




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 19 March 2024

PHARMACY BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.18 pm): I rise to address the debate on the Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023. As outlined in the bill's explanatory notes, for more than 20 years the Pharmacy Business Ownership Act 2001 has been in place during which time it has undergone various and significant amendments. It has come to the point now where it is deemed to be outdated and in fact limits Queensland Health's ability to ensure full compliance with its requirements. Accordingly, the Pharmacy Business Ownership Act 2001 will be repealed and replaced with this legislation we are currently debating which seeks to provide for a more modern and effective framework for the regulation of the ownership of pharmacy businesses.

As outlined in the explanatory notes, the policy objectives of this legislation include but are not limited to: firstly, clarify the requirements in relation to who may own or hold an interest in a pharmacy business and retain the limits on the number of pharmacy businesses that a person may own or hold an interest in; secondly, establish a regulatory council as a statutory body to administer the act and transfer regulatory functions from Queensland Health to the council; thirdly, establish a licensing framework for the ownership of and interests in pharmacy businesses; fourthly, prohibit the council from issuing a licence if the pharmacy business is located in a supermarket; fifthly, require the council to report the results of compliance audits as well as require the regulatory council to maintain a register of pharmacies to assist the community to locate pharmacies and services provided by pharmacies; and, finally, modernise existing provisions relating to the functions and powers of inspectors, legal proceedings, delegations and protections from civil liability.

This legislation has indeed been a long time coming. However, this legislation will implement the state government's response to a number of recommendations of the parliamentary Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee's report No. 12, *Inquiry into the establishment of a pharmacy council and transfer of pharmacy ownership in Queensland*. It must be noted that this committee began its inquiry as far back as May 2018, with its report subsequently tabled in 2019. Notwithstanding the significant delay it has taken the state Labor government to finally bring this legislation forward for debate, I want to emphasise some of the points that I previously made with respect to the committee report and its recommendations. When I addressed the committee report in 2019, I stated—

The committee examined some fairly contentious areas. One of those relates to scope of practice. Many in this House would be aware that collaborative models of care can be very important in achieving good clinical outcomes for patients. Some of the areas that were examined in relation to vaccinations and antibiotic prescribing can be very contentious but, within collaborative models of care, they can provide significant benefits to patients as long as there are not any unintended consequences.

On that particular point, I have always held the belief—we talk about the separation of powers in this place—that there is an important separation of powers when it comes to prescribing which is often undertaken by doctors, dispensing which is done by pharmacists, and then the administration, in some

cases by nurses if it is in hospitals or residential aged-care facilities. Maintaining those separations can be very important, but there can also be a role for collaborative models of care and scope of practice adjustments, particularly when we have workforce issues in rural and regional parts of Queensland.

I also acknowledge the recommendation of the committee in relation to the establishment of a Pharmacy Advisory Council and the significant benefits and added value that could stem from the creation of such a council. In 2019 I also spoke about pharmacy ownership. Considering that the contribution I made during the committee report debate was in February 2019, with the benefit of hindsight I realised that there were matters raised which ultimately became a significant focus during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. As I stated then—

... I note the committee's recommendations in relation to pharmacy ownership. I think those recommendations are very sound and reasonable. The aim of this report was to enhance patient care in Queensland, to have collaborative models of care and to ensure the potential expansion of vaccination coverage so that some transmittable diseases can be reduced or prevented by vaccinations. That is very important. As a state jurisdiction, the last thing we would want is to continue to have outbreaks of the flu or other illnesses.

Pharmacists provide a wealth of health education as well as health advice and health intervention. We need to ensure that the pharmacy models are robust and sound and that there are not any adverse outcomes when it comes to workforce recruitment and retention, particularly in rural and regional Queensland. Our general practitioners, our medical specialists, our nurses and our midwives are all very important. By working together in collaborative models of care, that can be good for patients and the health system, both public and private.

It has been more than five years since I made that statement to the Queensland parliament and the work of pharmacists across Queensland is more valued than ever. I again wish to acknowledge the significant work that many community-based pharmacists do in our communities across Queensland, especially in rural and regional areas as well as residential aged-care facilities.

Specifically in relation to this legislation, I note that it has broadly received support from pharmacy business owners and associated groups including the Pharmacy Guild of Australia. That being said, it is important to acknowledge the concerns that have been raised by key stakeholders and associations, including the Australian Medical Association Queensland, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners of Queensland, the Aboriginal and Islander Health Council and the Australian government's Productivity Commission. Such concerns pertain to the evidence base for the licensing framework, regulatory council and ownership restrictions as well as provisions viewed as being anti-competitive and concerns raised in relation to the accessibility and affordability of pharmacy services. These are considered views and concerns and it is incumbent on the Labor state government to ensure the diligent implementation of this legislation, including a thorough review of its operation within a reasonable time frame from its enactment.

There is no doubt that when it comes to improved health outcomes pharmacies play a vital role in ensuring the timely and affordable provision of medicines and associated service to those who need it. It is therefore vital that appropriate legislation and regulatory frameworks are in place to ensure that the operation and management of pharmacies are fit for purpose and reflect the modern needs of Queensland communities.

Finally, I take this opportunity to acknowledge all of my local pharmacies in the electorate of Moggill. They provide an invaluable community service for local residents. Importantly, this Thursday, 21 March 2024, is Thank Your Pharmacist Day. This is an important annual celebration which is held in March of each year, bringing together patients, community leaders, stakeholders and other health professionals from across the health sector to acknowledge the vital work of all of our pharmacists. I know that people will appreciate holding these celebrations this Thursday in not only my electorate but across all electorates in Queensland.