promoting 211 in seniors' marketplaces. When we do our Positive Aging Directory, we give them a banner on the bottom and at the bottom of every page, it says call 211 because while we have a paper directory for people who want that, 211 is our electronic version and 211 is our telephone version of this. They can do a much better job, many better hours of service. They have access to 22 languages - they do a better job.

So we promote 211. Information clarity is a big deal for seniors and us promoting 211 is our major intervention and publishing with the directory which we're happy to send to MLAs, as many as they want.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Can you tell me how 211 works, then? If I have a community event in my area that's going on, is that something that you would be able to find through 211?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I'm not sure community events - it's more geared toward ongoing social services. If you have a social service and you need to find out where the local food bank is, where you can volunteer in your community, where someone can help you start a business or whatever - those are more the services around 211 rather than current events. But they also update their databases on a regular basis and so on.

They actually do a little bit - you have to be careful about advertising this a lot. They have a number of people for whom social isolation is a big deal who actually call in and they just want to talk and they're very gracious about this. They'll actually engage in the conversation and they have some regulars that call and they'll engage in the conversation but at some point you have to say, I think we need to go now but they don't say you've reached the wrong phone number, call somewhere else. They're very sympathetic that way.

They also give us a report every year on how many seniors called, what they called for, what their met needs were, what their unmet needs were. They're quite scientific and

very rigorous in their evaluation work they do. So, they're a partner for us and a very valuable partner. We get good data that helps us design policy.

The other types of things you asked - what types of issues may be raised - I mentioned earlier community transportation, and I would say it was one of the big ones. The more we talked to departments and seniors, we said what are the top three things for seniors and, depending on which department we talked to, they would say it's this, this, and transportation. It's this, transportation, and this. It wasn't often number one but it was often number two or three in multiple, multiple, multiple places. So, tackling community transit and adding more capacity for transportation options for an increasingly aging population are clearly important for us because it's one of the number one things that makes you lose your independence especially in rural Nova Scotia, is losing your ability to drive.

So, building transportation is important and I'd say the number three one is ageism, which is discrimination on people because of their age. It cuts across so many things. It undermines seniors' ability to get their wishes of their health care respected as they get older. It undermines seniors' ability to go to a bank and get a loan to start a business and why would you want to start a business. You're 66 years old. The reality is 25 per cent of people between 65 and 69 are still in the workforce and 25 per cent of those are self-employed entrepreneurs versus the 9 per cent entrepreneurship rate for everyone else. So, getting a loan at the bank is an issue for seniors and, if they face age discrimination, that's a problem.

We ran an anti-ageism campaign last winter. You may have seen a clip on TV of a swimmer in a pool, Ron Allen, who is 71 who is a triathlete from the South Shore. We need to continue to put images forward of seniors who are breaking the mould of the perception of older adults as dependent and needing a lot of service to that of being a powerful asset and ally in our communities.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Okay. I'll come back to the ageism. On the communications side also, these are a lot of things you're hearing directly from seniors who are writing in to you and communicating when you're out the road and that. The Group of IX, how often do you engage with them and what are some of the things that you're hearing from them? They're an integral part of our understanding of the nuances in the senior community.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: The Group of IX is a key ally for us. We meet about eight times a year but a lot of phone calls in between. I speak to the chairman pretty well every week and they're great collaborators for us. The Group of IX is our permanent seniors' advisory council to the department. They are made up of nine organizations, two members each, so it's an 18-member panel. The benefits are on both sides. The Group of IX is a window for us into the minds of seniors when we're designing new programs and policies, to be able to say we're thinking of doing this, what do you think? It gives us a good head start on where to go. But the Group of IX is also a window for the seniors'

community into government. They represent 110,000 seniors in the province who come to them and say, this is what's on our mind, and they pass that on to us in the form of strategic priorities.

Every year they hear from a lot of different members, this is what's important, and every year we go through a process of prioritizing what those things are: driving the SHIFT plan, supporting health for seniors, supporting caregivers - these are the types of priorities. They give us a little bit of a narrower - there's a million things we could do for seniors and they kind of whittle it down and say, we think those are the priority areas, and we put some extra effort in those areas on their behalf.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Back to ageism. Certainly, we know that in the workplace, be it government or the private sector, it's a concerned area. We have a lot of good examples of things. I was talking to one of my colleagues this morning who had mentioned Home Depot and how it's such a wonderful example of how people who have retired can go back into the economy and be productive, but there are still challenges within the civil service - you can get time off to look after your children, but you can't get time off to look after your parents in some cases.

What do you contemplate as some action items around ageism in the government sector and in the private sector, that we might be able to do better?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: In government, for example, the Public Service Commission has launched an association - actually, one of the commitments of SHIFT is called a flex work arrangement. One of the things we need to do for older adults is that we need to keep them in the workforce as long as possible. It turns out from a workforce situation, the workforce participation of average age people 35 to 55 in Nova Scotia is the same as every other province. But with older adults, persons with disabilities, African Nova Scotians, and youth, we have less workforce participation.

We need to continue to work on the workforce participation of older adults, because as many jobs as we can create in those other under-represented areas, there are so many people retiring on the other end that as a net to the province, we have a workforce participation issue. We are working on that. The flex work issue that I mentioned at the Public Service Commission is important because some of the ways we're going to keep older workers in the workplace is to be more flexible on how they can work in their later years.

