




Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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### **HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (2.25 pm): I would like to support the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The bill will amend a number of Health portfolio acts to better support the delivery of high-quality, responsive health care in Queensland. I thank the stakeholders and the Health and Environment Committee for their comprehensive consultation on the bill. The Minister for Health and Ambulance Services and Leader of the House has already outlined the major amendments in the bill.

I will take this opportunity to highlight some of the considerations regarding the changes to the Public Health Act 2005 to support the vision-screening program and the modernisation of the Queensland Cancer Register. Before I do, I would like to say that we have great health workers in our state looking after the people of Queensland. I find it a bit fanciful that the member for Scenic Rim would think that having over 4,000 fewer health workers in the health system would make it a better health system because I know that the workers under the LNP were very stressed. When the member for Scenic Rim was going through—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): Order! The member for Mackay is not speaking loudly and I want to be able to hear what she has to say. I give members to my left a general warning not to interrupt when the member is not taking interjections.

**Mrs GILBERT:** The member for Scenic Rim spoke about stressors that health workers have, and he could also add to that the stress they have when they are being put down by those opposite. Health workers contact me and say how distressed they are, especially when the member for Mudgeeraba is always talking down health workers and talking down health sites. Our health workers are really proud of the work they do and they are also proud of the health sites they work in. An apology is overdue from the member for Mudgeeraba to those health workers she called duds.

The bill will amend the Public Health Act to authorise schools to provide specific student information to the Queensland Health Primary School Nurse Health Readiness Program—a free statewide vision-screening program for students in prep. Registered nurses use two non-invasive screening tools to test for common visual abnormalities—a card-matching game and a special automated camera. The screening process takes approximately five minutes per child, which is fantastic because it does not interrupt the school day. If a visual abnormality is found, a registered nurse will follow up with a parent or guardian and refer the child to an eye specialist for further assessment.

If the bill is passed, schools will be able to share the student information with the vision-screening program through a secure electronic process. This means the program will be able to obtain student information from schools so that they can directly contact families to see if they would like to consent and they can answer any questions. This will reduce the administrative burden on school staff and vision-screening nurses associated with following up consent forms. It will maximise the number of children who are screened for preventable vision loss.

There are existing safeguards in place to protect the privacy and interests of children in relation to information sharing. These include: restrictions on who can access Q Vision, the database for the program; offences and disciplinary action for unauthorised information disclosures; and obligations under the Information Privacy Act 2009. Importantly, school principals may withhold identifying information if disclosure is not in the student's best interest—for example, for safety issues. Families who do not wish to participate in the screening program may also inform the school principal or return a consent form stating their wishes. Information kept on the child's record will be destroyed accordingly.

Overall, the amendments aim to give Queensland's children the best possible start to their education. They will allow registered nurses to screen more prep students for preventable vision loss, subject to parental and guardian approvals. As a former teacher, I know how crucial it is for these early years of learning.

**Mr Harper:** You were a teacher?

**Mrs GILBERT:** Yes. Vision screening in early childhood is critical for detecting common visual abnormalities. If not treated early, these can result in behavioural issues, concentration difficulties and in turn poor learning outcomes. Children know when they are not achieving at the same rate as their peers. Not being able to see clearly has a huge impact on their ability to learn to read and also on their numeracy. This flows on to all the other subjects they come across in a usual curriculum. Those of us who now wear glasses know how difficult it is when we try to read something if we cannot put our hand on glasses to wear, so imagine trying to read with impaired sight. This is an important health screening initiative and it has the potential to minimise long-term impacts on a child's learning and development by providing opportunity for early detection.

This bill also amends the Public Health Act to include new notification requirements for hospitals, pathology, laboratories and diagnostic imaging practices. This will allow Queensland Cancer Register to better monitor the prevalence of cancer and evaluate the effectiveness of treatments. The objective of these amendments is to reflect on temporary cancer management and diagnostic techniques. This is so important, given cancer is the biggest contributor to the burden of disease in Australia and a leading cause of death. The data collected by the register is used to inform research on cancer screening, detection and patterns.

Australia has the highest melanoma incident rates in the world and, most concerning, of all the states in Australia, we have the highest rates. My mother, 30 years ago, had a melanoma removed. Early detection and early treatment means she is still with us today.

Statistics from the Cancer Council Queensland indicate that one in two Queenslanders will develop cancer in their lifetime. These statistics speak to the need to make sure our legislation is contemporary to assist the efforts to reduce the burden of cancer. The amendments to this bill will complement the Queensland government's plan to construct a new 150-bed, stand-alone cancer hospital in Herston Health Precinct, offering specialist treatments.

Cancer has substantial social and economic impacts on individuals and families in our community. Over the last 10 years, there has been more than a 30 per cent increase in the number of Queenslanders being diagnosed each year. This means more and more people need treatment and care. The new notification requirements will allow more data to be obtained to better support cancer research and education programs.

In January this year, my father lost his battle with bowel cancer. It is not a battle that I want to see any other families face. I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to the oncology team at the Mackay Base Hospital. Their care of my father, James, was outstanding. Their care and compassion was immense. Thank you to all the health workers looking after Queenslanders.

The amendments in this bill are a result of thorough consultation by Queensland Health, and stakeholders have described them as necessary, workable and practical. I commend the bill to the House.