




Speech By
Kerri-Anne Dooley

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 3 April 2025

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

 **Ms DOOLEY** (Redcliffe—LNP) (12.09 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I speak as a registered nurse, the member for Redcliffe, a member of the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee, the sole director of a private nursing agency and a proud member of the Nurses' Professional Association of Queensland. I speak in support of this bill. I, too, want to thank the health minister for his advice and consultation on this and for taking the recommendations in the committee report. I also want to thank the other members of the health committee and the committee secretariat for their immense work in collating all of the public hearing information and putting forward the report.

I, like everyone in this House, believe that the public has the right to know if their healthcare providers have a history relating to sexual misconduct in the workplace. Patients in hospitals, patients who see a GP in a community health clinic, residents who live in residential aged care, seniors who receive care in the comfort of their own home—wherever and whenever Queenslanders receive health care—should have confidence that they are going to receive professional, safe and quality care. Doctors, nurses and health professionals are some of the most trusted in society, so when that trust is broken the public has a right to know. Trust is the cornerstone of the health practitioner-patient relationship, impacting patient adherence, satisfaction and health outcomes, with the lack of trust potentially leading to negative consequences. Building trust involves effective communication, empathy, demonstrating competence and being honest and reliable.

According to Ahpra, the Australian Health Regulation Practitioner Agency, there are currently 920,535 registered health practitioners in Australia. This includes: doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, dentists, optometrists, osteopaths, chiropractors, psychologists and podiatrists, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners, who are all required to be registered with Ahpra to work professionally in Queensland and Australia. There are other relevant professional boards that each of these disciplines is also required to be a member of. For example, as a nurse I am a member of the Nurses' Professional Association of Queensland and the Royal College of Nursing.

Queensland is the host jurisdiction for this bill and its amendments, making Queensland responsible for amending the national law on behalf of all of the states and territories. Sadly, there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints of sexual misconduct made against health practitioners across Australia. In 2022-23 Ahpra received 841 complaints about boundary violations by health practitioners—a 223 per cent increase compared to the three years prior, indicating a growing trend of patients coming forward to report inappropriate behaviour. In 2024 Ahpra reported more than 1,156 complaints about professional boundary violations against health practitioners including sexual misconduct. This was an increase of 37.5 per cent from the previous year. Of those complaints, 174 related to practitioners working in Queensland.

Any act of sexual misconduct committed by a health practitioner is an egregious breach of the trust they hold. It is something that Queenslanders and Australians should never have to experience or tolerate. Sexual misconduct causes harm and long-lasting trauma to patients. It erodes community confidence in the safety of services provided by health practitioners and the public loses faith in public health service delivery. This Health Practitioner Regulation National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will ensure that more information is made available about practitioners with a history of sexual misconduct. It will empower Queenslanders to make more informed decisions about who provides their health care.

This bill will provide hospital and health services and other healthcare employers with the information they need before employing staff and will better protect their patients. This bill requires that national boards be open and transparent with data for each healthcare professional by publishing information on their public registers about tribunal findings of any sexual misconduct. How does that translate into practice? If people are given a referral for a specialist physician, for example an oncologist, a psychologist or a physio, before they make that appointment they can check the website and relevant health board to see if there is any history of sexual misconduct. This may influence their decision on whether or not they make that appointment with that health practitioner.

These national law amendments were agreed by all of the health ministers of states and territories and the Commonwealth in July 2024. This bill recommends three reforms to improve public safety and transparency of information. Firstly, it recommends that health practitioners whose registration has been cancelled by the tribunal or who have been disqualified from registration must obtain the tribunal's approval before they can reapply to the national board for registration. The second reform contained in the bill is a requirement for all national boards to permanently publish additional information on the public registers about practitioners who a tribunal has found have engaged in professional misconduct based on sexual misconduct.

Thirdly, the bill recommends the strengthening of protections for complainants and health consumers by making it an offence to engage in reprisals or other actions that could discourage persons from making notifications, preventing the use of non-disclosure provisions to limit a person's right to make a notification and rendering such provisions void. This bill will also amend the Health Ombudsman Act 2013 and the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009 to ensure these reforms operate effectively in Queensland.

I also want to note, however, that the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Avant medical insurers and the Australian College of Nursing support the amendments in the bill but did raise concerns that the bill does not provide adequate protection for health practitioners against complaints that are either without merit or have been repeatedly lodged as a form of retribution by an aggrieved person. There is a delicate balance required around protecting clinicians against aggrieved persons and protecting the public. We need this bill to protect all.

In closing, I want to put on the record my personal thanks to all of the health professionals at the Redcliffe Hospital. The Redcliffe Hospital expansion plan will be delivered under an LNP government. The implicit trust and relationship that health practitioners have with their patients, clients or residents is something the government must and should protect. If health practitioners are found guilty of any sexual charges of misconduct then relevant criminal proceedings may follow. This bill does not make provision for that; that will become a civil matter but may lead to their registration being suspended or disqualified. This bill seeks to ensure that any complaints of sexual misconduct are recorded publicly and are able to be accessed. I commend the bill to the House and ask for the House's support of it.