




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (6.54 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. The COVID-19 health pandemic has caused and resulted in significant disruption to our way of life, with the health, social, financial and economic impacts being experienced by nearly every Queenslanders.

I wish to acknowledge and express my appreciation to the thousands of frontline health professionals, medical colleagues, as well as hospital and community health workers who continue to respond to each and every challenge that has been experienced throughout the COVID-19 health pandemic. I also want to thank our frontline police and emergency services personnel, as well as school and education staff, who have been asked repeatedly to go above and beyond on behalf of all Queenslanders.

This pandemic has resulted in significant health and economic harm to many Queenslanders. As the state member for Moggill, I understand the enormous impacts that the COVID-19 health pandemic has had on local constituents, whether it has been mild, moderate or severe disease experienced, the impacts on businesses and economic livelihoods, or simple freedoms and democratic liberties which were once taken for granted, such as visiting a relative in residential aged care or attending a funeral or wedding. In many instances, these freedoms and liberties have had to be curtailed. Also there have been the restrictions at times to cross-state jurisdictional border movements.

It has to be said that our national, state jurisdictional and global efforts to understand, contain and combat the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic have been immense. Human history will certainly record the incredible efforts and scientific achievement by many to develop and implement targeted COVID-19 vaccines. There can be no question that vaccines are clinically efficacious and effective, along with other measures including masks, social distancing and hand hygiene, which have contributed to suppressing COVID-19 transmission. It remains critical that Queenslanders receive their vaccinations and also boosters when recommended and eligible to do so. COVID-19 vaccinations remain one of our strongest lines of defence in suppressing and containing the community transmission and individual health impacts of COVID-19. There is also significant work still to be undertaken when it comes to vaccinating children and students in Queensland.

Queenslanders and Australians are to be commended for their overall commitment to the importance of vaccinations as a public health strategy and ensuring that both they and their relatives are vaccinated. In the strongest possible terms I again implore those who are yet to be vaccinated and/or receive a booster, according to ATAGI, TGA and professional medical advice, to please contact their local general practitioner, community pharmacy or Queensland Health vaccination clinic and receive a COVID-19 vaccination and/or booster if they are eligible and it is clinically recommended to do so.

Despite the significant global effort to combat the COVID-19 health pandemic and the significant scientific knowledge already discovered, there remains significant health issues that are not known, particularly with respect to the persistent, chronic and complex health effects of having contracted the COVID-19 virus. The causes and symptoms of post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2, more commonly known as long COVID or post-COVID syndrome, continue to be researched and evaluated. As the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, within the Johns Hopkins University, has identified, whilst it is clear that those with certain risk factors including high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes and obesity are more likely to have a serious episode of COVID-19, there is still yet to be a clear link between such risk factors and chronic persistent health issues.

That being said, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine has outlined some of the known long-term effects of COVID-19 infection including: respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath and the development of interstitial lung disease and associated scarring to the lungs; heart problems, including ongoing inflammation of the cardiac muscle; a persistent loss or distorted sense of smell and taste; neurological problems including headaches, dizziness, fatigue and cognitive impairment; the increased potential of postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome affecting blood circulation; as well as ongoing mental health concerns, with some instances being recorded of people who have survived COVID-19 being left with lingering anxiety and depression.

Further, it has been shown that patients who were hospitalised due to COVID-19 often have a particularly challenging recovery, with post-intensive care syndrome putting COVID-19 survivors and other people who have spent time in the intensive care unit at a higher risk of problems associated with cognitive, mental health and physical recovery. Such chronic health issues underscore the need to contain and suppress COVID-19 by ensuring high optimal community levels of COVID-19 vaccination coverage.

A current renewed vaccination effort and booster strategy is even more pertinent, given the forthcoming winter and flu season in Queensland and across Australia. As communicated by the federal government's Department of Health, whilst there has been a lower exposure to influenza virus over the COVID-19 pandemic, now with increased and re-established travel, mobility and also borders reopening, there is the potential for a resurgence of influenza during the winter season of 2022. That is why being vaccinated against influenza this year is even more important than ever.

