



Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**


**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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**MOTION**

**COVID-19, Response Review**

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (4.30 pm): I move—

That this House notes:

- (a) The Queensland COVID pandemic response had wideranging and significant impacts to Queenslanders both during and after the pandemic.
- (b) In order to make provisions for future pandemics, it is imperative that an independent analysis be undertaken to assess these impacts.

and calls on the Queensland government in 2025 to establish an independent review into the COVID pandemic and Queensland response, including the examination of the following:

1. The preparedness and capabilities of Queensland and government for a pandemic
2. Governance of the response to the COVID pandemic, within Queensland, and in interacting with national mechanisms
3. All health, social and economic response measures and their impacts
4. Decision-making underlying those measures, including consideration of the cost and benefits of restrictions
5. Communication and messaging to the public
6. Impacts on Queensland individuals, businesses and the community, throughout the pandemic and continuing to this day, as well forecasts into the future including the inflated costs of products and services
7. Ongoing impacts and changing demands on public sector service delivery
8. Interstate and global responses, reviews of their responses, and make recommendations to assist for future pandemics.

No-one wants to revisit the trauma of the COVID pandemic—a disaster event of massive proportions; however, we must to ensure we are prepared for the next pandemic. This is not a new or difficult concept. In Queensland we do this for other disasters—and we have many of those—through the Inspector-General Emergency Management, whose role is to consistently review the effectiveness of our disaster management responses after every disaster.

Countries across the world have already done, or are doing, COVID inquiries—for example, England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Sweden and New Zealand. Other Australian states have COVID inquiries—Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia and the ACT. The Commonwealth is conducting an inquiry, and the report is due in September, but its terms of reference exclude consideration of state actions, hence why states have been doing their own.

I have been advocating for a Queensland inquiry since 2022. In October that year *Fault lines*, produced by the Paul Ramsay Foundation, recommended improvements to the way governments across Australia operated during the pandemic. This does not lessen the need for an independent review in Queensland, despite the government's response that what we did was effective and had lower social, economic and health effects than elsewhere. How this conclusion was reached is difficult to ascertain, given there has been no review or analysis of what can be improved on.

The impacts of COVID and the responses to it were traumatic: people lost their jobs, businesses and homes; people could not farewell loved ones; mental health and fitness declined and suicidality increased; and the abuse of alcohol and drugs increased, as did domestic and family violence. I could continue talking about the impacts; however, every single one of us in this chamber, through our constituents who have come to us, knows what it has done and continues to do.

It did not end when the pandemic was declared over. The ongoing impacts are visible and invisible: strain on our health and policing systems; staff shortages; the inflated cost of everything, including building materials; and ongoing uncertainty. To realise this we just need to ask our vulnerable, our businesses, our service workers and our volunteers how they feel every time a new strain is announced on the news. The memories are still very fresh, the fears still palpable.

Academic papers have been addressing the impacts of COVID policies, with the journal *Economic Analysis and Policy* suggesting that more finely targeted COVID policies, such as quarantining our vulnerable, may have been more effective. An article in *Scientific Reports* states that school closures should have been avoided due to the harsh impacts on students and their futures and that it is imperative that we learn as much as we can about the optimal blend of policies for addressing a pandemic based on our experience, and our experience in Queensland is different from other states.

Whether those conclusions are appropriate for Queensland, or if Queensland could have made other choices, we do not know. We will not know without an independent inquiry. Our own Chief Health Officer acknowledged that we did not do everything right when he said—

The way we messaged was probably wrong.

He also pointed out issues around vaccine fatigue and whether mandates were worth it. This is what we need to understand to go forward. We do it for bushfires and cyclones; why are we not doing it for a disastrous event that impacted not only our own state but also Australia and the world?

I am asking both sides of this House to support this motion and commit to a Queensland independent review in 2025 so we can finally have some closure and move into the future knowing that we are prepared for the next one, with our communities knowing how it will be managed. This is called disaster preparedness and it gives confidence, security and reassurance to our communities and, finally, the closure they are seeking.