




Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy and Minister for Small Business) (4.57 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016, particularly the amendments enabling the Queensland Institute of Medical Research to pay bonuses to researchers and inventors whose work leads to breakthroughs and those amendments addressing the age of consent for sexual intercourse. QIMR Berghofer is a recognised world leader in medical research, delivering breakthroughs in cancer, infectious diseases, mental health and chronic disorders. The institute has consistently been at the forefront of Australia's effort to prevent, detect and treat disease for 70 years. QIMR's work translating medical research discoveries into better treatments, diagnoses and health prevention strategies benefits not just Queenslanders but people right around the world. For example, in August this year, QIMR announced a breakthrough in malaria research, with researchers developing a protein that completely cures mice of malaria and protects them against re-infection. In July, QIMR announced that one of its scientists found that a protein he developed switches off HIV infection in cells. It is hoped that this finding might eventually lead to a cure for HIV in the form of a one-off treatment.

The list of achievements delivered by researchers and scientists working at QIMR is extensive, and I could spend quite some time talking about the outstanding work being done right here in Queensland. Our government does not just talk about outstanding innovation, we back it. In fact, the Palaszczuk government is supporting cutting-edge research at QIMR through Advance Queensland funding. In total, \$825,000 has been awarded to researchers at the institute who are working on projects with the potential to have a life-changing impact on the health and wellbeing of millions of people.

Advance Queensland funding is supporting projects such as those being led by Dr Philip Mosley to improve the post-operative care of Parkinson's disease patients who are undertaking deep brain stimulation. Dr Mosley has been awarded \$180,000 for his research as part of an early career Advance Queensland research fellowship. The Palaszczuk government is backing researchers such as Dr Mosley because we are determined to keep our state's best and brightest minds in Queensland.

Similarly, to maximise its potential QIMR must be able to attract and retain leaders in medical research. Requiring Governor in Council approval of the payment of bonuses impacts on QIMR's ability to enter into commercial agreements with its researchers. That can make it difficult for QIMR to attract higher-performing researchers and inventors and keep Queensland researchers in our state. Giving QIMR the authority to manage bonuses up to \$10 million per annum will help to ensure that the institute has the best opportunity to attract and retain high-calibre medical researchers, supporting QIMR's medical research projects.

I also support the bill as it standardises the age of consent for sexual intercourse. Queensland is the only state in Australia that makes a distinction between different forms of sexual activity and the age of consent. The current disparity in the Criminal Code between the age of consent for anal intercourse

and all other lawful sexual activity, in reality, acts to discriminate against young gay and bisexual men. This discrimination is not only at odds with the views of a modern progressive community but also, and more alarmingly, has meant that young people, particularly young gay and bisexual men, have been discouraged from accessing safe sex practice information, given that health practitioners are forced to inform those seeking information on anal sex about the illegality of the act. In essence, it is a discrimination that has left young men in same-sex relationships fearing prosecution when seeking information or health services.

Overwhelmingly, submissions made to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee on this issue support the proposed amendments. The committee heard from the Queensland AIDS Council, the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland, the LGBTI Community Legal Service and a number of sexual health experts. Individuals also shared their personal accounts of discrimination on the basis of their sexual preference. It made me think about a number of personal stories that I have encountered in my life, in my family and in my work career.

A few years ago—quite a few years now—I ran into a former student of mine. He was in the city. He looked a little bit upset. He did not look himself. At that time he was 17 and six months into a university course. I took him to lunch. I said, ‘What’s going on for you? I haven’t seen you for a while. You look a little upset.’ He had just been to a GP to talk about his own sexual health. A recent partner of his had revealed that he had an STI, so he went to do the normal thing that one would do, which was to check out his own health. That day, he had gone to seek assistance and had been told that, in fact, what he had been doing was illegal and that he ran the risk of being prosecuted. He was not asked, ‘How can I help you? What is the right path to ensure that you are safe?’ Rather, he was told, ‘What you are doing is illegal and you could be prosecuted.’ One can imagine, for a 17-year-old at university who was holding down a part-time job and living away from his family, how much of a shock that kind of response from a trusted GP would be. As a young man, he had to carry that and it impacted on him a great deal. He was already challenged a great deal by his sexual identity. He has suffered a bit from mental health issues over the years since the last time I saw him. I know that he has struggled a great deal. I do not think at that point that that helped him at all.

Those personal stories and the fact that this is the right thing to do are the reasons I am standing up tonight to support the bill. It is clear that the current law is a barrier to the kinds of conversations that young men, in particular, need to be able to have to stay safe and to feel secure about who they are. Standardising the age of consent will help to ensure that young people feel that they can talk to their health professionals openly and honestly, without fear and without shame.

I absolutely congratulate the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services for bringing this bill to the House, for taking the right steps and for conducting himself in a way that I think we can all be proud of. I commend the members of the committee who have addressed this legislation in such a respectful way. I commend all those who have tirelessly advocated in this space on behalf of those young men such as the young man whom I used to teach, to ensure that they feel safe and that they feel as though they are equally valued in our society and our community. I particularly commend Rainbow Labor and some of the activists in the gallery tonight for all the work that they have done over decades.

As I have said, I absolutely thank the Minister for Health for all of his work in bringing this bill to the House. The bill will support young Queenslanders to have healthy and safe sexual experiences in their lives and keep them mentally well and physically well, as they grow as a part of our great state of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.