



Speech By
John Barounis

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BAROUNIS** (Maryborough—LNP) (5.11 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This is a significant and timely reform that strengthens the foundation of our health system and ensures Queenslanders continue to receive the high-quality, safe and accessible care they rightly expect. The Crisafulli LNP government is committed to improving performance, increasing accountability and upholding integrity across our health system. This bill delivers on those commitments. It also sends a clear message: we are taking serious actions to protect public health and to stand up to the threats posed by illegal vaping products and unlawful tobacco sales.

One of the most important changes in this bill is the amendment to the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011. Every day thousands of frontline clinicians—our doctors, nurses and allied health professionals—deliver critical care across Queensland yet, until now, they have had limited input into how hospital and health services are governed. That is changing. This bill provides a key election commitment to put frontline clinical staff back at the heart of decision-making. The bill requires that at least one board member on every hospital and health board is a current clinician—someone with real on-the-ground experience who is working in a local public health facility. To be eligible, they must be a registered health practitioner such as a doctor, nurse, midwife or allied health professional who has worked in their local health service for at least two years and is actively engaged in patient care for at least eight hours a week.

This is a practical, meaningful reform. It ensures people who understand the system from the inside are shaping the services their communities rely on. Their insights, their experience and their compassion will help drive improvements in patient care. These changes will come into effect from 1 April 2026, aligning with the end of the current board appointments and giving Queensland Health time to conduct a fair and thorough recruitment process. Importantly, the bill includes safeguards. Clinicians appointed under this provision cannot serve as a chair or deputy chair of a board. This helps manage potential conflicts of interest. The Queensland Integrity Commissioner reviewed this proposal and confirmed that no further amendments were needed.

Our current laws are a gateway to ensuring proper disclosure and conflict management. Let us not forget: those opposite already appointed clinicians to boards during their term. This reform formalises that commitment and ensures consistency across all 16 boards statewide. This is fantastic news for my electorate of Maryborough. We have hardworking, compassionate staff at Maryborough Hospital—staff who genuinely care about the wellbeing of their patients and families. The people of Maryborough praise our hospital workers for the unwavering professional care they provide. It is only right that their voices help shape the future for our hospital in our region.

Recently, I was informed that the Maryborough Hospital is an absolute star in terms of performance. The performance in ED is fantastic considering the numbers who attend the department. The hospital is continuing to get busier; however, staff continue to rise to the challenge and provide excellent care to all patients. I was informed that the feedback from patients with regard to the staff is very positive. On all the visits I have made to Maryborough Hospital, all staff have been welcoming,

friendly and accommodating. I am very proud of my local constituents who work hard at the hospital for the commitment that they make every day. The current hospital score is three out of three. This is the highest result achievable and, again, I am very proud of them.

The bill also takes crucial steps to combat the growing harm caused by vaping and other unlawful smoking products. Under the previous government, the number of stores illegally selling vapes and tobacco exploded, and they did so in plain sight. Vaping among Queensland high school students tripled between 2017 and 2023. According to Cancer Council Queensland, kids who vape are 29 times more likely to try cigarettes. This is an alarming public health crisis, and we are taking it seriously. Since coming into office, the Crisafulli LNP government has acted. Over 250,000 vapes have been seized. Operation Appaloosa saw more than 30 illegal premises raided, resulting in the confiscation of 76,000 vapes, 19 million cigarettes and 3.6 tonnes of loose tobacco.

In my electorate of Maryborough alone, the Wide Bay Public Health Unit conducted a total of 14 inspections. Two warrants were executed at offsite bulk storage locations and 38 prescribed infringement notices were issued under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act for offences including the sale and possession of illicit tobacco. I am happy to report that the Queensland government is doing its job and trying to take these illegal operators off our suburban streets.

In total across Queensland, this was the largest seizure ever conducted by an Australian health authority, but this enforcement success has come with challenges. The storing of seized vapes for the mandatory eight-week period creates a risk of fires, toxic leaks and environmental contamination. It is also incredibly costly. This bill fixes that. It allows for the immediate forfeiture and destruction of seized vaping goods so we can remove these dangerous items from our communities faster and more safely. It also introduces a new court ordered cost recovery scheme. Those who profit from illegal trade—whether vapes, tobacco or ice pipes—will now be held financially accountable. Courts will be able to order offenders to pay for the cost of their illegal behaviour—seizure, storage, investigation and prosecution.

In Maryborough, we have seen a concerning rise in illegal tobacconists opening up in the CBD. We have six illegal tobacconists that have popped up on the same street within 300 metres. The licensed tobacconist in the same street now has to close their doors as they just cannot compete with these illegal operators.

This bill is a welcome relief for our community and for licensed tobacconists who are doing the right thing. The message is clear: if you break the law you will be held accountable.

This bill is about more than policy; it is about people. It empowers our frontline health workers to have a voice in the system they serve. It protects our children and communities from the dangers of illegal vaping. It restores confidence that public health is being taken seriously.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Hon. Tim Nicholls, Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, and his department for their work. For all of the people of Maryborough—for the nurses, doctors, families, patients and small and family businesses—I fully support the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.