




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (COVID-19 MANAGEMENT)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (11.24 am), continuing: To resume my contribution, we welcome any measures to improve transparency and democracy in our COVID response and to apply public health directions to democratic oversight. I also note the incredible stress and strain that our hospitals and healthcare workers have been under and remain under over the period of the pandemic. This strain on our healthcare system is not down to COVID alone but, rather, years of systemic underfunding and lack of support for staff. Nurses, doctors and allied healthcare workers report: understaffing, overwork, poor conditions, caring for patients with increasingly severe conditions who cannot access primary health care like a bulk-billing GP or a trip to the dentist while the cost of living increases and wages flatline.

A recent survey by AMAQ found that 46 per cent of junior doctors at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in my electorate were working up to or more than 24 hours of overtime per fortnight and that 68 per cent were concerned about making a clinical error due to fatigue caused by hours worked. I have heard similar feedback from nurses and allied healthcare workers in hospitals in South Brisbane and elsewhere, many of whom are burnt out, exhausted and planning to leave the healthcare workforce for good. Similarly, workers are struggling with the cost of living, with the cost of housing, with the cost of transport and parking and then dealing with incredibly difficult conditions in their workplaces.

This bill acknowledges that the COVID pandemic continues, but the state government has pushed nurses, doctors and healthcare workers to breaking point. When healthcare workers suffer, patients suffer too. While other states have implemented measures such as COVID bonuses or offer free university and TAFE for new nurses, Queensland it seems has no plan to bolster the healthcare workforce or to support those workers who have been working so hard on the frontlines of the pandemic. If Queensland does not follow suit and follow states such as Victoria that are offering free university, Queensland will lose even more nurses and healthcare workers and the healthcare crisis will only get worse.

I reiterate: we welcome any measures to improve transparency and democracy in our COVID response, but our healthcare workers have been carrying the brunt of this pandemic and remain unsupported by this government. They remain underpaid. They remain understaffed in our hospitals and are stressed. These are the stories that healthcare workers bring to me. They are saying, 'We are at our wit's end and we need the support that we deserve so that we can give patients the care that they deserve.' In a wealthy state like Queensland with an extremely high surplus, why are we underfunding our hospitals and healthcare workers?