The reality is, many people in their 50s want to get some time off to take care of parents in their 80s. Sometimes their employers are not accommodating those needs, so rather than getting 80 or 90 per cent of an employee, they're getting 0 per cent of the employee because they leave. They leave to take care of their parents for a decade, who eventually move on or pass on, and then they try to re-enter the workplace in their 60s to

try to make up the time and face age discrimination because they're too old to be entering the workforce. Those are issues we need to work on.

As you mentioned, we can get more time off to take care of our sick kids than our sick parents, yet the number of people over 65 last year in Canada surpassed the number of people under 14, so we need to modernize workplace practices. We're doing a big piece of work on that. We're working with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and the Centre on Aging at Mount Saint Vincent, and we're doing research on what the best practices and barriers are for the workforce participation of older adults. We plan to turn that into some actions of new policy directions or potentially new programming, and we plan to roll that out around the province to see whether or not we can move the markers.

There are some great examples of how you can bust the myths. BMW, the automaker - about 10 years ago one of their HR people said, we've got an aging workforce, this is going to be a big problem for us. So, they actually purposefully created an assembly line made up of a workforce that was 10 years older than the average, just to see what would happen.

They found that for \$30,000 - £20,000 in the day - in small accommodations like orthotics, rubber mats and stools and changing the work flow, they actually increased productivity by 9 per cent, totally dispelling the myth that older workers are less productive. There are great practices that have been done, we need to look into those and find out what policies and programs we need to do.

[10:00 a.m.]

We've also developed a free module with Labour and Advanced Education that employers can get online on how to create age-friendly workplaces. We are also training the front-line staff of Nova Scotia Works on creating age-friendly workplaces and how to work with employers to retain older workers. We are doing quite a bit and we need to keep the pressure going because it's going to be an important part of our economy.

If I can add, we also need to dispel the myth that older workers are taking jobs away from youth. This has been studied to death by economists and they have actually given it a name, it's called the lump of labour fallacy. The lump of labour fallacy is basically the presumption that there's a fixed number of jobs and if you give a job to someone you have to take it away from someone else.

The reality is that a schoolteacher who retires making \$80,000 and is replaced by another one making \$40,000, you've taken \$40,000 of spend out of the economy, even though technically you've got the same number of jobs. It's true at the micro level, a younger teacher can't be in a job that the older teacher is still in but at the macro level, we need those older workers.

In the U.K. they did a study and found that if everyone stayed in the workplace one year longer, their GDP would grow by 2 per cent. In Canada the workforce participation of people 55 and older is 54 per cent, it's 62 per cent in New Zealand and in the Netherlands, like the leading jurisdictions. In Canada they figured out that if we had the same workforce participation of older adults as those leading jurisdictions, the leading GDP per capita would go up by 2.8 per cent. So clearly older workers is a winning scenario for us and, as the oldest population in the country, we need to be working on that actively, which we are, and we need to continue to do more.

MR. GORDON WILSON: As I noted in my statement, I believe there's nine different departments and corporations that work directly with seniors, with your department. So integrating all the different approaches towards dealing with these problems is one that you take the lead on with the policy side of it. How do you interact? So \$13.6 million was put into the SHIFT program a year ago. We're at that anniversary here today and I believe there were at least 12 large commitments and 50 action items that were part of that action plan.

Again, that's not directly in your department - that's across a lot of departments. How do you work directly with those departments? Is there a regularly scheduled meeting? Is it part of your deputy ministers' forum? I'd like to better understand how that is coordinated.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have a number of mechanisms. Sometimes we have on particular files like transportation, we have an interdepartmental working group where we have someone on that committee but also CCH is there and Municipal Affairs. Some pieces of work just need their own spinoff committee.

With Faizal, his job is also to - we call it doing the round, with executive directors, understanding what they're doing. Part of our job is for other departments to know that when they are designing seniors-related policies or issues to give us a call and that's success for us. EMO may call us and says, we're developing a new brochure around what to do in an emergency, can you sit on our working group so that we don't end up with a guideline that says, "If there's a fire, run out of the house." Well running out of the house doesn't work for everyone, so that's success when they give us a call.

One of the other mechanisms is for the one-year anniversary, we sent out a number of templates to all the departments that made commitments and said report back on your commitment, where are you at? We are in the middle of that process now.

The other thing I do is, as a deputy, I do the rounds. Twice per year I go visit all the deputies who have commitments in the plan and say, how are we making it against your old commitments and what else are you working on that we can help with? So a lot of it is just creating that awareness.

The most important, impactful maybe tool that we have is the Premier's mandate letter to my minister. The Premier's mandate letter to the Minister of Seniors says that one of your mandate items is to lead the development of aging policy for the Province of Nova Scotia, so that is our licence to go to other departments and say the Premier wants us to work with you to co-operate on seniors' policy.

The trick for us is to not become the seniors' police. If every time we pick up the phone and the other department says, oh my God, it's the Department of Seniors calling, what do they want now - that's not the type of partnership we want. We're sharing intelligence, sharing information. We need their help. We're working on older workers. We need the expertise and the statisticians over at Labour and Advanced Education who are experts in workforces to help us. So it's a mutual relationship.

