



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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PHARMACY BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BILL

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (4.52 pm): I rise to address the Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023, a bill that, as we have heard, seeks to clarify the requirements and establish additional regulatory controls around the ownership of Queensland's pharmacy businesses. Community pharmacy businesses are the first port of call for our communities' immediate health needs. They are our port of call when we have a toddler with a temperature or a raging cold or when we run out of a ventolin puffer, which is so important in reducing the impact of asthma.

With four young kids, I regularly make an evening dash to the local community pharmacy to buy a bottle of panadol or nurofen to get on top of a teething toddler's temperature—something that I am sure most parents can appreciate. For my community, which has a higher preponderance of older residents than many in the state, our local community pharmacies are particularly important. They are essential to dispense medicines and advice to control the chronic conditions that many suffer from in their senior years.

Perhaps I did not appreciate the importance of a community pharmacy until I was elected in 2017. Since then it has been very clear that our community needs access to advice and care close to home which only our community pharmacies can provide. In my electorate one local pharmacy, the Buderim Pharmacy, has for many years provided home delivery of medicines at no cost to patients. It is an example of the difference between a community pharmacy and the larger chains and supermarkets. In doing so, businesses like the Buderim Pharmacy are delivering a critical service to our community, and that support means that residents are able to stay comfortably at home longer and they can do so without the additional supports they might otherwise need. I should note the Buderim Pharmacy is not alone in this regard. Our local Terry Whites, our Amcals—and I am not going to rattle off all the local pharmacies—all share that same commitment to our local community.

We know that at their heart most community pharmacies are small and family businesses. In my role as the shadow minister for small and family business I have been privileged to meet and visit many community pharmacies—from Goondiwindi to Gladstone, from Cairns to Currumbin. They have told me of the challenges facing their businesses: the regulatory burden, the competition from other sectors and the progressive erosion of their margins. The member for Nanango spoke of Lucy Walker in Goondiwindi. She has an amazing business. I visited there a year or two ago with the member for Southern Downs. She and her business are the heart of that community. It is the heart of the main street. She has an amazing robot which is an investment in her community that allows her to deliver the services and employ more locals. It is people like Lucy, with her commitment to the local community, whom we need to protect and ensure they continue to flourish.

Mrs Frecklington: She's got good craft, too.

Mr MICKELBERG: She does have good craft; I will take that interjection from the member for Nanango.

At our heart, the LNP is the party of small and family business. We represent the small businesses that sponsor the local footy team, that donate the snags for the Men's Shed Bunnings barbecue and that donate to the local school P&C. It is those businesses that are the threads that make up the tapestry of our communities and it is small and family businesses—not big businesses like the major supermarket chains—that this parliament needs to foster and protect.

Notwithstanding the importance of their task, for the most part pharmacy businesses in Queensland are small businesses. It is important that governments at all levels get the regulatory settings right for small and family business. Regulation too frequently is used by big business as an anti-competitive barrier to entry, and it is through that lens that I consider this bill. Are the regulatory requirements that this bill seeks to impose justified, and do they impose the minimum regulatory burden on small and family businesses while still protecting consumers? Far too often this Labor state government imposes additional requirements on small and family business when all that achieves is placing additional burden on small business owners who are already doing it tough.

In a previous life I provided advice to small and family businesses. At that time I was quite surprised by the relatively thin margins and profitability that pharmacy owners have to deal with. Given that I was in the health sector, I had assumed that many pharmacies would be working on far fatter margins and have far more profitability. It became clear that, despite the educational requirements required to become a pharmacist, they do that job because it is a vocation and they care about our community.

This legislation does have the potential to be anti-competitive and as a consequence it may reduce accessibility for the pharmacy services our community needs. Ultimately, we need to consider that there is a net benefit for all Queenslanders. It is important that we protect and empower our local community pharmacies so they can continue the types of services I spoke about that the Buderim Pharmacy delivers for the benefit of all Queenslanders. We will be watching the implementation of this bill to ensure it delivers better health services for every Queenslander and not less access than is currently available.

I note that a number of submitters to the bill inquiry raised concerns around the compliance burden that this legislation may place on pharmacy businesses. It is an issue that we on this side are particularly mindful of and it is why we have committed to re-establishing the Productivity Commission after it was shamefully cut by this Labor state government. I also note the concerns expressed by the AMAQ and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Queensland. They, too, represent key stakeholders in our health system and it is important that we consider the second order effects of decisions such as those we are debating here today. To that end, I associate myself with the contribution of the member for Moggill, who is far more qualified than I am in relation to such issues and who covered them in good detail.

I want to address the timing of this bill. As the member for Nanango noted, the original parliamentary committee report to which this bill responds is almost six years old—nearly 2,000 days old. It talks to the chaos and crisis besetting this government and its priorities that this government would rather rename Fraser Island than address these important issues. It talks to the lack of priorities and priorities that do not address the concerns of Queenslanders. I call on those opposite, as did the people of Ipswich West and Inala on the weekend, to start listening to Queenslanders and start reflecting their concerns.

The LNP will not be opposing this bill, but we continue to call on the state government to place small and family businesses at the forefront of every decision this government makes because small and family businesses are the backbone of our community.