In turning to the detail of this legislation, and also the amendments proposed by the Liberal National Party, I wish to reaffirm my support for all COVID-19 health directives and mandates. I support and accept all the public health advice and determinations in good faith, as has been determined by Queensland's Chief Health Officer and the relevant public health officials in Queensland Health, as well as Australia's Chief Medical Officer and the federal Department of Health. Also, as a specialist physician, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic I have assisted with public health efforts including providing COVID-19 clinical screenings and efforts to vaccinate Queenslanders.

I also wish to reaffirm my continued support for the determinations made by, and advice provided, under the auspices of the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, various professional medical and health bodies as well as the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, including the AHPPC's vaccination mandate for frontline health, disability and aged-care staff. As with all legislation before the Queensland parliament, the Liberal National Party opposition has carefully considered the detail of this legislation. The circumstances of the COVID-19 health pandemic have been unprecedented, and the extension of extraordinary powers contained within this legislation being granted to the state government is being done again without the implementation of independent bipartisan parliamentary committee oversight. This is unacceptable for the following reason.

The position that Queensland now finds itself in is far different to when the Queensland parliament debated similar legislation in August of last year. There is no doubt that a significant failing of the Palaszczuk state Labor government throughout the COVID-19 health pandemic has been a complete lack of openness, transparency and accountability with respect to the extraordinary measures and powers that have been enacted by the state Labor government. It is for this reason, and more, that the Liberal National Party has foreshadowed key amendments to this legislation in order to improve the transparency and accountability for all Queenslanders.

The first amendment would seek to only allow the extension of the extraordinary powers granted to the Queensland government, and the Chief Health Officer, to 31 May 2022. Queenslanders have done all that has been asked of them by the Queensland Labor government, and they were told by the Labor government that a clear plan for the future would be provided. Queenslanders are still waiting on such an open and transparent plan and a clear path forward. The extension to the end of May of this year would provide the Queensland state Labor government ample and sufficient time to finalise and

release its plan for the future of any COVID-19 related measures. Of course, should circumstances change and a further extension be required, the Queensland parliament, being the appropriate democratic institution, could further consider any relevant extensions during the May sitting of the Queensland parliament.

Secondly, the Liberal National Party will also move to ensure that the expert health and professional advice that is provided to the state Labor government, and used as the rationale for implementing public health directives, is publicly released. The importance of this amendment cannot be overstated. Queenslanders deserve openness and transparency with all decisions that are taken and measures enacted in their name as Queenslanders. Such transparency must also be provided in order to ensure full public confidence in the state government's COVID-19 response and non-political decision-making. The Liberal National Party understands and respects the need for the state government's COVID-19 response to be grounded in expert medical and health advice, but it is equally important that the state government takes all Queenslanders into their trust and that the state government is open, transparent and accountable.

Importantly, the Liberal National Party has also foreshadowed an amendment to establish a parliamentary select committee, which would routinely hold public hearings with the Chief Health Officer to assess and scrutinise the relevant health advice and state government decision-making as it pertains to COVID-19. Such a bipartisan parliamentary select committee would give openness, transparency and scrutiny to decision-making and advice and provide a level of parliamentary oversight that has been lacking throughout this pandemic. Such a parliamentary select committee is also important, particularly given the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of Queenslanders.

Having further engaged with Queenslanders through my appointment to the Queensland parliament's Mental Health Select Committee, I and other members of the committee have heard firsthand the reports of the mental health impacts that have resulted from the COVID-19 health pandemic. A robust bipartisan parliamentary select committee to oversee COVID-19 management is absolutely needed to provide proper scrutiny to state government decision-making and the unintended mental health and social impacts of certain state government decisions.

Whilst health mandates and directives are necessary and evidenced based and continue to be an important part of the COVID-19 health response, the implementation of such health directives cannot be taken without an open, transparent and accountable assessment of the social, economic and mental health impacts on individuals, communities and also our entire Westminster democratic system of government.

This pandemic is certainly not over. There is still plenty that remains unknown, and the future is not certain. I support the entire public health vaccination program, all health directives and mandates and the expert public health advice, and I will continue to do so. I also support greater openness, transparency and accountability from this state Labor government.