MR. GORDON WILSON: This is probably the last question we'll get in, certainly not the least. Nobody else talked about our Senior Safety Program. Our conversations go back quite a while. Probably one of the first conversations that we had was around senior safety. It's been in my communities, I think, one of the longest if not - it was the first place that was launched, I believe. I can't over-emphasize how important that is.

Some of the concerns that we had were that it should be everywhere not just there. We understand it needs to come from the community. It can't be driven down by government. More importantly, they need to have some stability there. I know I might have missed it in the budget this year, so correct me if I'm wrong. Did we ever extend the commitment from a one-year turnover, that they had to apply every year, to a longer term?

What is going on the Senior Safety Program provincially? Is it growing? I'll give a shout-out to all the senior safety coordinators. I would have to say that is truly one of the best expenditures of government money, bar none.

Are we growing that program, and what does it look like today?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We are a fan of the program, and the minister is a fan. We are all fans of the Senior Safety Program. We have senior safety officers who we fund in communities to help those communities help seniors on safety issues. We let the community decide about safety. Is it financial fraud? Is it burglaries? You decide what it is.

Basically, we had five counties that were unserved, and we made a commitment to add the commitment to add the program to those five communities. We also made a commitment to increase one-year contracts to three-year contracts because you know how it is for NGOs in small communities. Once you have someone good, to keep them, you need to offer them some employment security. We went to three-year agreements, and we actually added to our budget to bring the coordinators into town together to train together as a community of practice.

So, I'll let Faizal comment on the five unserved counties . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I'm sorry. The time has expired.

We'll move back to the PC caucus. Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: Maybe you can answer this one to get some air time. I think the Positive Aging Directory is a positive tool. Is it mailed to every senior in the province?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We don't mail it to every senior, but we do make copies widely available in doctors offices, pharmacies, and MLAs' offices. We're prepared to send as many boxes to anyone who asks for them as needed. We put them in strategic areas where people can pick them up. People can call in and ask for copy, and we will mail out individual copies if someone calls asking for one.

MR. HOUSTON: Has the department considered creating a list of approved contractors or something? One of the things that I hear is the concern that seniors get scammed. Is there any role for the department in looking at approving contractors, caregivers, cleaners, and the list goes on? Is there a role for that in the department?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have talked about it. It's a daunting task to go through the process of certifying private sector people - and the liability that comes from the endorsement of government of private sector people. We tend not to do that. There are some organizations that can assist seniors. For example, Efficiency Nova Scotia certifies installers for energy efficiency that seniors can apply for, so there's a little bit of that.

We do fraud education through the Senior Safety Program, which we just mentioned. People can be helped and coaxed a little bit on how to find good referrals and safe contractors.

There's also a project we're funding in Dartmouth - I believe it's called Dartmouth on the main. It's run by Ocean View. In return for a small fee, seniors contribute to a pool of money and get access to discounts from people who have been certified as good employers and had senior safety checks, and these types of things.

We have talked about it, and it is done in various areas, but we haven't done it as a department.

MR. HOUSTON: Sometimes if seniors want to get some work done and want to get a grant, the grant becomes available for the lowest bid. Go get three bids, and then I'll approve some kind of a grant for the lowest one. That's not always the best way and that is why I am wondering if we can protect seniors a little more by having that type of a list or having some kind of a role. It's a good idea, I guess, but it's just not something that government can do, would you say?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, I think it would be a pretty daunting task to go through the process of interviewing, safety checking, certifying the potentially thousands of different services that companies would want to do. As a policy department, I think that would be well beyond the scope of what we have the horsepower to do. But if community groups or organizations want to come forward and apply for funding and they felt they had mechanisms to do that type of work and help out in communities, that is something we might possibly be interested in talking about.

MR. HOUSTON: What about the role of technology in closing the gap between seniors and their family members who often might be in another jurisdiction? There are all kinds of technology tools - GPS - I'm thinking of GPS on watches and cars and door-ajar alarms and that type of stuff, but that technology is expensive, and in some cases too expensive for the family members to afford.

I have a couple of questions about involving the family in the process more, and this would kind of be the first one: Is there funding available for families who want to put some of those technology assistances in the homes of seniors?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I agree 100 per cent on the potential role for technology going forward. There are a few programs that the province offers like the \$400 a month caregiver program. There is also a \$500 a month program for people with terminal illness.

MR. HOUSTON: The caregiver program - can you get that for a family member?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: You can. The way that the \$400 caregiver program works is that there is a means test on the senior and if the senior cannot afford to buy caregivers, the \$400 a month goes to a caregiver that they have. Those types of funds could be deployed to technology, if that's what they felt the best use was, or if it's the best way to do some caregiving.

We're such a fan of the role of technology, actually, that we had our third Silver Economy Summit this year in March, and the theme of the Silver Economy Summit was the use of technology in aging. We actually brought companies from all over the world that came and we had Nova Scotia companies do presentations on the types of things they are doing. We wanted to give an audience to great Nova Scotia companies developing technology. Because we have one of the oldest jurisdictions, many companies are looking at Nova Scotia as a great place to grow their aging business and there is probably a technology edge to that.

