




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

Record of Proceedings, 19 March 2024

PHARMACY BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BILL

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (3.25 pm): I rise to offer my support for the Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill 2023 and thank my fellow committee members for their consideration. I also thank the members of the former health committee of the 56th Parliament who conducted an inquiry into the establishment of a pharmacy council and transfer of pharmacy ownership in Queensland. This bill sees the implementation of the legislative amendments required for that committee's recommendations 8, 9, 10 and 11. I note the extensive consultation that went into this bill, not only with the previous parliament's inquiry but with the Queensland Audit Office and the Queensland Productivity Commission. I note the original inquiry's recommendation 6 to establish a Queensland Pharmacy Advisory Council, but subsequent stakeholder engagement sought the establishment of a regulatory council rather than an advisory body.

This bill seeks to establish the Pharmacy Business Ownership Council as well as update the pharmacy ownership restrictions set out in the new Pharmacy Business Ownership Bill. Reviews have found that the Pharmacy Business Ownership Act 2001 is outdated and has many instances of ambiguity. Previously administered by Queensland Health, the current regulations were difficult for Queensland Health to enforce. The bill clarifies who may own or hold an interest in a pharmacy business and retains the number of pharmacy businesses that a person may own or hold an interest in. Under the bill, only a pharmacist or a corporation whose directors and shareholders are all pharmacists and certain friendly societies may own or have an interest in a pharmacy business. The bill also retains the limit on ownership, with pharmacists and corporations not being able to own or have an interest in any more than five pharmacies. I believe most consumers are supportive of the rationale for these restrictions. Pharmacies are a key delivery point of important health services and the need for professionalism and patients' interests before profit are paramount. The idea of corporatisation of medicine and the potential for monopolies would ultimately see Queensland consumers pay more for their medicines.

The other aspect of regulation that the committee examined was the location of pharmacies. Specifically, this bill imposes a new restriction on the location of a pharmacy business so it cannot be located in or accessible from a supermarket. The bill contains definitions of 'supermarket' as well as 'pharmacy business'. The restriction was supported by pharmacy business owners. They felt that supermarkets were not an appropriate location for the provision of sensitive healthcare services, and I think most people who have attended their pharmacy to seek assistance for their own or perhaps their children's medical ailments might agree with me here. Given the extended scope of practice that pharmacists in Queensland can now offer, the idea of discussing health matters in a location such as a supermarket setting would have people avoiding seeking the assistance of, or trying to obtain medication without the guidance of, a pharmacist.

It might be one thing to ask for 500 grams of sliced English ham over the counter; it is a completely different thing to ask what a particular rash is and 'what do I need to treat it—speaking on behalf of a friend?' It was interesting to note that the AMAQ did not see a problem with supermarkets being a provider of healthcare services, but the shelf stocker in the pharmacy aisle or the medications aisle at the supermarket assisting you with the dosage of a particular medicine versus the person at the local pharmacy who can point you in the right direction or perhaps away from a medication that might not be suitable for you are offering two completely different services. As I said, the fact that it is the pharmacy owners themselves who wish to maintain the integrity of their health services means that I am certainly more inclined to agree with them. Also I note that the amendment will bring Queensland into line with other jurisdictions for this restriction. I commend the bill to the House.