

The motion called on the minister by the first sitting day in September, which is today, to report on progress for work to fix each of the extreme and high risk issues identified, the cost of fixing each of the issues, the progress to date on each of the issues, and when each of the problems will be rectified.

The minister today has moved through 149 issues in a broadbrush way, referring to 16 packages. But I am not yet convinced that that complies with the matters brought forward in the original motion. In that regard, I reserve my right to return to the Assembly with a further motion if the opposition is not satisfied, on reflection and on closer study, with the contents of the statement today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Ministerial statement

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (10.17): I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people, whose sacred lands have so much meaning to their ancestors, kinship connections and families who continue to care for country.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to provide this update and to formally announce to the Assembly that the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is open, has commenced its client intake processes and will soon be supporting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This has been a journey of many years for representatives particularly of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, who came together with a common purpose driven by a deep sadness for the loss of lives within their communities. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is the product of these conversations and will provide a place of healing, a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will feel safe and supported by their traditional custodians, community leaders, elders and respected role models. Cultural healers will work to make ongoing and meaningful changes in their lives and to break the cycle of drug and alcohol dependency.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples we understand that acknowledging who they are and where they come from is an intrinsic aspect of their identity. Their identity encompasses the story of their place of belonging, direct family lineage to their cultural identity, and self-empowerment for protecting their spiritual wellbeing. Although the introduction of healing is reasonably new to government service provision, the concept of healing has been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's culture and way of life for thousands of years.

The concept of healing was first made most clear to the broader public in the *Bringing them home* report in 1997. Since then there has been growing recognition of the need for a holistic approach to tackle the root causes rather than just the symptoms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's suffering and disadvantage. Whilst the

concept is well accepted and has proven effective in countries such as Canada, in Australia it unfortunately still remains on the fringes. Putting spirituality and culture at the centre of care is not at the heart of Western medicine and often leads to questioning of its appropriateness as a policy response to issues such as incarceration or addiction.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will strive to do what has not been done thus far in the territory, that is, engage in the personal journey of individuals, families and communities dealing with the trauma caused by past practices and current disadvantage. In short, it aims to take a different approach to care to break the cycle of drug and alcohol problems, and these are the key words: break the cycle.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm views the recurrent problems with alcohol, drugs and incarceration as symptoms of underlying issues. The farm strives to deal with these underlying issues rather than the symptoms in isolation. This is a difficult process. These issues are not ones which many want to talk about or, in some cases, even recognise. However, they must be confronted and addressed. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will work to restore pride, trust and cultural identity whilst equipping individuals with a broad range of skills and networks needed to engage meaningfully in the community. This will form a base from which participants in the program can better avoid relapse, participate more fully in society and potentially even grow to become community role models themselves.

Through this project the ACT government aims to build individuals who have strong links to their identity and culture, who will not only be resilient in their own lives but can be seen as positive role models for others in their community and show that change is possible. This is a journey which will take time. Overcoming generations of disadvantage and trauma and restoring lost cultural identity do not happen overnight.

The work that will be done by the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is not only about the individual healing journey; it is also a statement about promoting and protecting the unique and diverse cultures of our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognising the importance that culture plays not only in the wellbeing of the community but also of the individual. This has been recognised as a central right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here in the ACT as part of the ACT Human Rights Act, and I am pleased we are able to give life to these rights through the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

All clients seeking to enter the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will have to undergo an assessment process to determine their eligibility and preparedness for the program. The assessment process will examine the client's eligibility. This will involve two panels. The first panel will examine whether a client is in recovery from alcohol and drugs as well as their stability on any medications, their mental and physical health and any criminal matters which may affect their participation in the program. The second panel will examine the cultural and other preparedness for a client's participation in the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

Clients may be eligible for entry to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm if: any criminal history has been discussed with the service manager and deemed as

manageable by the assessment panel; any mental illness is manageable; they are stable on medications; and there are no pending charges or criminal sentences which in the opinion of the service manager will interfere with the client's participation in the program or the conduct of the service.

A client may be referred to other programs and supports if: there are criminal charges still pending; there is chronic self-harm; they are not stable on medications; or there is any other factor which in the view of the evaluation panel would pose a risk to self or others or to the good conduct of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

With this said it is important to note the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will take a no wrong door approach. Those who are not deemed suitable for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will be guided and supported by the staff of the bush healing farm to other services to support their needs with the view that in time, when they are ready, they will be welcomed back. Once a client has been deemed eligible and offered a place at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, they will commence working with support staff in the development of their individual plans for success.

To assist clients of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to meet their goals, ACT Health, in consultation with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, has identified a number of key areas which are necessary for the success of the program. These areas include: reconnection to country and culture; a foundational skills program; a life skills program; and a relapse prevention program. To deliver on these key areas ACT Health has contracted with a range of service providers who will deliver programs to support the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. In particular they have engaged with the Canberra Institute of Technology, Nutrition Australia, the healthy country program run by parks and conservation services and the alcohol and drug service of ACT Health.