One of the big issues in technology is probably going to be that the number of seniors is going up but the population of people under 65 is shrinking. So the number of people under 65 available to take care of people over 65 - that ratio is going to get stretched and stretched.

I was at a conference on technology and aging last fall, and one of the interesting observations was the role for technology to apply a multiplier effect for more younger people to take care of more older people. I think the most interesting sub-observation was that we have a social isolation challenge. Technology replacing human interaction would probably not be a good direction.

The holy grail will be technology that enhances human interaction. So you have remote monitors on your parents, and you have a phone and an app. An app that says, "Your mother took her pills at nine o'clock, she's fine" and then encourages you to go to bed is probably not the right thing. But an app that says, "Your mother took her pills at nine o'clock. It would be great for you to call her before going to bed" - technology that promotes interaction rather than replacing it is probably the holy grail of technology for us.

MR. HOUSTON: But there's no funding for families for those types of technologies that even exist today. The caregiver allowance - the threshold is very low and I think the income test.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, the income test is the LICO - the low income cut-off. Other than the caregiver program, I am not aware which are means-tested so that people who can't afford them otherwise might have access. This is an emerging area that I think will kind of grow quite a bit and we will have to do some thinking as a government. I think more and more, the issue of not just supporting the senior but also supporting the caregiver is going to be an integral part of directionally where we are going.

[10:15 a.m.]

Over the last 10 or 20 years, it seems every policy decision or trends in community kind of suggested that a caregiver can do a little bit more. We are getting to a point where the caregiver is going to be a very valuable resource for the Province of Nova Scotia with an older population, and we need to start providing supports to caregivers to do their jobs and that's probably directionally where we're going.

Whether providing technology aids and subsidizing technology aids can be part of the winning conditions for us is possible, and maybe there's a cost-avoidance business case that if a nursing home is \$70,000 a year, maybe a small invest in home technology to avoid the move to the nursing home will be a wise investment for the province some day.

MR. HOUSTON: Are you doing those analyses?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: In some ways, we're looking at what our options are. A lot of these technologies are not very mature - there are privacy issues and so on to plow through - so I think it's going to take us a bit of time. But there are already things like wearables, for example. If you have someone with dementia, rather than putting them in an institution and locking the doors, put a bracelet on them with a GPS where you can

actually buy the technology. You can go on a map and identify the perimeter where it's okay for them within that perimeter to walk around, and when they walk outside the perimeter you get a phone call or a text message.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the supporting caregivers, I agree with you that we're going to have to find different ways to support caregivers. Obviously, straight-up money is one of them. In a world where a CCA could cost \$30, \$40, \$50 bucks an hour, but there are family members there who are able and willing to provide care for their loved one, is there a consideration of paying the family member \$20 an hour, or \$22 an hour or something, to provide those services that they may be providing anyway?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Our foray to date on that has been the Caregiver Benefit, the \$400 a month which the eligibility for that has recently been expanded to hopefully get another 600 people to be eligible into the program.

MR. HOUSTON: How many would that be in total?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Don't quote me on this - it's between 1,000 and 2,000. I think we've got 1,500 people maybe, in the program. We can get that number.

MR. HOUSTON: Let's call it 1,500 for the sake of argument, and we expand it and we get 600 more people, it's 2,100 people, but there's 190,000 seniors in the province. It doesn't seem like that's much penetration of the seniors market. Why would that be? Is that because the income test is too low?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I don't know the answer of how we're changing that. I think they're using a low-income cut-off, which is the standard income test. But whether or not using the low-income test is going to be sufficient to meet our needs in supporting caregivers in the future, I can't predict that.

We are unique, though, in that we're the only province with a Caregiver Benefit. Most other provinces are quite envious of our leadership position there.

MR. HOUSTON: So we would have 2,000 people eligible for it at \$400 a month, right? That's the investment in helping seniors with any multitude of things. It could be technology, it could actually be somebody to come into their home and help them with something. That's a lot of seniors that don't have access to that, and don't have access to probably anything in the absence of that.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We do spend \$360 million on home care, so this is just a little bit of an add-on to provide relief to the caregivers when there are family members and so on. It is directly tackling that family member issue, but there are a large number of other supports for older adults to continue to stay in their home, including things

like the affordability of staying home - fuel tax rebates and property tax rebates and these types of things.

There are a large suite of investments that we make, but the Caregiver Benefit is the foray into helping family do it. This is probably something we are not going to be doing less of in the future, we're probably going to be doing more, focused on the key importance of caregivers in their role in an aging population.

MR. HOUSTON: The 211 number only directs people to government and non-profit services - is that true? If somebody called there and asked how they accessed some service, if it's not provided by government or a non-profit, then they are not going to get that recommendation?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think ballpark, yes. I don't think they focus on private business services, but between the non-profit sector and government services, there is quite a breadth of services there. I'm sure there are some other things, like private sector businesses and so on, that aren't targeted.

MR. HOUSTON: I'm trying to figure out how you know where to go. You might have the aging directory, you might have it if you were somewhere and picked it up, because it doesn't come to your home, or you might call 211, but you still might not know where to go. I sense a bit of a gap there. Do you think there's pretty good coverage?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: There is pretty good coverage. I mean, they have a long list of volunteer organizations. They know the government programs fairly well. If you're looking for private-sector services, they have 4,000 in their database. It's quite broad.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has expired.

