



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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QUEENSLAND INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH BILL 2025

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (5.05 pm): I rise today to share my contribution on the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025. This bill replaces the 80-year-old Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act 1945 and introduces a contemporary legislative framework that better suits our growing needs. This new legislation introduces updated governance, procedural and operational frameworks to support the institute's future growth and competitiveness. This bill supports our government's commitment to improving health outcomes for all Queenslanders.

The Queensland Institute of Medical Research has a longstanding history of scientific excellence in our state. It delivers world-class research that directly improves the lives of Queenslanders. Its long list of achievements include breakthroughs in cancer, in infectious diseases and in mental health. QIMR has consistently translated research into real-world impact. This bill establishes a new governance structure for QIMR, including a redefined council with clearer roles and responsibilities. It introduces provisions for commercialisation and incentive payments to encourage innovation and partnerships.

This research matters deeply to Far North Queensland. One such example is its pioneering work in melanoma prevention. Queensland is already known as the skin cancer capital of the world, with melanoma rates 40 per cent higher than the national average. Australia itself has the highest per capita incidence of melanoma globally, with rates 8.7 times higher than the global average. In Far North Queensland, where UV exposure is intense and year round, the risk is even greater. Our region faces some of the highest rates of melanoma in the world. Melanoma is the second most common cancer in Far North Queensland, and I commend the Queensland Institute of Medical Research for everything they are doing in this space.

In 2022 doctors at the FNQH skin cancer centre found more than 150 melanomas in the first six months of the year. Earlier this year I met with Jason and the team at Skin Doctors on Barr Street during their opening. In just two weeks of the clinic being open they found 18 melanomas, highlighting the importance of early skin checks. If you have not had yours, go and get one. Cancer Council Queensland notes an average of 219 melanomas are diagnosed in Far North Queensland a year—140 are males and 79 are females. This is why the work of QIMR Berghofer is so critical.

The updated QIMR melanoma risk calculator is one of the many leading innovations developed from over a decade of data and 40,000 participants in the landmark QSkin study. This tool now includes 16 personal risk factors. Nearly 80,000 Australians have already used QIMR's upgraded melanoma risk calculator. QIMR has also launched the Q-Inform study, which is being led by Dr Matthew Law, to determine the most effective way to communicate melanoma risk to Australians. This study will ensure people not only know their risk but also are empowered to act on it, especially in high-risk regions like Far North Queensland. This bill is about better tools, better data and better outcomes in the fight against melanoma and other pressing health challenges, and that is what the Crisafulli government is backing under this legislation.

Another groundbreaking study out of QIMR which was published just last week confirmed something that many of us females have long felt but could not quite explain—that is, women carry nearly twice the genetic risk for major depression as men. The study, which analysed the DNA of nearly 200,000 people, found that women are more likely to experience depression in ways that are often overlooked—weight gain, fatigue, excessive sleep and emotional withdrawal. These symptoms do not always scream for attention. In fact, they are often considered the norm, where tiredness is simply the mask of motherhood or emotional withdrawal is simply the price of parental burnout. However, 28.1 per cent of Queensland women aged 16 to 85 reported experiencing a mental disorder in the last 12 months. That is 45.6 per cent higher than men.

What is even more striking is that these genetic markers overlap with metabolic rates, meaning our bodies and minds are deeply interconnected. This opens the door to treatments that are tailored to us—to our biology, our experiences and our needs as women. This research, like many of the other key projects under QIMR, is a call to action on the importance of mental health services designed for women, especially in regional areas. It tells us that our pain is real, our needs are valid and our health must be prioritised. I commend all of the researchers, inventors and innovators and support staff for their extraordinary contribution to science and health.

After 10 years of health decline under Labor, the government is doing what it takes to mend a broken health system, starting with legislation. One thing we are improving is the incentivisation scheme, because the current act only permits bonuses for employees who are classed rigidly as ‘discoverers’ or ‘inventors’. This excludes many people including collaborators working under non-traditional employment arrangements who meaningfully contribute to the institute’s work. Imagine awarding a championship medal only to the striker who scores the winning goal while ignoring the defenders, the midfield, coaches and support staff who made the victory possible. Medical research teams are no different.

Success is a team effort, and the current act fails to recognise the many contributors who play essential roles behind the scenes. This bill ensures that all of those who meaningfully advance discovery are encouraged and rewarded accordingly, not through bonuses but instead through commercialised incentive payments. At the heart of the QIMR’s success is collaboration. The objective is clear: to attract and retain world-class talent while recognising the essential role of collaboration in modern medical research. The intended outcome is equally vital: to encourage research that improves health outcomes.

This bill also reduces the red tape that often plagues our system. Currently, all QIMR council appointments are made by the Governor in Council which can lead to unnecessary delays and affect the council’s ability to remain responsive and effective. This bill transfers the responsibility to our health minister, the Hon. Tim Nicholls, who has already proven his capabilities in just 12 months of delivering better health services for Queensland. As Minister Nicholls said, ‘This change will improve responsiveness and reduce administrative delays that can hinder the effective operations of the institute.’ It will enable swift appointments without compromising integrity or transparency.

At the heart of this bill is bettering our health system behind the scenes. By providing QIMR with the legislative framework it needs, we are empowering vital research and innovation that will benefit Queenslanders for generations to come. I support this bill and congratulate the minister and his team on taking strong action.