




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (12.24 pm): Don't you just love to hear from the other side when it comes to talking about legislation? It is almost like they have completely forgotten that they were the government for the last decade. We just heard the shadow minister talk about a lack of credentials in respect of the environment, but where were they on making these amendments and changes in regard to the disposal of vapes and tobacco-related products in the past? We had nothing from them in the past, yet they stand here today and accuse us, who have only been in government for what, six months, that we fail to act.

As chair of the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee, I rise to speak in support of the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill reflects the Crisafulli government's unwavering commitment to improving the performance, accountability and integrity of our health system and to taking decisive action against the public health crisis posed by illegal tobacco and vaping products. This legislation makes amendments to two key pieces of health law: the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 and the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998. These are smart, targeted changes—changes that respond to genuine frontline feedback and deliver practical outcomes for Queenslanders.

Let me speak first to the amendments to the Hospital and Health Boards Act. Across our state, thousands of hardworking clinicians deliver lifesaving care every single day. They are the ones on the floor in other hospitals, in our community clinics, in our aged care and out in the field, but for too long, those same clinicians have had a limited say into the governance of the very health services they work in. We are implementing an election commitment of the Crisafulli government to ensure at least one frontline clinician is appointed to every hospital and health board in Queensland; that means a doctor, a nurse, a midwife or an allied health professional who works directly with patients for at least eight hours per week and has done so for at least two years. This is about giving our health boards access to people who understand firsthand what is working and what is not, and what our community needs. It is about giving those on the front line a seat at the table.

Concerns were raised about potential conflicts of interest. I asked that the committee seek formal advice from the Integrity Commissioner who provided both written advice and appeared at the public hearing on 23 April. The commissioner advised that she did not have any concern and that any potential conflicts could easily be managed. It should be noted that there have been clinicians on some health and hospital boards previously. Further, she advised us that the existing framework for managing conflicts of interest was adequate and further amendments were not required.

These amendments will come into effect on 1 April 2026, aligning with the end of a major cycle of board appointments. That gives Queensland Health the time needed to recruit the right people and to support a smooth transition.

I turn now to the second part of the bill—reforms to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998. Let me say this plainly: the illegal tobacco and vape trade in Queensland has exploded in recent years. Under Labor, it flourished in plain sight. We saw hundreds of illegal stores selling to children, dodging regulation and undermining public safety. I have seen this firsthand across my electorate with what feels like an illegal tobacco and vape store at every corner.

Between 2017 and 2023, the rate of vaping amongst Queensland high school students has tripled—tripled—and we know from the Cancer Council that young people who vape are 29 times more likely to start smoking traditional cigarettes. This is not just a minor health concern; it is a looming public health crisis.

The Crisafulli government has responded with action. Since our government was elected, Queensland Health has seized more than 250,000 vapes. In March this year, we led Operation Appaloosa, the largest seizure of illicit tobacco and vapes by any health agency in the country. That operation netted more than 76,000 vapes, 19 million cigarettes and 3.6 tonnes of loose tobacco, with a street value of over \$120 million.

But with that success has come a challenge: once seized these products must be stored, sometimes for months, while legal processes play out. That means higher costs, greater risks of fire or toxic leaks and a mounting environmental burden.

During committee hearings, we heard reports that it could cost as high as \$65,000 per unit to store vapes at a local hospital and health service while waiting for proceedings to be completed. That is why this bill introduces the power for the immediate forfeiture of seized vapes. In other words, if they are illegal they can be destroyed without delay—no more unnecessary storage, no more fire risk; just a clear, fast response that keeps our community safe.

This bill also introduces a new cost recovery power for the courts. If someone is convicted of illegally selling vapes or tobacco, they can now be ordered to pay the full cost of enforcement. It is simple: if you profit from breaking the law, you should pay for the damage that you caused. Since we have introduced these reforms, we have seen real results. In just one week in April, illegal traders were hit with over \$5 million in fines. To put that in context, Labor averaged less than \$250,000 a week when they were in charge. We have seized \$468,000 in assets from dodgy tobacco retailers and taken the fight to more than 20 stores across South-East Queensland. These changes send a strong message: the days of looking the other way are over.

I want to acknowledge the many stakeholders who contributed to our committee's inquiry into the bill from hospital boards to public health advocates to integrity experts, including the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners and the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia. They particularly raised issues of product circularity and that disposal is a huge issue. While this legislation makes provision for the cost recovery of illicit products, there is still more to be done in terms of the full cycle of disposal. It is important to note that the Product Lifecycle Responsibility Bill recently passed in New South Wales may be something that we will need to refer to as we continue to make improvements to what has been a very broken system under Labor. I look forward to further reforms by the Crisafulli government. While these laws give further powers to the department for dealing with illicit traders, it still leaves open an issue around online retailers that are based and operating in and outside of Queensland. The committee still has concerns around online retailers, particularly those who are seeking to get around the laws by masquerading as pharmacies.

In closing, I do want to thank my fellow committee members for their contribution and participation in the process. I want to thank the secretariat for their hard work in arranging public briefings, for assisting in compiling the final report and for their ongoing work. This legislation is needed to protect Queenslanders. It is built on the simple principle that Queenslanders deserve a health system that works for them, one that listens to its front line and one that tackles emerging threats and puts the community first. I am happy to commend this bill to the House.