




Speech By
Donna Kirkland

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs KIRKLAND** (Rockhampton—LNP) (4.55 pm): Today I rise to speak in support of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is a crucial step in strengthening Queensland's healthcare system and protecting our communities from the growing threat of illicit tobacco and vaping. The first component of the bill delivers on a key commitment of the Crisafulli government to put doctors, nurses and clinical staff back in charge of hospitals by amending and improving the Hospital and Health Boards Act. We are ensuring that frontline clinicians have a direct voice in the decision-making. While they may not serve as chairs or deputy chairs, their presence on the board will guarantee that the needs and concerns of those working on the ground are actually heard and acted upon. This amendment bridges the gap between policy and practice, allowing for experiential, evidence-based decisions that directly and positively impact patient care.

During my campaign I spoke with countless hospital practitioners who expressed frustration at the disconnect between board and executive decisions and the realities of frontline health care. This bill addresses that concern by establishing clear eligibility criteria for clinicians wishing to serve on a board. They must be registered practitioners—doctors, nurses, midwives or allied health professionals—who have worked within the hospital and health service for at least two years and who provide direct patient care for a minimum of eight hours per week in a public hospital or health facility. This requirement is vital. Clinicians must work within the health service they represent to ensure accurate and meaningful advocacy. The challenges faced by regional HHSs differ significantly from those in metropolitan areas, whether it is access to specialty services or simply the tyranny of distance. This bill ensures those differences are acknowledged and addressed.

The second component of this bill tackles the alarming rise in the illegal sale and possession of vaping products. Across Queensland, from major cities to small rural towns, illicit tobacco and vape stores have been operating in plain sight—blindsiding communities with their insidious takeover. The previous Labor government failed to take decisive action, allowing this crisis to escalate. Between 2017 and 2023 vaping rates among school-age children tripled, and that is a frightening statistic. According to the Cancer Council Queensland submission to the committee inquiry, young children who vape are 29 times more likely to subsequently try cigarettes. After years of investment in antismoking initiatives, Labor stood by and allowed the new dangerous trend to undo that progress.

The vaping issue has also been widely discussed online, with many Rockhampton residents expressing frustration over the ease of access to vapes and the lack of enforcement against illegal sales. Some have described vaping as a plague among young people, warning of long-term health consequences for generation Z. Parents, teachers and health professionals alike are calling for stronger action to protect our children from the dangers of nicotine addiction.

The Crisafulli government refuses to let this continue. We have doubled down on enforcement, taking swift and decisive action. In March, Operation Appaloosa, led by Queensland Health, resulted in the seizure of 76,000 vapes, 19 million illicit cigarettes and 3.6 tonnes of loose tobacco. This was followed in April by the introduction of the nation's toughest fines for businesses supplying or possessing

illicit tobacco and vapes. Just last year, Queensland Health, alongside the Australian Border Force, seized over \$2 million worth of illegal tobacco products, including 54,000 vapes, in coordinated raids across the state, including in my electorate of Rockhampton. These raids send a clear message: illegal tobacco and vape traders must clean up their act or face consequences.

Given the sheer volume of seized products, the bill also establishes protocols for their safe storage and destruction. These hazardous items must be handled properly to prevent further harm. Additionally, the bill introduces a new court-ordered cost recovery system, ensuring that offenders, not taxpayers, bear the financial burden of their crimes. Courts will have the authority to order convicted individuals to cover the cost of enforcement, including seizure, storage, destruction, investigation and prosecution.

The bill is about accountability—accountability in our healthcare system and accountability in law enforcement. It ensures that frontline clinicians have a seat at the table, that illicit tobacco and vape traders face serious consequences, and that Queenslanders can trust their government to act in their best interests. I commend the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the House.