




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 17 April 2024

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.37 pm): I rise to address committee report No. 38 of the Health and Environment Committee, *Vaping: An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland*. In March 2023 the Queensland Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Health and Environment Committee inquire into and report on reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland. I note that, through the course of its inquiry, the committee received 78 submissions from a diverse range of individual and organisational stakeholders spanning across the health, medical, education and retail sectors.

In confirming what had already been widely suspected and indeed known, the committee found from the data that was made available that e-cigarette use is increasing at an alarming rate and particularly amongst our young adults. As the Liberal National Party's shadow minister for education and as a specialist physician, I am deeply concerned that there has been an apparent increase in the uptake and ongoing use of e-cigarettes amongst specific cohorts, including school-aged children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as those experiencing mental illness. As I said, as a specialist physician with a subspecialty in addiction medicine, we know that these vaping products contain nicotine, heavy metals, pesticides and carcinogenic chemicals and that there are significant harms with their consumption with respect to things such as heart disease, lung disease and other forms of cancers. I think there is no clinical place for that. I know there is still research being undertaken with respect to the type and form of these products for a limited clinical place when it comes to recalcitrant smokers; however, I do not think the evidence is there whatsoever. We need to be doing a lot more when it comes to regulating and eliminating these products.

As with drugs and tobacco, vaping is a serious public health issue in our Queensland schools and warrants the full attention and action of the state Labor government. As the Liberal National Party has revealed, last year to the end of term 3 there were more than 43 student suspensions and exclusions each and every school day for incidents related to substance misuse, related paraphernalia and vaping products. Many parents and teachers have shared with the Liberal National Party their concerns that the state Labor government has been too slow to act on this vital public health issue and that significantly more resources and supports are required to eliminate vaping in our schools.

It is clear that previous measures which have been undertaken by the state Labor government to address vaping in schools have not as yet comprehensively addressed this issue and that more needs to be done. By way of example, whilst the Labor state government provided a funded commitment in August of last year for an anti-vaping program—and that was certainly welcome—this program was only for state high schools in Queensland. Disappointingly, this announcement failed to address the growing issue of vaping in Queensland primary schools.

As I highlighted at the time of Labor's announcement, since the state Labor government came to power, suspensions for primary school students for substance misconduct including vaping and drug use has exploded by 800 per cent. What is more, during the estimates committee hearing last year the Liberal National Party uncovered that the state Labor government does not comprehensively record specific instances of vaping and vape products in our schools. You cannot fix properly what you do not measure accurately. This includes the prevalence of vaping across both primary and state high schools in Queensland.

I acknowledge that of the 14 recommendations that the committee provided in its report, recommendations 5, 6 and 7 specifically pertain to the Department of Education. When it comes to the delivery of any additional resources and strategies, it is important that key delivery metrics are identified, implemented and made publicly available so as to ensure the overall success in reducing and eliminating vaping in our schools.

Finally, I refer to Mr Speaker's statement on 16 April concerning correspondence from the Leader of the House. This was the first time this matter had been drawn to my attention. In response to Mr Speaker's request, I correct the record and advise that I should have ensured the post referred to the fact that 18 of the 19 ministers did not make ministerial statements on the day in question. I have removed the social media post as requested.