




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (4.46 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The bill will amend the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 and the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998. During the state election the LNP promised they would introduce changes to hospital and health boards to ensure at least one clinician serving on the board is employed or engaged by the hospital and health service for which the board is established. Obviously there is merit in this idea. There is so much merit in the idea that it has already been happening across most of the HHSs, including mine in Ipswich, the West Moreton Hospital and Health Board.

It is one of those boards that is incredibly active in our community. We have an amazing chair in the form of Sue Scheinplug, who is doing a great job. Recently we opened a new dental clinic and one of the board members attended. It does not matter what event I go to in Ipswich, there is someone from the hospital and health board attending, just engaged in the community. I do commend them for the work they do. We have people on those boards who are clinicians, which does help them do their work, but we also have people from all walks of life on the board, which adds value to the work they do.

It is not a simple change to the legislation: it introduces potential problems we have heard about to the governance of the board. The Queensland Integrity Commissioner, Linda Waugh, highlighted some of those concerns in her advice to the committee and said there may be potential conflicts of interest arising in two areas where an individual is both an employee and a member of a board. I think most people could logically understand how that could occur. One way could involve issues pertaining to the employee's role or work area, some of the services provided, employment terms or conditions or other interests affecting their colleagues or close work friends. I have several family members who work in hospitals. My daughter is an anaesthetist at the Gold Coast hospital and my sister is a social worker at the Sunshine Coast hospital. They are on the front line of those kinds of issues when they arise.

The second issue that was mentioned involved concerns in relation to the employer-employee relationship. HHS employees who are also board members report to their health service chief executive, but the health service chief executive also reports to the employee in their board role. We can clearly see potential governance risks in that model. For instance, would a health service chief executive be impartial and objective when dealing with any employment matters involving an employee who is also a member of the hospital and health board? Could they remain impartial if that situation arose?

While theoretically a plan could be put in place to manage these conflict of interest risks, it would also place a significant administrative burden on the relevant clinician, the HHS and the board secretariat and chair. The Queensland Integrity Commissioner suggested a more effective alternative model would be to appoint clinicians from outside the HHS and ensure boards establish effective mechanisms to consult with employees and parts of the HHS when performing their functions.

In the overall scheme of things, this amendment does not deliver any real-world benefits when it comes to patient outcomes. It does not reduce elective surgery wait times or emergency wait times. It does not reduce ambulance ramping or deliver more hospital beds. Instead, what we have here is just

some tinkering around the edges by the LNP government to give the impression that they are doing something. It is similar to how they changed the name of the satellite hospitals to satellite health centres, or the implementation of the misleadingly named 'real-time hospital data' dashboard which is failing to provide accurate wait time data to any patients.

These cosmetic changes are part of the Crisafulli government's Hospital Rescue Plan, but what we have seen of their rescue plan so far has been underwhelming. Compare this with Labor's real transformative changes to our public health system while we were in government. In Ipswich alone the former Labor government invested over \$1 billion in a range of new hospital and health infrastructure for our city. I mentioned earlier the recent opening of a new dental clinic in Silkstone which will drastically reduce the waiting times for people on the dental waiting list.

Mrs KIRKLAND: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance to the bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Marr): Member for Ipswich, I will get you to come back to the bill.

Ms HOWARD: Thank you for your guidance. We have seen the difference those investments have made to our community. When we are talking about health and hospital service boards, that is their role; they want to make sure that the data is matching the work they are putting in and that is what we are talking about in this bill. It is incredibly important to Ipswich people and probably every person in this House. Those facilities have vastly improved access to these services for people. We see it as our responsibility to weigh up the complexity and cost of this proposed amendment against the public interest and whether a simpler model could achieve the same results. Since section 23(3) of the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 already requires that one or more members of a board must be clinicians, part 2 of this bill is not supported, as we have heard from other members on this side.

I will turn my attention to the other amendments in the bill relating to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998. This amendment will expedite the forfeiture of seized vaping goods and allow courts to order persons convicted of an offence under the act to pay reasonable costs incurred as a result of the offence. Labor strongly supports any moves to crack down on illicit vapes in Queensland. As we heard from the member for Bulimba, the measures that we introduced made a huge difference in schools. My husband works at one of the big high schools in Ipswich. Before we introduced those changes for young people, vapes were just everywhere—all over the school. Kids were vaping everywhere you looked. There was a sentiment in the community at one time that vaping was somehow a healthier alternative to smoking cigarettes—which I admit is something I did when I was at school—but we soon found out that was wrong. We know how dangerous vaping is for kids. Queensland leads the way in having the toughest vaping and tobacco laws thanks to the former Labor government, but I do acknowledge that the Crisafulli government is very well intended in proposing the amendments in this bill.

Obviously, we have heard some concerns. As the member for Ipswich, I can say that we have a lot of waste disposal facilities and we have an issue with public health concerns for residents living in Ipswich. I certainly applaud any measure the government can take to protect the health of people who live in areas where there are a lot of waste facilities, like my constituents. I urge the government to keep that at the forefront of their mind.

Mr NICHOLLS: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance, and I am sure I do not need to say it again. I am happy to talk to the member about what is happening at Ipswich at another time. I accept her thing, but it is not relevant to this bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Ipswich, I was listening very intently and you are very close to going away from the bill. Please keep that in mind. I have ruled on this and there will be no tolerance from this moment on.

Ms HOWARD: As the member for Ipswich, we do what we do our way. Given that vapes are currently classified as pharmaceutical waste, we hope the government will listen to the serious concerns of residents around that disposal. I encourage them to consult with Queensland Health and DETSI on the most appropriate classification of vaping products and the most appropriate method of disposal. This will mean a lot to Ipswich people. While we appreciate the need to expedite forfeiture and disposal of seized vaping products, we need to see a clear plan on how that is going to unfold.