




Speech By
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**HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BAROUNIS** (Maryborough—LNP) (4.04 pm): I am honoured to stand before the House today to support an issue that is not just critical to the future of our healthcare system but essential to the health and safety of every Queenslanders—the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill was introduced into parliament on 11 September 2024 by the Hon. Shannon Fentiman, who was the minister for health, mental health and ambulance services at the time.

The purpose of this bill is to establish a comprehensive accreditation scheme for 16 health professions across Queensland, ensuring that anyone providing health care in this state is properly qualified, registered and adheres to the highest standards of practice. While this is undoubtedly a significant step forward for the safety and wellbeing of Queenslanders, it is important to pause and reflect on the timing of this bill's introduction. It was brought forward in the final weeks of the Labor government's term.

Now, after nearly nine years in power, I think it is fair to ask: why did it take so long for this crucial issue to be addressed? For almost a decade Queensland's healthcare system operated without a comprehensive accreditation framework that we are now introducing. It was not until the very end of their term that the previous government began to take action on this matter. I want to pose the question: why was such an important issue left unresolved until the final weeks of their administration? Why did it take until the end of their term for the Labor government to start working on a solution? These are legitimate questions.

For the Labor government, after being in power for nearly a decade, the lack of urgency in addressing this healthcare concern is troubling. It raises doubts about their commitment to the healthcare system and the people of Queensland. But, with the new leadership of the Crisafulli LNP government, we are committed to doing better. We are taking swift and decisive action to ensure that all Queenslanders can have confidence in the healthcare professionals they rely on for care, treatment and advice. After all, we are talking about people's lives. The trust that individuals place in their healthcare providers is not something to be taken lightly. It is vital that those who provide care are not only qualified but accredited and held to the highest standards.

In my electorate, I am fortunate that we have not had any instances of non-accredited health professionals practising, but that is not something I take for granted. I want to ensure that my constituents continue to feel secure in the knowledge that the healthcare practitioners they see are fully accredited. Like many other areas in Queensland, my electorate has an aging population. Many of my constituents are elderly, and they deserve to feel confident when seeking medical attention. We must be sure that the professionals they rely on are not only competent but also meet the rigorous standards expected of health practitioners in Queensland.

Now let's talk about the details of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill introduces key amendments to the Health Ombudsman Act 2013 and the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act, which will help streamline and improve how the national law is applied in Queensland.

One of the most important aspects of this bill is that it will facilitate a joint regulatory arrangement between the Queensland Health Ombudsman and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. This will allow for greater oversight of health practitioners and ensure that they adhere to consistent national standards. Here is why this is so important: if a health professional decides to move to another state or territory in Australia, they will still be listed on the national register. This will provide greater transparency and peace of mind for Queenslanders, knowing that any health practitioner moving between states will still be subject to national scrutiny and regulation.

We cannot ignore the fact that the previous government had nine years to implement these reforms but failed to do so. The fact that this issue was neglected for so long shows a lack of priority and urgency. The previous government had the opportunity to make this happen earlier but chose not to. Once again, they let down the very people who voted them into power, leaving Queensland's healthcare system vulnerable to a lack of oversight and regulation.

Another crucial part of this bill ensures the public has the right to be informed about the regulatory history of their healthcare providers, especially in cases where serious issues such as sexual misconduct have occurred. In 2024 alone, Ahpra received more than 1,156 complaints against practitioners for violating personal boundaries. These complaints represent a breach of trust. It is clear that this issue should have been addressed much earlier. It should have been a priority for the Labor government.

The new bill aims to reduce these incidents by strengthening the regulatory framework and ensuring inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated within the healthcare sector. In my electorate we also face a high turnover of health practitioners due to our location in a more rural area far from the larger, more attractive urban centres. While this can be challenging, it is essential my constituents know that, regardless of which health practitioner they see, that individual has met Queensland's strict accreditation guidelines and is registered with Ahpra. This will provide not just peace of mind but also confidence in the quality of care they receive, even when practitioners change frequently.

Moreover, under the new system, if a health practitioner is disqualified from registration for any reason they must obtain a reinstatement order from a tribunal before they can apply to re-register with a national board. This is an important measure that will make it more difficult for unfit practitioners to return to the system. It will hold them accountable for their actions and prevent them from re-entering the workforce until they have demonstrated they are fit to do so.

Ultimately, the goal of the LNP Crisafulli government is simple: we want all Queenslanders to feel safe, confident and assured in the healthcare choices they make. We want them to know that when they visit a healthcare provider they are in the hands of a qualified, accredited and trusted professional. By introducing this amendment bill, the Crisafulli government is demonstrating our unwavering commitment to the health, safety and wellbeing of all Queenslanders. This bill represents a bold step forward to ensure that our healthcare system is not only stable but also accountable, transparent and ultimately trustworthy. We are committed to improving and safeguarding our healthcare system for every Queenslanders, no matter where they live or from whom they seek care. This is a commitment we take seriously and it is one we are proud to uphold. I commend the bill to the House.