




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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PUBLIC HEALTH (MEDICINAL CANNABIS) BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (10.19 pm): I rise tonight to speak in support of the Public Health (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2016. There are a number of Queenslanders who are forced to live their lives with chronic pain or untreatable disease. It can be anything from phantom limb syndrome, where a person experiences pain from a limb that has been surgically removed, to a child with treatment resistant epilepsy. In many cases chronic pain is untreatable and people can be left to suffer through pain that we can only imagine. Tonight we have the potential to get this kind of treatment to our constituents through the form of medicinal cannabis.

As many members are aware, there has been a growing body of evidence to suggest that in particular cases, which are consistently growing, there is therapeutic potential for medicinal cannabis. Just last year the Palaszczuk government amended the Health (Drugs and Poison) Regulation 1996 to allow the chief executive of Queensland Health to approve the use of certain medicinal cannabis products for a clinical trial of its potential usefulness.

We were the first state in Australia to permit patient access to medicinal cannabis products through this amendment. While this was an historic step, our government's position now is to ensure that there is a more comprehensive regulatory framework which will allow us to effectively regulate the use of medicinal cannabis products and ensure it gets to those who would benefit from it most. That framework is the topic of this bill.

Every day there are thousands of Queenslanders who are visiting their specialists, their GPs or their hospitals—people suffering from cancer who are undergoing chemotherapy, people suffering wastage from HIV/AIDS or any other illness. These are people whom our medical professionals deal with regularly and who have tried every trick in the book to assist them to no avail.

I therefore commend the Minister for Health and the Palaszczuk government for providing these people with a potential treatment in the form of medicinal cannabis. This treatment will be guided by a stringent regulatory framework—one that will ensure that the people who receive it are those who need it and provide flexibility as more potential users are discovered.

For a patient to receive this kind of treatment there are a number of approval steps that must be taken to ensure that only those most in need are those who receive it. This will be accomplished through two flexible pathways introduced in this bill—the patient class prescriber pathway and the single-patient prescriber pathway, both of which will provide timely access to safe, high-quality medicinal cannabis.

Becoming a patient class prescriber is no easy feat. To begin with, they must be a specialist within a class of specialist listed in the regulation to ensure that only those who will have frequent dealings and substantial knowledge are the ones prescribing. Given that there is much development and continued research in this field, this pathway will be open for expansion whenever new breakthroughs are discovered, allowing for greater flexibility and development.

The single-patient prescriber pathway will be an option for those who do not fall under the patient class prescriber pathway. In this instance, for any patient who is suffering with intense pain a patient's doctor, including their GP, can apply to the chief executive of Queensland Health for approval to prescribe medicinal cannabis treatment. In certain particular cases this referral may lead to clinical trials that patients can participate in, paving the way for an expansion of the patient class prescriber pathway.

Our state is already leading the way in this regard, with a clinical trial for children suffering the most severe treatment resistant epilepsy expected to begin before the end of the year. This emphasises the flexibility of this bill in addressing any potential beneficial perks that may be waiting around the corner. I commend the health minister again for having the foresight to address this. Whether we are talking about patients who suffer from conditions where it is proven to help or patients who could benefit from a trial, there is no question that we should do everything we can to help, unshackling ourselves in the process from the outdated views of the past.

In the first year alone, medicinal cannabis could provide up to \$100 million in revenue. Given our state's bountiful agricultural land and high-quality growing conditions, Queensland would be primed to take a lion's share of that revenue and job creation.

It is not often that there is such universal agreement among a single industry. I believe that we should take note of the fact that doctors, medical researchers, nurses and paramedics have been approached and consulted. There is widespread agreement amongst them. In a recent poll 96 per cent of Queenslanders support medicinal cannabis. The writing is on the wall. I commend the bill to the House.