

Thursday, 12 July 2018

Committee Secretary
Health, Community and Disability Services, Domestic and Family Violence Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

RE: Inquiry into establishing a pharmacy council and pharmacy ownership in Queensland

Dear Mr Hansen,

I was recently made aware of the current inquiry into the pharmacy sector in Queensland. As a pharmacy owner, I am concerned about some of the questions raised by this inquiry, and I am writing to voice my concerns.

I own pharmacies in the regional centers of Cairns and Innisfail which not only service those regions, but the surrounding communities and districts. Like many pharmacy owners who operate in regional Queensland, I do a lot more for my customers and my community than just dispense medicines. My pharmacy is an important health destination for local residents, providing advice, screening and health services.

I am in favour of the formation of a pharmacy council. We need better oversight in Queensland of local pharmacy issues. I believe it would serve pharmacists, our customers and the health system well to have a body which can ensure that the current regulations are being enforced, and to advise government on pharmacy-specific issues.

However, I was surprised to discover that the committee is considering the potential deregulation of pharmacy ownership laws in Queensland. I am worried what deregulation would mean for pharmacies in rural and regional Queensland, where residents often rely on the broad range of services, and personalised care, that independent pharmacies provide. I know that at my pharmacy, we go above and beyond to meet the health needs of Cairns, Innisfail and surrounding residents, offering a range of services including weight loss programs, blood glucose and cholesterol monitoring, flu vaccinations, and general health and nutrition advice. Beyond these formal services, our pharmacist-in-charge is well placed to watch for the signs of a variety of illnesses, and refer our customers to their GPs.

I believe that a corporate-run pharmacy would not prioritise the health needs of my community the way that I do. I know that a lot of the advice and referral that we do takes time out of our days and does not turn additional profit for my business. But I am first and foremost a healthcare professional, and I take my role in my community, as a primary healthcare provider, very seriously. While a corporate buyout may be tempting for regional pharmacies, I believe the outcomes for patients would be a lot worse under a corporate model.

This inquiry has given us a great opportunity to look into the scope of services pharmacists can provide in Queensland. I believe we already do so much important work, and we should have the ability to do more for our customers. The success of the flu vaccination program, which has seen more Queenslanders vaccinated, means we should extend the scope, allowing pharmacists to provide flu vaccinations to children, and even allowing us to vaccinate against more conditions.

I believe expanding the screening capabilities of pharmacists would result in more conditions being picked up sooner, reducing the burden on hospitals and GPs. This is particularly important in regional Queensland, where doctors are already stretched to their limit. Allowing pharmacists to screen for lung disease, STIs and diabetes would, I believe, improve health outcomes in my community.

I am proud of the work pharmacists do in our communities. I would like to see a pharmacy council formed to make sure that this work continues to be of an exceptional standard, and to ensure that we are all following the same set of rules. I would also like to be able to operate to the full scope of my practice as a pharmacist, and I believe we need to lift regulations that are stopping pharmacists from delivering services they are qualified to deliver. Most importantly, however, I think that deregulation in the sector would be a terrible thing for Queensland communities. We need to keep laws to protect independent, pharmacist-owned pharmacies, from corporate takeover in order to best service the consumer. I strongly believe the current model serves patients and the health system well.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Georgina Twomey'.

Georgina Twomey
Proprietor, Alive Pharmacy Warehouse Innisfail