




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR STRETTON**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2025

### **QUEENSLAND INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH BILL 2025**

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (3.02 pm): I rise today in support of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill, a modernisation of nearly 80-year-old legislation that governs one of our state's most prestigious medical research institutions. For nearly 80 years QIMR has stood at the forefront of medical innovation in Queensland. From early postwar years through to now, generations of scientists, clinicians and collaborators have worked tirelessly to improve the health and wellbeing of people across our state and our nation. The institute's reputation as a world-class medical research facility is a source of great pride for Queenslanders, and it continues to attract global partnerships and investment because of its excellence and integrity.

The Labor opposition will always support QIMR and the extraordinary people who make it is what it is. We acknowledge and thank the scientists, researchers, technicians and students whose work each day leads to discoveries that save lives. We also recognise the commitment of the council, both past and present, whose stewardship has maintained the institution's independence and scientific integrity through many decades of change.

Queenslanders have benefited immeasurably from QIMR's breakthroughs. The discovery of Ross River virus in 1963 placed Queensland scientists on the world stage. Groundbreaking melanoma and skin cancer research has improved survival rates and shaped national and Queensland prevention programs, and that is why it is so disappointing to hear that the LNP have made a decision to axe skincare prevention campaigns. It is dangerous and irresponsible to be ripping \$2.1 million out of skin cancer awareness in the budget in the skin cancer capital of the world. It certainly shows the nature of the LNP. They are happy to stand up in this place and say they support QIMR, but behind the scenes they cut funding to a program that the QIMR itself helped to create.

Most recently, QIMR's expertise supported the Labor government's public health strategy during COVID-19, assisting in vaccine evaluation and community health modelling when Queensland needed it most. These are not just achievements in a laboratory; they are triumphs of public service, collaboration and science in action. Again, that is why it is so disappointing to hear that anti-vax and anti-science sentiments are creeping in and have contributed to the return of measles. The LNP need to do better on public health and better on supporting vaccination programs.

This bill repeals and replaces the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act 1945, recognising that the existing law no longer meets contemporary governance standards for an institute of this size with this much global impact. Under the proposed framework the QIMR will have clearer governance provisions, including conflict of interest rules; the council will be empowered with delegation powers to improve responsiveness; there will be stricter integrity safeguards, such as criminal history checks for council appointees and mandatory ministerial notifications when financial or management issues arise; and, most significantly, there will be enhanced incentive arrangements for commercialisation, pivotal for translating research into real-world impact.

While a number of these reforms are welcome, including the principle of incentive payments to appropriately value hardworking and dedicated scientists and researchers, clarification is needed regarding notification to the minister on matters that raise significant concerns in modernisation of the legislation to reflect the scale, function and role of the institute today. The devil, as they say, is in the detail. In particular, the new council appointment process is particularly concerning, especially the removal of Governor in Council oversight for appointments to the council, something that smacks of 'jobs for mates'. The LNP need to explain how open, merit-based and transparent appointments to the QIMR council will occur.

Let me go through some of the key changes. One striking feature is the way the bill reshapes the relationship between publicly funded research and commercial gain. While it rightly acknowledges the potential of Queensland's medical research to generate new treatments and drugs, the bill is silent on exactly how the financial benefits of that success will be distributed. It makes provision for intellectual property and commercialisation, but there is little clarity on whether PhD students, postdoctoral researchers or other early-career researchers—the people who do all the day-to-day work—will share in the financial rewards. This lack of definition could mean institutions and senior executives capture a disproportionate benefit from breakthroughs that were made by others. The LNP must clearly explain how they can ensure benefits are shared appropriately and provide it to the people who actually do the work.

Another aspect is the broad discretion the bill gives the QIMR council in reaching commercial arrangements. While it empowers the council to enter into joint ventures, partnerships and other financial structures, the bill does not impose strong transparency or reporting requirements to parliament. This means highly valuable public assets such as research findings, drug candidates and biotechnological platforms could be leveraged or even privatised with limited external scrutiny. Again, the LNP must provide assurances to parliament that these public assets will not be arbitrarily privatised.

As mentioned earlier, the bill maintains that council members are to be appointed by the minister rather than having Governor in Council oversight and that appointees will require appropriate qualifications in areas such as governance, research, ethics and commercialisation, amongst others. Given this change, we must scrutinise how these appointments will occur and whom the minister will select. In particular, will these appointments be truly contestable and open, allowing our best researchers a fair opportunity? Will diversity and representation, including the inclusion of women and First Nations people, be actively prioritised? Given the high stakes in medical research, how will these appointments be shielded from partisan bias? Will researchers and other appropriately qualified individuals be appointed to these independent positions irrespective of their political beliefs? We all heard what happened with the CHO.

Queensland's medical research sector is a cornerstone of our future prosperity. It not only saves lives; it creates jobs, drives innovation and builds partnerships that position Queensland on the global stage. Every dollar invested in research returns multiple dollars in economic and social value. Protecting the independence and integrity of institutions like the QIMR is not optional; it is essential.

Without transparency and accountability, all of this runs the risk of being undermined. We call on the government to answer how it will ensure open, merit-based and transparent appointments. Will the government support embedding diversity targets from a truly bipartisan and independent selection panel? Will it commission regular reviews of the council's composition and performance and report back to parliament?

It is no secret that the key components of this bill originated from Labor, rooted in our longstanding advocacy of QIMR's modernisation. While we support the bill, we must ask: will the LNP support genuine reform or will they undermine the principles put forward in the bill through sloppy governance and a biased appointment process? I urge the LNP to stop appointing LNP mates to important positions. Let's all support the bill and commit to ensuring it delivers for our researchers and communities, not for the LNP political party.

To conclude, this bill represents a real opportunity to modernise the way QIMR works and provides the incentives it requires to succeed in its mission on the national and international stage. All research institutions of global standing must be governed in the public interest, not for political expediency. Those opposite must ensure: the researchers themselves receive appropriate financial benefit from their work when successful commercialisation occurs; transparent criteria exist for commercialisation; and they resist the temptation to appoint their own people to the QIMR council through implementing a bipartisan selection committee to ensure the best and brightest are included, building a world-class legacy for QIMR and the excellent work that it undertakes.