

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 Sir/Madam,

I recently found out about this inquiry, and I'm writing to express my concerns as the owner of a pharmacy in a rural area in Queensland.

Thursday Island Pharmacy

I understand that the government is planning to set up a pharmacy council, and I think this is a good idea. We need a local body to oversee pharmacies. But I'm really worried about what any changes to the laws around pharmacy ownership would mean for my pharmacy and my patients.

Deregulating the sector and opening it up to non-pharmacists owners could mean the end of community pharmacies like my own. Pharmacies are not like other businesses. Rural and remote communities, like the one I service on Thursday Island in the Torres Straits, need the health services that a local pharmacist provides. Many of my customers struggle to get to the GP for minor ailments, and I'm there to provide health advice when this happens.

We are in a unique situation where due to the remote nature of where we live we need to become more than just a pharmacy and have more knowledge than just medications, we work extremely closely with our associated health professionals to ensure that all of the community has access to the highest level of health care. We aim to provide everyone with a service that is comparable to or better than what they would be getting on the mainland. The logistical side of our situation means we must become more than a pharmacy we need to be on top of barge timetables and flight timetables.

We are so much more to our community than just a pharmacy, we are a place where people know they can come and see someone they trust (more than likely the same person every time) and feel comfortable that I will still be here next week and next month. In remote towns there is often a struggle to retain staff and we feel we are in a unique position to provide an avenue to a career path for many local residents who want to pursue a career in pharmacy through the certificates and any further education they would like to enroll in. The fear is always that any other operator/pharmacy would not always look to employ as many local staff and look to always be cutting the "wages bill" leaving people unemployed.

Businesses like mine are already struggling, and the offer of purchase by a large corporation might seem attractive, but we are health care providers first and foremost. I know that Coles or Woolworths wouldn't provide the sorts of services to my community that I do, because many of them simply don't turn a profit.

I also think that the scope of services pharmacists can provide should be reviewed. I need to be able to provide more services to my community, as I really am the most accessible health professional in Thursday Island and the Torres Straits region.

A huge step forward for us has a lot to do not only with the funding and support for programs offered in pharmacy but also for programs that can be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. What we would love to see more funding for is:

- Lung health screening
- Diabetes screening (further to medcheck, but more in a diagnostic setting)
- STI screening
- Wound care services
- Pharmacist payment for providing vaccinations
- Sleep apnea subsidies
- Continence aids services
- Funding for weight management programs .

Pharmacies are incredibly important to rural and remote communities in Queensland. We need to have confidence that regulations will let us continue to serve our communities as best we can. We also need to be able to meet more of the health needs of our patients, to give every rural Queenslanders a better chance at a healthier life.

Regards,



Caitlin Davies

Managing Partner

Thursday Island Pharmacy