For the NDP caucus, the honourable David Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for being here today. I want to return to long-term care. We haven't talked about it a lot, just because you had indicated that it's not in your wheelhouse, especially when you're dealing with the SHIFT action plan. I know you indicated that a lot of the correspondence you receive in the department deal with what services are being provided and can you improve on it.

Individuals want to stay in their homes longer. I would agree with that 100 per cent, I know that's the case. To this day, I still haven't met a senior or an individual saying, I can't wait to live in a long-term care home facility - I haven't met that. I've engaged with a lot of people in this role and as a paramedic, as a first responder. I still haven't found

anybody just waiting for the day to get into a long-term care facility. But with the sheer demographic numbers that we're facing, I don't believe that we as a province can look at just a couple of areas to support seniors, especially with their housing needs.

I know long-term care has been an issue for a number of years. Caregivers have been playing an important role in trying to support their family members and trying to keep people in their homes longer. I do want to know why long-term care is not in your realm or maybe why SHIFT avoided - it's not in that SHIFT plan. Have you been told that long-term care is a health issue, leave it to the Department of Health and Wellness?

I'm concerned about those 1,100 people who might not be writing a letter to the Department of Seniors because of cognitive, medical, or physical reasons why they're on that list. If you did receive a letter from each one of those, would that change what you would advocate for? Those people need influence peddlers, as you also indicated.

My concern is that the government has taken a stance, we know that. But your department could influence the Department of Health and Wellness and say, listen, we cannot just ignore that and put all our eggs into one basket, into improving home care and those services.

Maybe just another input from yourself on why long-term care was not part of that SHIFT action plan.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: It's a good observation. There is actually a commitment around the Continuing Care Strategy in the plan. When we were developing the plan, we went to all the departments and said, what are you doing, what are the issues, and so on. The Department of Health and Wellness' position at the time was that the Continuing Care Strategy is expiring right now. We made a commitment to come up with a new one.

It would have been premature for us in our plan to indicate what government's commitment was around long-term care and continuing care and nursing homes if we are just on the cusp of coming up with a new plan. We couldn't predict what it was. All we did in our plan is say that there is a new Continuing Care Strategy coming out. That was the commitment in our plan, and that'll be coming out very soon, I expect. So we put a placeholder for it, saying that there will be a plan, and when that plan comes out, it will become part of our plan because our plan is an interim plan. We're open to continuing to tweak it, advance it, add things as we go along.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Will you play a role in trying to make sure that that continuing care plan recognizes the demand - and listen, I was there. I know that the cost of adding long-term care beds to our province is significant. It far outweighs the cost of improving and expanding home care services, I understand that. But I think we're failing

our seniors if we don't move both of those initiatives forward in some capacity, and we haven't over the last five years.

It doesn't happen overnight - the creation of a new facility, for example, or increasing new beds. It takes planning, which usually takes a couple of years, if not more. I'm worried that in three, four, or five years, we're going to be even further behind at meeting the needs of those 1,100 and that number - yes there are 1,100 people on the list, but there are many, many more who are just hanging on, or their families are hanging on because they're providing that care.

Are you going to play a role in ensuring - with the influence peddling that you have and the ability to do that - that you do reflect the needs of those 1,100-plus people who are waiting today for long-term care? They've exhausted home care, they've exhausted their family members and it just takes one fall, one illness, a month of a progressive disease for them to be put on a list, or their needs increase over what they've been dealing with over the last little while.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I can't disagree with any of your statements and that there will be a role for institutional care for seniors, there's bound to be. As you mention, there is a predisposition for seniors to want to stay at home and they advocate for that, but that's not going to work for everyone all the time, so there's a role for institutional care. We have been working with the Department of Health and Wellness and we will continue to do so, because it's one of the commitments in our plan. We continue to be able to pass on the feedback from our Group of IX on the types of things that are important in care, how we get the right balance and how we support people.

Those are the types of conversations we have with the Group of IX, and we're able to pass that intelligence and feedback back to the Department of Health and Wellness and work with them on things where we can also contribute, like the role of technology that we just talked about earlier in home care and helping people stay at home, and all the other tools that help keep people at home like tax rebates, and Housing Nova Scotia provides grants to seniors to be able to make changes to their homes. That's a portfolio of all the things that help and we always try to stay plugged in with all those things, new changes, and try to advocate for investment.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know your department was co-located with Health and Wellness for a number of years. Is that cost the barrier? Is that why we haven't seen any real change in seeing increases of long-term care beds in the province? Is it the cost factor saying, let's try all these other services and improve those, because the cost is a barrier? I mean, you can't hide behind the fact that building a long-term care bed itself - I'm trying to recall seven, eight, nine years ago - it can be significant. It could be \$150,000 to \$250,000 per year for one bed, so I know that's significant if you're going to create new beds. Do you think that maybe that has been a barrier in not looking at why we haven't seen an increase in long-term care beds in the province?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I can't comment on whether or not - I was not privy to the conversation of whether or not we should spend it on this versus that, and whether or not the financial pressures are an issue. All I can say from my perspective, the advocacy from seniors and seniors' groups, is for supports to stay at home and that's where we've been putting the investment, which is not unwise based on that strategy. As well, the province is working on its new five-year Continuing Care Strategy, which will give policy direction to how you should spend your continuing care money. It's \$800-and-something million and it will decide if you spend it on home care or nursing homes, or what the right balance is in how you spend it.

