




Speech By  
**James Martin**

**MEMBER FOR STRETTON**

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### **PHARMACY BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BILL**

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (4.59 pm): I rise to support the Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023 which will replace the 2001 act with a modern and more effective framework for the regulation of the ownership of pharmacy businesses. I want to start by acknowledging all of the hardworking pharmacists in the Stretton electorate. Pharmacists and pharmacy assistants play a pivotal role in primary health care. They have the community's trust and confidence. They are dedicated to serving the people of Queensland and providing world-class health care. As health professionals, their job goes further than simply dispensing medicine. They provide many members of my community with health advice every day and it is important to acknowledge that this government supports pharmacists using their full scope of practice so they can offer a wide range of frontline health services to Queenslanders. Further, we are a proud supporter of community-based pharmacies and the community pharmacy model that sees the community benefit from an increasing number and quality of services and care delivered. In contrast, if the pharmacy sector was deregulated, as many right-wing think tanks have argued, pharmacies would be focused instead on high volumes and low margins to maximise profitability and drive shareholder returns at the expense of more service and patient focused traditional community pharmacies. The pressure to minimise costs would put pressure on less profitable parts of pharmacy businesses, in particular those services which require higher levels of patient care.

When it comes to the health of Queenslanders, it is a core belief of those on this side of the House that every Queenslander deserves access to top quality universal health care close to home, and that is why we do not support the privatisation of hospitals or contracting out of services or making health workers redundant and replacing them with casuals, because that leads to worse health outcomes. We also do not support deregulating pharmacies—a free market model. The free market might make a few high-volume services or products cheaper, but ultimately it would result in worse health outcomes for ordinary Queenslanders. We only need to look at the behaviour of the big supermarkets like Coles and Woolies and how they have been using their market power to drive down prices for farmers but not passing any savings on to their customers. They just give bigger returns to shareholders.

That is why it is important that we have a modern and effective framework for regulating the ownership of pharmacy businesses. In particular, this bill will retain current ownership restrictions which ensure pharmacies are owned by pharmacists whilst also ensuring that organisations like the Mater and certain friendly societies can continue to own pharmacy businesses. These restrictions ensure that pharmacies are operated in a manner that places the health and wellbeing of customers and the community ahead of commercial considerations. We do not want an Americanised healthcare system controlled by big corporates where health care is only for people who can afford it.

This bill will repeal and replace current legislation which has been in place for over 20 years but is no longer fit for purpose, so the new bill will ensure our community pharmacies remain protected. The policy objectives of the bill are to clarify the requirements of the 2001 act relating to who may own or hold an interest in a pharmacy business and retain the limit on the number of pharmacy businesses that

a person may own or hold an interest in; establish a regulatory council as a statutory body to administer the act and transfer regulatory functions from Queensland Health to the council; establish a licensing framework for the ownership of an interest in pharmacy businesses; prohibit the regulatory council from issuing a licence if the pharmacy business is located in a supermarket; prohibit third parties from exercising inappropriate control over how pharmacy business owners provide pharmacy services related to medicines and provide that clauses in the contract or agreement that allow a third party to exercise inappropriate control are void; require the regulatory council to report the results of compliance audits; require the regulatory council to maintain a register of pharmacies to assist the community to locate pharmacies and services; modernise existing provisions relating to the functions and powers of inspectors, legal proceedings, delegations and protections from civil liability; restrict disclosure of information obtained in connection with the administration of legislation; and confirm that regulations may be made about fees, waiving fees, record keeping and premises standards.

As I mentioned, one of the key important parts of this bill is that it establishes a regulatory council as an independent statutory body. This transfers the responsibility for regulating pharmacy ownership from Queensland Health to the council. This change has been made in response to feedback from pharmacists that they considered an independent statutory body would be better placed to monitor and enforce pharmacy ownership requirements. It also brings Queensland into line with most other states. Overall, the bill promotes the professional, safe and competent provision of pharmacy services by pharmacy businesses and also maintains public confidence in the pharmacy profession.

I am also proud to say that Stretton is home to many pharmacists. I am sure that there would be many other MPs in this House who have community pharmacies in their electorates but whose pharmacists live in Stretton. That is because my local community really values education. Many people come from all around the world for a better life in Australia and I see how much their families value education. They can get a fantastic state school education in Stretton with great teachers, teacher aides and new buildings that are all air conditioned. When I visit these schools I hear countless times from proud parents that their children have finished year 12 with a great ATAR score and they are very proud that next year they will be going to university to study pharmacy. One of the things that I have found over time is that being a pharmacist seems to run in the family. It is quite often that a pharmacist's children will take up the profession. It is really not just a profession; it is a position that is held in great esteem in my community and across the whole of Queensland and Australia. As other members have said, it is a real vocation, especially in my community, and that is something that we must maintain.

In conclusion, this government remains committed to the community pharmacy model. It has stood the test of time and has also allowed us to deliver a number of commonsense patient wins for Queenslanders like delivering COVID vaccines or free flu vaccines or women's health care, which is such an important focus for this government, such as easier access to UTI treatments or the pill. The community pharmacy model allows us to support better primary health care for Queenslanders closer to home, and this bill allows pharmacists to do just that. I commend the bill to the House.