




Speech By
Bart Mellish

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Vaccination

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (2.46 pm): I wish to speak briefly about an issue I am wary of giving more attention than it deserves, but I feel it is something that merits challenge wherever it pops up. I speak regarding a billboard that is currently displayed on Beams Road, on the border of the Aspley and Sandgate electorates. The advertisement in question—a billboard depicting the question ‘Vaccinated or Unvaccinated: Who is Healthier?’—is paid for by the Australian Vaccination-risks Network. This is a group that in 2015 ran stories comparing vaccination to rape, with a heading that mocked ‘Forced penetration’ and asking ‘Do you really “need” control over your own choices?’

The current billboard has resulted in a significant number of complaints to me from constituents and members of the public who are uncomfortable with an advertisement that promotes wholly untrue and unscientific behaviour with regard to vaccinations in our community. The member for Sandgate and I have today written to APN, the billboard owner; Ad Standards, the industry self-regulatory body; and Senator Mitch Fifield, the federal communications minister, calling for action to remove the billboard.

I am and will continue to be a strong proponent of the right to political free speech in public discourse; however, coming from a science background, I cannot stand by and say nothing while an advertisement that puts the lives of children in our community at risk remains in full public view. By pushing the message that somehow if you are unvaccinated you are healthier, this advertisement actively harms public health. I believe that the content of the advertisement may contravene section 2.6 of the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Ethics and goes against the prevailing community standards on health and safety, in light of the significant volume of research that has proven time and time again that vaccines are highly effective and safe.

A prominent advertisement promoting antivaccination pseudoscience has no place in our community and harms the legacy and ongoing benefits of vaccination, which is the biggest and best public health intervention of the last century. Of course there are risks with vaccination, just as there are risks with any medical procedure or treatment, but the risks are far outweighed by the benefits to the individual—importantly, those who are too young or too immunocompromised to be vaccinated—and the community at large.

The right to free speech is important, but the right of vulnerable people and children to be protected from preventable diseases is a fundamental right of a modern society. It is unfortunate that a dramatic rise in freely and readily available information over the last decade has resulted in a corresponding rise in readily available misinformation. Googling a few antivaccination sites does not qualify as doing your research, just as closing your eyes and imagining that you are Usain Bolt does not make you the world’s fastest man.

I am sure there are some in my electorate who will strongly disagree with me on this issue, and I could have just as easily not taken up this issue, but bad ideas thrive in a vacuum and really bad ideas need to be challenged by those in public positions. People should not take my word for it. This is not about my own qualifications or lack thereof. This is not about how much Google research I have done on my own. People should see their local GP or talk to another practising health professional and make a decision based on logic, not emotion—for the benefit of their own children and the benefit of the community.