Given those two things - that we've got a Continuing Care Strategy that will be out soon to provide policy direction on what you should do, and the fact that seniors are advocating for staying at home - what we've been doing currently, spending more money to keep people at home, doesn't seem unwise in that scenario.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I appreciate that. Just to emphasize and keep in mind that often, the people who need long-term care can't advocate for themselves, and their families are so busy that writing a letter to the government is just not in their wheelhouse for that day - feeding their mom, dad, or a family member is. We need to make sure that their needs are met as we move forward.

Talking about the respite care, we know seniors are living longer and seniors are taking care of seniors longer now. This is not a new thing. As a paramedic 20 years ago, going into a home and seeing someone who is elderly, who is exhausted because they're taking care of an older parent - it has its challenges. I know the caregiver allowance has been something that I take very much pride in, knowing the initiative and bringing that forward and making sure that people have some relief, but it has been a number of years since that program was initiated.

I know there was a small expansion here, but is there any discussion or any thought around lending more support, as my colleague mentioned, to those caregivers, to those people who are saving the province a lot of money for maybe their loved ones not being in a long-term care facility?

Are there any new ideas or new programs that will support those, especially for respite? Sometimes it could be just three hours a week and they may be over that threshold - that means test for low income - that could significantly improve their ability to continue to care for that senior in the years ahead. Have there been any initiatives looking at how we support those caregivers who may not meet the criteria of some of the programs that we currently have?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I think directionally with support for caregivers - we're not going to do less on that. I think we are doing some thinking and will continue to think about the role of caregivers in supporting an older population. They are a key asset

of ours, to the point where we need to start thinking of them with our caregiver benefit. We need to support them, not just support seniors.

We are doing some work with Caregivers Nova Scotia to try to work on some of the supports that they need. These are institutional improvements and awareness and information. They are not providing direct supports, but they have a very strong organization and we are happy to support them through our age-friendly grants, for example, and they are a key partner.

They have come in before to the Group of IX to do presentations, for example, on what they see as the trends in caregiving and advice to us on things we can do. There are things they suggest to us that we look into, for example, the taxability of some of these caregiver benefits and whether or not getting the benefit is going to increase or impact the eligibility for other programs. We look into those things.

We need to create a path for caregivers that makes it as attractive as possible for them to stay engaged in their work; like you say, respite care. For us, losing a caregiver is a loss we probably cannot afford so I think on the caregiver side, our policy direction will continue to drive to more support.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I know we've talked about this. It has been talked about for a number of years, if you look at Veterans Affairs Canada, around their VIP program; that is hugely popular because it does help with those tasks of lawn care and painting and snow removal.

Meals on Wheels is in certain regions. To what degree do you support those organizations? Most of them depend on volunteers and donations. Is there any support? I don't recall hearing from the organization in our area about provincial support, but it is an important one; people being able to gain access to make sure they have hot, healthy meals on a regular basis. Any support from your department on those types of programs?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We haven't done ongoing support. We don't have ongoing funding, but we have funded pilots and new trials of new ways of doing things.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, the time has expired. We'll go to the Liberal caucus, and Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Good morning, gentlemen. Good to see you here today. I know we've had a lot of conversations over the last few years on seniors and how to move forward with an aging population, and I know I have been in your office dozens of times, along with phone calls and emails, so I just wanted to speak about aging in place.

First of all, I do want to thank you for the massive amount of consultation that was done for the SHIFT program. I know that you came to our community, led by Marjorie

Willison, and we are glad to have someone like Marjorie in our community who speaks for seniors, along with many other things. I know that, for example, the Captain William Spry was packed with seniors and they left feeling that their voices had been heard, so a huge appreciation for that.

When we talk about aging in place, I always go back to the program that maybe I am a little bit obsessed about over the last few years - I see you smiling, but I do see us moving in that direction, and the program is called CAPABLE, and it's based out of Baltimore and it was designed by Johns Hopkins University.

Baltimore, as we have been through, is one of the poorest municipalities in the entire United States. They had a massive problem with long-term care and seniors' beds. The program was originally a trial to see exactly what seniors needed in order to get the best possible care.

What they discovered was that, for a significant savings, they were able to provide more services for seniors to have a longer and healthier life. What they did, as we have been through, is provide those services in their homes. Some of the stuff that I was looking at was, between 2012 and 2015, only two per cent of the seniors who were involved in this program ended up in long-term care. The seniors aged 65 to 100 who were in this program - my understanding from the research that we did was that if they didn't completely eliminate their long-term care bed wait, they came darn near close.

It was little things. We have met with the Group of IX a few times. I have had the conversations with the Group of IX. It always comes back to the little things. It's the same thing that they found out in Baltimore, and CAPABLE is now spreading throughout the United States, especially in the low-income jurisdictions. They're seeing it in places like Flint, Michigan, and other places like that. This program or a version of this program is being rolled out with huge success.