ACT Health is planning for the first intake of between 10 and 15 participants initially in day programs transported from Canberra to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm each day. As the programs develop, they will move to become residential programs with participants staying at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

As I have mentioned, the key feature of the farm is to reconnect to culture and to land and to restore pride and identity among Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm clients. To deliver upon this, ACT Health has engaged the healthy country program of ACT parks and conservation. This is a well established and respected program. Through this program clients of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will take part in visits to sites of significance around the ACT and be given insights into the cultural importance of these locations to local Aboriginal people.

Clients will also be given an understanding of local plants and the Ngunnawal plant use guide and they will also engage in activities to build a range of traditional tools and structures. Finally, clients will participate in yarning circles with local elders and other role models to talk about local culture both in the past and in the present. Through these circles elders will be able to engage with the clients and reinvigorate local cultural protocols and promote healing.

Providing skills education and pathways to employment is a core concept of the model of care. Through education and the promotion of job readiness and other foundational skills, we aim to restore confidence and provide pathways to employment and further education. To deliver this, CIT will deliver a unique foundational skills program to the clients of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. This program has been specially developed by CIT to incorporate the eight Aboriginal ways of learning and will be co-taught by CIT's Yurauna Centre and Access Education. The program includes a cultural arts component which aims to reconnect participants to their cultural identities as well as to build self-confidence to participate in the other elements of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. The proposal from CIT will link into the other parts of the program, notably the healthy country program.

It is a sad reality that many people in our community have not been given the opportunity in their lives to learn basic life skills such as cooking, weekly budgeting or how to access essential information that so many of us take for granted. We cannot assume that everyone has these skills, and this is something the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board was very aware of. As a result, ACT Health has commissioned Nutrition Australia to provide cooking skills and nutrition workshops. Three days a week clients will cook for themselves and their peers, building their skills in looking after themselves, their families and their community but also rebuilding their confidence in themselves.

It is also very important that we have in place programs which support recovery and prevent relapse. To this end the alcohol and drug service of ACT Health will conduct workshops and group sessions which will teach practical skills to help people deal with issues in their lives and empower them to abstain and achieve a healthy lifestyle balance.

To support the implementation of the programs at the bush healing farm ACT Health has recruited a number of staff to work with clients and service providers. The staff will guide clients through the assessment and intake processes and work with each client to develop individual support plans and ensure that a tailored approach is made to achieve the client's goals and aspirations beyond their time at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm program. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the majority of staff of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm identify as Aboriginal.

The government does not present this suite of programs as being complete just yet. This represents an initial offering to what we know is an evolving journey ahead of us. What I present today represents a beginning, a place to start and to learn and to come to grips with the concepts which Indigenous Australians have used for generations but, nonetheless, are new to Western medical tradition and to the setting in the ACT. We will evaluate this initial program, we will learn from it and, together with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we will continue to evolve it.

To this end ACT Health is in the process of drafting a cultural healing framework which will establish the ongoing principals which underpin the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and the concepts of cultural healing. ACT Health will work with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, Ngunnawal elders and the Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the Healing Foundation and other members of our Indigenous community to deliver this framework.

In closing, I would like to thank the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, in particular its founding members, Aunty Agnes Shea and Uncle Fred Monaghan. I would also like to make special mention of the co-chair of the advisory board and founding member Aunty Roslyn Brown. It was a particular privilege to be present at the opening of the bush healing farm with Aunty Agnes and to also on the same day celebrate her birthday. These three individuals started with a vision many years ago and have driven this project from the beginning. It is true to say that without their leadership and determination we would not be here today with a Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm which is playing its part in helping to heal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I again apologise that the government's actions contributed to confusion during the planning phase and apologise directly to any members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who felt misled as a result. I look forward to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm evolving as a special and unique place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It certainly was a special occasion to be there at the opening. I thank Mr Steel, who came along to the opening as well. I present a copy of the statement:

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm—Update on the progress and opening—
Ministerial statement, 12 September 2017.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee) (10.29): I too rise to speak on the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. Our government is committed to providing better access to quality and culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. On 4 September I was pleased to have the privilege to attend the official opening of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm in the Tidbinbilla Valley with the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. We were joined by members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, Ngunnawal elders, community leaders, members of the Torres Strait Islander community and representatives from across the Canberra community.

The morning was a special day for those in attendance because it represented the realisation of the vision of Canberra's original custodians, the Ngunnawal people. The bush healing farm will provide a range of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, with the emphasis placed on the important process of cultural healing.

The centre itself is nestled in the fantastic natural bushland of Tidbinbilla. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm's design and location recognises the significant role that country plays in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, and the centre will serve as a point of reconnection to country and Aboriginal culture, away from modern city life.

