




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (6.39 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill. It is hard to believe that just over a year ago we were all first coming to grips with this pandemic and figuring out how much it would change our everyday lives. The restrictions that were placed on businesses, gatherings, movements and especially borders were matters that many people would never have imagined. They left massive impacts on Queenslanders that will be felt for months and years to come.

I want to give credit to Chief Health Officer Dr Young. We have not been privy to all the medical advice she was providing—we have asked the government multiple times to increase the transparency around it—but one thing we cannot dispute is that she has worked tirelessly over the last year to do her best to protect Queenslanders, and it is right to acknowledge that.

The extension of the CHO's powers is necessary while this virus remains an active threat. I think many people hoped that once the clock struck 12.01 am on 1 January 2021 the virus would suddenly disappear, but we know that that is not the case. The reality is that things will not go back to the way they were for some time to come, but the rollout of the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines will be essential to getting there.

I will add that I have been surprised by the level of scepticism that is out there on the vaccine, judging by a couple of responses I received to Facebook posts I have done. I was inundated with hundreds of comments from people. I had to take a deep breath and remain calm as I replied to them, some of them being quite ridiculous. I urge the government to do everything they can to educate people on the safety of these vaccines, to ensure that they explain it in a way that people can easily understand so that as many Queenslanders as possible will choose to get the jab. A good starting point for the advertising budget would be something like the millions spent talking about the unite and recover plan, a plan that seemed to disappear last November for some reason; we no longer see those ads. Most of the questions people have are genuine, so we need to arm them with information and evidence to allay their fears.

I am proud to represent thousands of Gold Coast health workers in my electorate and at the Gold Coast University Hospital. It is in fact my biggest employer in Bonney. These health workers, as well as many more around the country, did not falter when cases were rising a year ago. They did not shirk from their duties but came to work every day, ready to put themselves in the line of this virus to care for those who had been infected. I do not think our community has ever been more thankful for them. Gift baskets were being dropped off at the Gold Coast University Hospital, businesses were dropping off coffees, food and other goodies, many cafes and restaurants were offering discounts and freebies to these frontline workers, and Arundel State School even had the children who were still at school then writing cards to say thank you and those were all sent or given to the health professionals. It was great to see so many take the opportunity to say thank you. It is clear that these frontline workers were truly seen as heroes during the pandemic. Now they are stepping up to get vaccinated so they can keep

going in to work to safely care for Queenslanders. I was proud to see that rollout begin in my electorate earlier this week. As we hopefully move towards beating this virus, the work of our health workers in getting us through this cannot be forgotten. I want to ensure that we continue to take every chance to say thank you for the work that they do.