I look at what's happening there and at what's happening here. I see snow removal. It's one of the biggest things we heard from the Group of IX and one of the biggest things I hear from seniors in my community - they can't get out of their house. If they can't get out of their house, it leads to depression, and it leads to social exclusion. That obviously leads to deterioration of health which has a huge impact on the health care system. It's little things like mowing the lawn, cleaning the house, being able to get into a shower.

What is your department doing to emulate some of these programs that we're seeing throughout the United States and the world, particularly in places like Baltimore and Johns Hopkins University? What are you doing to take that evidence or those programs that work and implement them here in Nova Scotia?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: We have been doing some work for example studying the programs that already exist that do this type of work. There's a program in the

Health Authority called the IADL, Instrumental Activities of Daily Living. They fund the non-health issues that impact being able to access services - transportation, snow shovelling, and these types of things. The United Way also ran a program here in the city where they offer snow-shovelling services and so on for low income people. We're having a look into those to see which ones of those and how they might be replicated in the province.

We're also advocating with the folks at the Department of Health and Wellness who are working on the Continuing Care Strategy, which will decide how home care and nursing homes run in the future. They're with us on this, maybe diversifying the view of home care as a nursing service or a health service.

The reality is, the objective is to keep people at home longer. We're getting to a point where people are living so long now that their ability to do the house maintenance chores is as much a deterrent to living independently as getting sick, from a health perspective. We need a diversified model going forward of what types of services people need to stay at home.

We need to find out what the most effective delivery mechanism is. Is it giving the money to the Department of Health and Wellness to offer a service, or is it paying the United Way or community-based organizations to provide those services? Do we income-test those services to make sure that you can target the funding to those people who need it the most? Do we give them the money to hire the services themselves, or do we go hire the services?

There's a lot of questions to ask, but we're doing that digging. I think once we find some of those answers, we should, hopefully, have an ability to put forward an idea about how to advance that in in the province. Maybe it would be on a small-scale pilot to learn how it works and then roll it out bigger or some other way. Or it could be influencing the policies of the Department of Health and Wellness to make sure that they include these types of things when the redesign the Continuing Care Strategy.

MR. MAGUIRE: Obviously, these programs that are based in the United States are a little different than what we have here because they have privatized health care, which is a larger cost to the individual. Some of the services that they're providing are things like grooming, helping seniors dealing with feet issues or hand issues. I've been deep in this, as you know, for a couple of years now, reading and researching back and forth, and testimonials from these programs are outstanding. I'm glad to see that we're actually moving towards something like that and kind of creating it in a Nova Scotia model.

One of the things that I feel made that program so successful is that they had the university work with the seniors to create a model and not just government saying to seniors, here's what you need. We have a massive amount of university resources here in

Nova Scotia. You say you're a policy department - are you working with universities here in Nova Scotia to create similar models or different models that work here for our seniors?

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Yes, 100 per cent. As part of our SHIFT Action Plan, we set up three working groups and we asked them under these pillars, what are the things we can do? We got 52 actions. We actually got a list of 300 and I work with an advisory committee, like you mentioned, co-chaired by Marjorie Willison who is a rock star in my world. You may know her as the gardening lady on CBC, but she's much more than that. She's a lifelong community development advocate and a great advocate for seniors. She's fantastic.

We set up three subject matter expert committees to come with good ideas and good policy directions. We included lots of academics from universities on those working groups. We had dietitians from Acadia, nursing teachers from Dal, and so on and so on. They bring us lots of good ideas.

Our latest foray into coming up with new ways of designing policy that is important for us as well - we also have an MOU with the Centre on Aging at Mount Saint Vincent University. It was a key partner for us because my department can't hire a subject matter expert in everything aging; I'd have a staff of 200. We have an MOU with the Centre for Aging that I can tap into their capacity to go reach out to the academic sector and tap into any expertise I need.

Our most recent foray into tapping into the expertise of others was one of our commitments in our plan, and that's our social innovation lab. A social innovation lab is the equivalent in business of what a business incubator would be, where you bring a bunch of smart people together and try to work out some problems. For us it's social policy problems around aging.

We've launched our first "class," and we have 24 fellows which we selected to come in to be partners in our lab. It's based on a thesis that none of us are smart as all of us so let's get these 24 people and give them a challenge around aging. Some of these are academics, some of them are seniors' advocates, and some of them are just seniors themselves. Some of them are youth who are interested around seniors' issues.

We launched the problem to them, and the way the social innovation lab works is it's a contrast to the way we traditionally do policy. Policy people will sit in a room, come up with a great idea, go get concurrence from government that it's a good idea, and then roll out a new program. Preferably we would consult along the way to make sure it's the right thing. But if it doesn't work, you've launched it big and it doesn't work really big.

The whole goal of the social innovation lab is, if you're going to fail, fail small and quick. We asked these 24 people to come up with maybe the best five ideas and then we

try five prototypes or pilots on a small scale. If they fail, they fail small, and then you pick the best one and then you scale up the best idea to a bigger way.

What you've done there is involve the people who are going to be impacted by that policy in the development of it. You've included more people in the thinking and the problem solving, which would presumably come up with a better idea. You've done the equivalent of consultation by having them involved in it - you know, you're not coming up with a boo-boo idea that's just not going to work, so this is a great way forward for us.

We really do need this innovation. As I mentioned earlier, we're facing a demographic shift that we've never seen. We're not going to go back into the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s to find out what we need to do. We're facing a new shift so we're engaging people in coming up - we need true innovation, ideas that we've never seen before.

