




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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

 **Mr McCALLUM** (Bundamba—ALP) (2.30 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. Queensland was the first jurisdiction in Australia to act decisively and declare an emergency to respond to the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic. That emergency was declared back in January 2020. As we know, it has been extended multiple times, most recently until 24 June this year. It is this effective public health response that enabled our community to receive such high vaccination rates right across Queensland. In Ipswich, we are currently sitting at 92.3 per cent fully vaccinated and 94.2 per cent with a single vaccination. In my local community across the suburbs of Bundamba, Dinmore, Riverview, Ebbw Vale and South Ripley we are at 93.9 per cent fully vaccinated and 95 per cent single dose; whilst in Goodna, Bellbird Park, Redbank, Redbank Plains and Collingwood Park we are at 91.6 per cent fully vaccinated and 93.8 per cent single vaccination. That is absolutely outstanding in terms of a response from our local community.

I thank every single person who came out to get vaccinated, to protect themselves, to protect their loved ones and to protect our wider community. It is because of these people and the people who have come out right across Queensland that we are able to enjoy the freedoms we in Queensland enjoy with our relatively open lifestyle. We can go to the pub and have a beer. We can go and have a meal. We are also protecting the vulnerable in our community, those who cannot get vaccinated—the elderly and young children under the age of five. The fact is that vaccination is still our best protection and our best and safest way out of this pandemic. It is not over.

The other thank you that I would like to place on record is for the outstanding work of our frontline health workers. They have been absolutely immense throughout the 2½ years of this pandemic. They are the ones who have been doing the contact tracing, providing vaccinations, undertaking our testing as well as providing all of the other life-saving treatments and required healthcare services our community need. Most recently during the Omicron wave over Christmas and New Year, our frontline health workers were working long shifts, sometimes double shifts, to the point of exhaustion, driven by the need to protect others and by their commitment and professionalism to help us be as safe as possible.

That is why I was particularly pleased last week to join with my colleagues, the members for Ipswich, Ipswich West and Jordan as well as our federal colleagues in the federal members for Blair and Oxley, in thanking our local frontline health workers. We were able to provide them with a free coffee as we joined them at the Ipswich Hospital cafe. I want to place on record again my deep gratitude to our frontline health workers. It is because of their commitment and because of our careful planning and management that COVID-19 transmission in Queensland is happening against this backdrop of a highly vaccinated population. It means that there are fewer COVID related deaths, less severe illness and reduced pressure on our health system, particularly compared to other jurisdictions. I also place on record my deep condolences to the families and loved ones of everyone who passed away throughout the course of this pandemic.

Whilst we have had this excellent response that has enabled us such high coverage and the protections that come with that, the risk of adverse health impacts to the community and pressures on our health system—and, indeed, the consequent impacts on our economy—remain. Recently, that was clearly demonstrated by the high rates of transmission that occurred through the first Omicron wave in terms of the threat that is out there in our community at the moment. It is very clear that the COVID-19 pandemic still remains fluid. It still remains unpredictable not just here in Queensland or in Australia but right across the globe. Given the highly infectious nature of Omicron, the increased transmission of COVID-19 is likely to continue throughout 2022. This is the expert health advice. We have already seen the beginning of that with the second wave of Omicron and the subvariant BA.2 here in Queensland.

Before this COVID-19 response framework that is the subject of this bill, a declared public health emergency could only be extended by regulation in Queensland for up to seven days. These public health measures are necessary to respond when new variants emerge that are more transmissible, more severe or, indeed, both. It is particularly important as we enter the winter months. I encourage everyone who is eligible to get their winter COVID booster and a winter flu shot. It will be yet another challenge as we continue to walk a path through this pandemic. There have been so many challenges to overcome. Unfortunately, some of the most severe challenges resulted thanks to the federal Morrison LNP government which initially completely botched the vaccination rollout by not ordering enough vaccines and not providing Queensland with enough supply.

Government members interjected.

Mr McCALLUM: Yes. It was not a race apparently, except it turned out that it was! One would think that this Prime Minister, who is never there in a crisis when we need him, would have learnt some lessons. Follow that up, of course, with pretty much the same failure of planning and supply when it came to rapid antigen tests. All the way through for the Prime Minister it was always someone else's fault. He always blamed the states, especially Queensland, for never accepting responsibility and for always changing colours like a chameleon.

We saw it again only last night with the delivery of the federal budget. Scott Morrison has written off Queensland. This is despite the fact that, due to our excellent management of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are the growth engine of our national economy. Our nation-leading COVID response and economic recovery has our fellow Aussies moving here in droves. Instead of giving Queensland our fair share, Mr Morrison is off chasing votes in other states. The sacrifices that Queenslanders have made over the past two years during the pandemic have been ignored by what is an incompetent and arrogant federal government.

We asked for a fifty-fifty partnership with the federal government to meet the health needs of Queensland. Scott Morrison has denied Queenslanders a fair deal. The budget papers have it in black and white that he is cutting \$21 million from our public hospitals over the next financial year—in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think that that is absolutely shameful. If that is not enough, he is going to back it up by cutting another \$176 million from Queensland hospitals over the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years compared to funding that he promised just four months ago.

We will get on with the job of protecting Queenslanders like we have done all the way through this pandemic and has put us in a position of leading the nation. We have a world leading response to this pandemic and we will get on with the job of delivering for Queenslanders and protecting Queenslanders as we continue to face the COVID pandemic.