




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS (DISMANTLING ILLEGAL TRADE) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Ms ASIF** (Sandgate—ALP) (4.46 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Dismantling Illegal Trade) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. In doing so, I would like to speak on the critical public health challenge facing Queensland: the devastating impact of vaping and illicit tobacco in our communities, particularly our young people. Labor, both in government and now in opposition, have always looked after the health of Queenslanders, and our care has been guided by expert advice and scientific, evidence-based approaches when it comes to health. We have a commitment to protecting the health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders, and that principle has never been more important than it is today.

The harmful effects of smoking tobacco are well established. We know that nicotine in tobacco is highly addictive, with the release of dopamine making smokers crave more at regular intervals. Smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable disease and death in this state. It significantly reduces life expectancy and increases the risk of conditions such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

In recent years, governments across the world have been confronted with a new and alarming threat: vaping and illicit nicotine products. According to the April 2025 report of the Chief Health Officer Queensland, vaping rates amongst Queensland high-schoolers have tripled in just six years. New research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* tells us that the decline in youth smoking rates has slowed since the widespread uptake of vaping. Evidence shows that vaping carries significant risks including nicotine addiction, seizures, poisoning and lung injury.

There is emerging evidence of adverse effects on cardiovascular health such as elevated blood pressure and heart rate. Alarming, there have also been reports of illicit vaping liquids being contaminated with dangerous substances including synthetic opioids such as nitazenes, which can be up to 10 times more potent than fentanyl. These products are deliberately designed to appeal to young people, with candy flavours, bright colours and sleek designs that mask the very real danger they pose. These dangerous and addictive products are causing severe harm to Queenslanders, especially our young people, whose health and futures are being put at risk.

Over the past year I have heard from many of my constituents who find the rise in tobacconists operating unlawfully alarming. I have heard from Nick in Deagon, who contacted me after three new tobacconists opened near his children's school. He noticed these stores had started selling lollies. This is a deliberate strategy to attract young consumers. When a new tobacconist opened near Sandgate District State High School, teacher Kaylene and parents reached out to me with concerns that this proximity created easier access for students to purchase cigarettes and vapes. They no longer trust that these stores uphold age restriction laws.

These are not isolated incidents. I know that teachers and parents across Queensland are facing this crisis and they are on the front line. They confiscate vapes from students, they have difficult conversations with young people about addiction and they support families that are dealing with the consequences. Our health professionals are equally stretched. They are treating young people with nicotine addiction, respiratory problems and the psychological impacts of substance abuse and dependence. They are seeing cases of acute nicotine poisoning and providing cessation support to individuals who thought vaping was a safe alternative to smoking.

This is not just a health crisis; it is also a public safety issue. Organised crime groups are exploiting the profitability of illicit tobacco and nicotine products, embedding criminal activity in local communities. We have seen reports of retailers being threatened, firebombed and coerced into supplying products to generate profits for criminal networks. We heard some of that in the public hearing here at parliament. When we talk about illicit tobacco we are not just talking about tax avoidance; we are talking about products that bypass all quality controls—products that are being brought into our state through illegal means and then sold on the street corners of our communities, causing great harm to local kids and concern to parents.

When Labor was in government we took this seriously. We continue to do so. We listened to the expert health advice. That is why when we were in government we took decisive action and introduced the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Act 2023, which included a comprehensive licensing scheme and strong penalties against the supply of illicit tobacco products. We invested in school-based programs and social media campaigns to target young people and provide education around these dangerous products. We also passed the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024, working with the Commonwealth Government to enforce the ban on recreational vapes, create closure powers and strengthen regulations on advertising. This was comprehensive, expert backed reform that put Queenslanders' health first. That is why today the Labor opposition supports this bill.

This bill builds on the strong foundations we established. It extends closure orders from 72 hours to three months and from six months to 12 months for serious offenders. It ensures that stores remain closed and there are no loopholes on trading under the guise of those selling other goods. It also holds corporate executives personally accountable unless they can prove they had no knowledge of the illegal activities that had been taking place. These are sensible and proportionate measures that will help enforce more regular control over illegal tobacco use in our communities.

I hope there is more reform to come from this because this is becoming a huge issue in many of our communities. We need continued support for school-based educational programs. We also need to see that the consequences of these are upheld. We have seen the LNP government's lack of track record when it comes to listening to health experts. They ignored the advice of health experts on other policies, which is why I am pleased to see this is being taken further. We have seen this government break the promises they made to Queenslanders when it comes to access to health care, showing disrespect and utter disregard for health workers.

In September I wrote to the health minister to pass on my constituents' concerns specifically around proximity to schools and marketing to children. The minister could not be bothered to give me a response and instead had his adviser write a reply to me that in part was copied and pasted from another response. Unfortunately, the adviser did not know that in fact I am the member for Sandgate and the suburb I wrote about was not Teneriffe—it was in my electorate. They referred to 'constituents of Teneriffe' in a copy and pasted response. I would say to the Minister for Health that I would appreciate a response to my constituents' inquiry and their concerns, because they have children who go to a local school and they would like the government to take action on these things. I will yet again wait for a response from the minister.

I know that parents and teachers feel powerless against tobacco stores, particularly when businesses fail to uphold the laws that are designed to protect children. It is disappointing that the government only appears to be interested in attacking us when they have a real opportunity here to ensure these reforms can be implemented. This bill is a much needed crackdown on illegal activity in the tobacco industry and an important continuation of Labor's work. From a government that has consistently failed to listen to the experts when it comes to health in Queensland, it is a refreshing change to see them do so on this matter and continue Labor's progress. I welcome the changes but do acknowledge there is further work needed to increase protections against illicit tobacco, particularly for our children.