[10:45 a.m.]

MR. MAGUIRE: I'm glad that you're working with the academic community, but you're also still working with the individuals on the ground that these policies will impact. We have to make sure that when we get into these program creations, sometimes people tend to forget about who it's going to impact and making sure that their voice is heard.

Even after retirement, seniors have a lot to contribute. I said before the meeting, I think of what Home Depot has been able to do, which is hire a lot of retired skilled tradespeople to actually work in their store. It's probably some of the best and most knowledgeable customer service you'll ever get, when you walk in there. They have been able to tap into that experience and that wealth of knowledge.

When it comes to government, we hear a lot of numbers, and we hear a lot of big numbers. It has been a year since the \$13.6 million was earmarked for this SHIFT initiative. I would like to know where that money has gone and what it has contributed to - the programs in particular and the things that are impacting people's lives on the ground.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: I'll turn this one over to Faizal Nanji.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Nanji.

MR. FAIZAL NANJI: As I think Deputy d'Entremont has alluded to, the investment in the older population goes beyond the amount that was committed to SHIFT specifically. Within SHIFT and the amount you refer to, the \$13 million, there's about \$750,000 initially in 2017-18 that was spread out over the Innovation Lab, which the deputy minister talked about - expanding the Senior Safety Programs, expanding our Age-Friendly Communities Grant Program, promoting and developing entrepreneurship programs and capacity, as well as supporting the TEDx conference and developing some capacity around using technology and building digital literacy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I'm sorry. Time has expired. We do have some time, Mr. d'Entremont, if you would like to provide a closing statement.

MR. SIMON D'ENTREMONT: Thank you, it will be quite short. This was a great opportunity for us to come here and talk about seniors and aging. I think we all have a role on the issues of combatting ageism and changing the dialogue away from aging as a problem to managed to that of an opportunity. We all need to contribute to that conversation in our own networks and our own worlds and find ways to show seniors that we value their participation through mentorship, entrepreneurship, volunteering, and being grandparents.

We need to collectively change the conversation around aging. We all need to do it for us to make an impact. If we do so, hopefully we can create a better opportunity for an aging population. That's our goal, what we would like to do in the Department of Seniors.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, and thank you for answering our questions today.

We have one item on our agenda. There was a motion made at the last meeting that was not dealt with, so it will be dealt with today. Mr. Houston had made the motion. I am going to ask Mr. Houston, for the record and for the benefit of members today, to read the motion so it can be voted upon.

Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: The motion was to bring the Department of Internal Services before the committee to talk about the protection of Nova Scotians' personal private information. We had the highly publicized FOIPOP breach, where the government had indicated that one single 19-year-old was responsible for this. They had to save the day - I guess that would be the way that the Premier kind of described it. It turned out that there were no charges in that case. We know there were a number of other breaches.

I just worry about the protection of data across various areas of government. The Auditor General has reported potential security weaknesses at a number of government systems. It occurred to me that there's an open date in the calendar. I think next week was open, May 23rd - I'm looking at the clerk there.

I would like to see that day filled, and I would like to see that day filled with the Department of Internal Services appearing before the committee to talk about what they're doing to protect Nova Scotians' data. That was the motion that was before the committee last week when we adjourned.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion as I understand it, for clarification, is for on May 23rd for the Department of Internal Services to appear as a witness to discuss protection of personal data and government response when there is a breach of personal information.

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

Okay, I'm going to ask for those opposed again because it was not clear to me what the vote was.

Would all those opposed to the motion please say Nay.

The motion is defeated.

Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I just want to add that we're not against having the Department of Internal Services coming here to present to the Public Accounts Committee but what we do feel is it's important that the Office of the Auditor General and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia do the work that they're doing before that happens. I just wanted to get that on the record.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your comments. Is there any further business to come before the committee?

Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: Mr. Chairman, in light of Mr. Wilson's comments, I've been through that before. We went down this road with another file, I think, on the expenses at the IWK. This committee decided that we'd wait for the Auditor General in that case and I believe it was almost a year before the Auditor General was able to schedule that audit.

I wonder if maybe the Auditor General can inform the committee if he's been able to schedule his review of Internal Services' security - I guess response to the FOIPOP. Have you been able to schedule the audit with the Department of Internal Services?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Pickup.

MR. MICHAEL PICKUP: Partially, I will define or interpret what you mean by scheduling - we are well under way now. We have met with the department. We're into it. We're not ready yet to give a date as to when that report will be released but we are trying to fast-track this thing to make it happen as quickly as possible. But, yes, work is well under way now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you and I'm glad to hear that. I would be curious. Would it interfere with your work in any way for the committee to meet with the department? Is

that something that would trouble you or do you have any assessment of whether those two things could happen at the same time?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Pickup.

MR. PICKUP: I think in terms of what comes before a committee, that really is up to the committee to decide. I report to you as called, and I wouldn't have an opinion on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Pickup. Are there any further comments?

Is there any further business to come before the committee?

Hearing none, our next meeting is on May 30th when we will have the Office of the Auditor General and Mr. Pickup with the release of the Spring 2018 Report of the Auditor General. I look forward to seeing you all at that time. Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:53 a.m.]