




Speech By

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MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (4.26 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—a bill that brings tangible, community-based reforms to our health system and has particular significance for Far North Queensland. In six short months the LNP government have introduced real-time health data. We have launched the ambulance ramping reduction program, and it is working. We are recruiting an additional 34,200 frontline health staff by 2030. We are delivering our Hospital Rescue Plan, and this is just the beginning.

The Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is a bold step towards rebuilding Queensland's healthcare system after years of neglect, and it starts by putting clinicians back where they belong—at the decision-making table. For too long critical health decisions have been made without enough input from those on the front line: the nurses, doctors and allied health professionals who care for our communities every single day. That is about to change.

This bill will ensure that every hospital and health board across Queensland includes at least one local clinician—someone with at least two years of hands-on experience, who is still working in direct patient care and who is deeply connected to the people whom they serve. Importantly, these clinicians will not be able to serve as chair or deputy chair as a safeguard to maintain good governance while still valuing the insights of frontline staff. Right now, just five clinicians serve on boards across only four of Queensland's 16 hospital and health services. None of them is from Far North Queensland: not one. There is no voice from the cape, the Tablelands, the Torres Strait or the coast.

Regional services need regional voices. From chronic diseases to long travel times and children with heart conditions who need more access to paediatric cardiology services, the challenges in Far North Queensland are not the same as those here in Brisbane. Without a seat at the table, local clinicians cannot shape the solutions. Putting frontline clinicians on hospital boards is not just about better governance; it is about smarter, faster and more informed responses to real health crises, like vaping.

Under Labor's watch, vaping rates among Queensland high school students tripled between 2017 and 2023. Since the Crisafulli government was elected, Queensland Health has seized more than 250,000 vapes. That is 250,000 products that are illegal that could have ended up in the hands of our children and our youth.

The vape crackdown continues. Not only are we actively seizing vapes, but we have put into place the nation's toughest on-the-spot fines for the sale of illicit tobacco and vapes, which means individuals can be fined \$32,260 and businesses up to \$161,300 if caught selling illicit tobacco and vapes. In just the very first week of those new fines, illegal traders were hit with fines totalling \$5,094,560. To put that into perspective, Labor averaged less than \$250,000 in fines per week in their final months in office.

This bill continues the work we have already started. This bill also allows Queensland Health to immediately destroy seized vapes, avoiding toxic storage risks and delays. Under the current laws, seized vapes must be stored for a minimum of eight weeks to accommodate existing forfeiture

processes. This poses a shelf full of problems—risk of fires, toxic leaks, environmental contamination. The vapes crisis is all around us. You need look no further than in any high school bathroom in Cairns to see the evidence. Sadly, it is not just high schools; it is also primary schools. Children as young as eight have been caught with vapes bought illegally, stolen or given to them to try.

This bill gives Queensland Health the power to put an end to this vaping crisis, to seize vapes at the source before they are trickled down into the system and into our schools and playgrounds. This bill is about less red tape and more action on our streets and in our healthcare system. It is about empowering the clinicians who know our communities best to shape the services that we can all rely on. It is about holding illegal vape and tobacco traders to account. It is about protecting our children and keeping our towns and our schools safe. Above all, it is about building a healthier, stronger Queensland. I support this bill and commend it to the House.