




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2022

HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.54 pm): I rise to speak on the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. This bill amends a range of acts to improve the operation of our Health portfolio legislation and support the delivery of health services in Queensland. I want to thank the committee for the body of work they have done on this bill and of course our wonderful health minister.

Before Christmas last year, I had the opportunity to visit the Ipswich Hospital. I wanted to drop off some gift hampers to the frontline health workers to thank them for their service and commitment to the Ipswich community. While I was there, I visited the hospital's new 26-bed ward, which had just been completed and is now fully operational. Can I say how proud every single member of the staff was of this exceptional ward. It is the hospital's first new ward in seven years and it is part of the first stage of the Ipswich Hospital's \$166.9 million expansion project. The new 26-bed ward is a testament to the Palaszczuk government's proud track record of investment in health infrastructure and frontline services.

Much like our record investment in health, the amendments in this bill reflect our ongoing commitment to quality public health care for all Queenslanders and they deliver health legislation that meets their needs. The Palaszczuk government has a strong track record of passing health legislation that enhances Queenslanders' access to quality health care and promotes public health measures to keep people safe. You only have to look at the way we have managed the COVID pandemic to see that Labor governments put the health and safety of Queenslanders front and centre. You also just have to look at our track record of health legislation passed since forming government. When the LNP were in government for one term, they managed to pass only nine pieces of legislation related to health and they ransacked the public health and hospital system by sacking 4,400 health workers, including 1,800 nurses and midwives. There is some fantasy island stuff going on in here.

In the Palaszczuk government's first term of government, we reformed and rebuilt our public health system by passing 13 pieces of legislation relating to health care and public health. Since 2015 we have rebuilt Queensland's health system by employing 8,407 more nurses and 2,841 more doctors—and I will have my proud parent moment by saying that my daughter was one of them. This bill has undergone extensive consultation over a number of years with stakeholders from the medical, nursing, pharmaceutical, mental health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sectors, as well as government agencies and statutory offices.

Ambulance officers in Queensland are doing a tremendous job each and every day, responding to an ever-increasing number of callouts from the community and responding to the challenges brought on by the Omicron wave this summer. I join my neighbour, the member for Bundamba, in being very excited about the new ambulance centre that is being built. We are excited.

In order for ambulance officers to continue doing their job effectively, the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will amend the Ambulance Service Act 1991 to strengthen safeguards around disclosing confidential information, as well as align confidentiality provisions with the Hospital and Health Boards Act. Differences between those two acts have caused confusion for officers

regarding confidentiality obligations. Aligning the Ambulance Service Act with the Hospital and Health Boards Act will ensure consistency with regards to circumstances when confidential information may be disclosed—for example, in cases where it involves the protection, safety or wellbeing of a child.

Part of having an efficient and effective world-class health system is making sure our health workers are able to have access to timely and consistent patient information. This supports better coordination for patient care between public hospitals and community health practitioners. Under this bill, access to the Viewer—a web based patient data application—will be expanded to allied health professionals who are not employed by Queensland Health or registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. These allied health professionals include, for instance, audiologists, social workers, dieticians, speech pathologists, exercise physiologists, orthotists, orthoptists and prosthetists. Extending access to the Viewer will improve information sharing and collaboration between health professionals and improve the process of transferring patients from acute-care settings in hospitals to community care settings. This can only lead to better health outcomes and quality of life for patients in Queensland.

The Palaszczuk government takes its commitment to mental health services seriously. The demand for mental health treatment has never been greater, and we are responding to that need by bolstering our mental health services and infrastructure. For instance, we are investing in frontline mental health care by delivering a new 64-bed acute mental health unit in Ipswich and expanding the mental health co-responder program into more regions across Queensland so that patients experiencing a mental health crisis can get timely and appropriate support.

Just last week we announced an \$8 million pilot program called Q-MOST, which aims to enhance mental health support services for young people. This bill will amend the Mental Health Act to improve processes for mental health care patients and to promote the human rights and dignity of people with a mental illness by taking a rights based approach to mental health care in Queensland. The bill will amend processes for approving electroconvulsive therapy, ECT, for patients, and I want to make note of the contribution of the member for Greenslopes about ECT and just what it means.



Ms HOWARD (Ipswich—ALP) (6.10 pm), continuing: ECT can be an effective treatment for some types of mental illness, including severe depressive illness, as we heard from the member for Greenslopes earlier. It is a regulated treatment meaning there are additional approvals needed before it can be performed. For people needing ECT who are unable to give informed consent, the bill safeguards and enhances their human rights. This will be done by requiring the Mental Health Review Tribunal to have regard to a person's capacity to consent to ECT, even if the patient's doctor has assessed the patient as having given informed consent.

The tribunal must also have regard to the views, wishes and preferences of adults to the greatest extent practicable, replacing the current best interests test and aligning the Mental Health Act with the Guardianship and Administration Act 2000. These protections will also extend to people subject to treatment authorities, forensic orders or treatment support orders. These new requirements respect a person's right to dignity and self-determination while promoting access and necessary and sometimes lifesaving mental health treatment.

The Public Advocate has come out in support of these amendments, stating in their committee submission that they ensure that a person's views, wishes and preferences are now taken into account when it comes to mental health treatment and further 'recognises the right of everyone to express their position and encourages supported rather than substitute decision-making'.

Another amendment to the Mental Health Act expands the categories of authorised persons who may apprehend or transport a person absent from an interstate mental health service—for instance, in circumstances where a clinical response is more appropriate and does not warrant police involvement. The bill will also allow the Mental Health Review Tribunal to approve an international transfer of involuntary patients to ensure they can access support from family and carer networks overseas. Currently the tribunal can only approve interstate transferrals.

The bill makes necessary amendments to the Public Health (Infection Control for Personal Appearance Services) Act 2003 to streamline licence processes for businesses and local government. We know that COVID has hit some small businesses hard. Personal appearance services affected by this amendment such as tattoo parlours and body-piercing services will certainly benefit from the improved flexibility of these new changes which will extend licence renewal time frames and allow business owners to easily restore their licences.

This is a robust bill. I thank the committee again for their work. I commend the bill to the House.