




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOK

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2022

HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (2.08 pm): I rise to speak on the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Health, Yvette D’Ath, the committee chair and members, the committee secretariat and Hansard for their work in the examination of the bill. The committee invited written submissions and received 40 submissions from the public, identified stakeholders and email subscribers.

The policy objectives of the bill are to amend the health practitioner regulation national law as agreed by the Australian health ministers on 18 February 2022 to: strengthen public safety and confidence in the provision of health services; improve the governance of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health professionals; and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the national scheme.

This is a very important piece of legislation that would ultimately enhance consumer trust and confidence in the provision of health services. It is particularly important for health practitioners because it affects the way they manage their relationships with consumers in delivering good quality health care under a very complex system. The only way we could really achieve this is with tighter regulations that assess health professionals’ registration against consistent, high-quality national professional standards. Having the right mechanisms in place means that we can strengthen consumer confidence and increase the ability of consumers to use those services effectively. We can all agree that Queenslanders deserve peace of mind when it comes to accessing health care and they have every right to know that they are in good hands and that their best interests will always be met with health professionals who are suitably trained and qualified.

I acknowledge all of Queensland’s health professionals and the work that they do to take care of Queenslanders every day. I also acknowledge that the vast majority of our health professionals go above and beyond for their patients’ health needs. I acknowledge those members in this House with health backgrounds who have lived experience taking care of the health needs of others. It is a selfless job and I commend the work you do. I have doctors that I see regularly for my health needs—doctors whom I have seen over many years—and I put my complete faith and trust in them to give me the right advice.

My experience has always been very positive and I hope this would be the same for everyone. However, we know that this is not always so. Anyone questioning the importance of this bill should be reminded of the disgraced Bundaberg surgeon and the impact on that community. According to researched history, there were many red flags to suggest that he was in no way fit to carry out his duties as a medical practitioner, but he did. Imagine if there were tougher measures to assess his credentials back then. This bill is because of the very few people like him in that it enforces the need for stricter regulations to safeguard our service provision and maintain public safety. As policymakers we have an ethical obligation to the people of Queensland to ensure public safety is upheld to the highest priority.

The national law sets out the legal framework for the national scheme. It establishes national boards as the principal regulatory decision-makers for each profession and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency as the national organisation responsible for implementing the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme across Australia. The national scheme and national law ensure that only health practitioners who are suitably trained and qualified to practise in a competent and ethical manner are registered. Having one national scheme for the registration of health practitioners reduces red tape and delivers improved administrative efficiency and consistency. It allows health practitioners to have a single registration recognised anywhere in Australia and provides for uniform standards for the registration of health practitioners and the accreditation of health education providers.

The key reforms in the bill include refocusing the objectives and guiding principles of the national law to make public safety and confidence paramount considerations; to recognise the national scheme's role in ensuring the development of a culturally safe and respectful health workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; introducing a power for national regulators to issue interim prohibition orders to prohibit or restrict unregistered practitioners from providing health services or using protected titles, similar to the power already given to the Health Ombudsman in Queensland; introducing a power for the Health Ombudsman and national regulators to issue public statements about persons whose conduct poses a serious risk to public health and safety; removing barriers to information sharing to protect the public and enable more efficient and appropriate resolution of notifications; and, lastly, improving processes by which national boards make registration decisions and manage health conduct and performance issues.

The bill also makes minor and technical amendments to the national law to correct typographical errors, make terminology clearer or more consistent, update references and contemporise some provisions. To accommodate Queensland's co-regulatory arrangements for registered health practitioners, the bill also amends the Health Ombudsman Act 2013 and makes minor modifications to how certain amendments to the national law operate in Queensland. If the bill is passed, the amendments would automatically apply in all states and territories that are part of the national scheme except Western Australia, which must pass corresponding legislation, and South Australia, which must make regulations to apply the changes.

The public has a right to feel safe when putting their life in the hands of health professions from whom we expect to receive nothing less than good quality health care. I will always speak up for public safety and I wholeheartedly support this bill. I commend the bill to the House.