



Speech By
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QUEENSLAND INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH BILL 2025

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.23 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025. First of all, I will say how pleased I am to support a bill that modernises one of Queensland's oldest and most respected research institutions. For Toowoomba, this comes at the right time. We are currently developing a single campus hospital on a great parcel of land in Toowoomba. It is poised to become not only a regional hub for medical services but also a great opportunity for expanding medical research, clinical trials and various innovations that might suit people who live west of the divide in regional and remote Queensland. Our city can take direct benefit from the partnerships, training and career pathways that this legislation will support.

Before I go too much further into it I want to make a particular comment concerning my good friend Clive Berghofer AM and his contribution. He has proven himself to be one of Australia's most generous citizens as well as a former mayor of Toowoomba and a former member of this House, so his contribution has been great. To this institution back in 2013 he donated \$50 million, which is a substantial donation. In recognition of that, 'Berghofer' was added onto the end of QIMR. When people from Toowoomba drive to the airport and see the sign they feel very proud that one of our favourite citizens made such a great philanthropic donation. It is one of the single largest donations in Australia's history.

Obviously this has helped the institution expand its work in cancer, genetics and mental health and ensures that research can be well funded to serve the people of Queensland. This just goes to show how an institution like this can be supported and shaped to serve Queensland, particularly those regional Queenslanders who know that innovation in medical research is critical to serve our way of life. Regional Queenslanders live a slightly different lifestyle to other Queenslanders, so when medical problems come up involving different symptoms, different diseases or whatever, they need specific research. To have this institution based in Queensland is very important, and to make sure it is modern and effective is the duty of a minister. This also embodies the spirit of Toowoomba. The institute is out there on the cutting edge looking for innovation, making sure it is well-researched, practical and community minded, so all of those things are very important.

I will go into a bit of detail on the bill itself. As we have heard from many people, it repeals and replaces a bill from 1945, almost 80 years ago. It is good to make sure that legislation is fit for purpose. I have heard the opposition on many occasions talk about various pieces of legislation and how they need to be kept up to date and made to fit the circumstances of our environment here and now. The fact that we have a fit-for-purpose governance framework for QIMR that aligns with contemporary standards of integrity and transparency is a great move forward. You would like to think that people are always going to do the right thing, but there is nothing like a bit of transparency and a few integrity checks along the way to make sure people keep on the straight and narrow. I am sure in this august institution they always have.

A really important part is that in terms of research it is competing for funding, access and people all around the world, so to keep it well governed, globally connected and competitive means it needs to be nimble. It needs to be able to make adjustments, particularly in a world where AI and other things are developing. If there are changes required or if there is a skill set required, it needs to be able to make that change in an effective and timely manner.

Some key reforms include commercialisation and incentive payments, which are obviously very important. This introduces a fairer and more flexible reward structure to help the people who have research successes. I fundamentally believe in getting paid for your hard work. If you have a particularly innovative approach and you have had a breakthrough in research, you should certainly be able to benefit from that. Having a more flexible and fairer methodology of doing that is very important, so it will remove some of the rigid bonuses and introduce inclusive incentive payments, recognising that the whole team is behind a medical breakthrough and not just a few inventors. I think that is really important.

This is going to be about collaboration. If we are going to get the breakthroughs, we need a whole team of people working, so having a flexible reward system that ensures the team is getting the benefit from that is great. The caps will be adjusted to reflect a modern collaboration—with \$10 million per project and \$5 million per person per financial year. Again, we need to make sure this is kept up to date and current because it is important.

The bill aligns QIMR governance with the Hospital Foundations Act 2018, and this is important. It is interesting that that act was introduced under a Labor government and this is aligning with that, yet others are critical of this. The bill enables the minister to obtain criminal history information for council members and strengthens transparency in financial oversight. I do not think anyone can disagree with that; it seems like a good, modern way to approach the governance of such an august institution. Obviously, that will lead to improved community confidence and accountability.

The bill transfers council appointment powers from Governor in Council to the health minister. It is interesting that those opposite seem to think that is very controversial. If they are in government, it means they too can be more responsive and faster and make sure they can keep up to date. That is something they obviously do not value, and we know that because of the way they governed Queensland for the last 10 years.

The bill allows the QIMR council to appoint its own director with ministerial approval and to appoint acting directors for up to six months. If people are headhunted and poached for similar institutions around the world, particularly if they are having great success, we need to be able to act swiftly and concisely to make sure Queensland is looked after. It is a good idea to make the minister able to do that.

The bill will simplify some of the delegation powers, meeting procedures and the handling of gifts and donations. We should be encouraging all of those gifts and donations to such a great institution. I am sure at some stage we will hear Clive's name mentioned again, because he is such a generous man who has always made sure that research is being done to enable good outcomes for Queenslanders.

This bill is important to Queenslanders because our population is growing and aging. I am feeling the signs of that myself.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr WATTS: I am hoping they can work out various things to ensure that as I approach my 60s my prime returns. That is a few years away yet.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kempton): Member, I hope you come back to the long title soon.

Mr WATTS: It is important that we are researching contemporary matters. An aging population will bring challenges not only for medical research but also for medical services. This institution is about making sure we are at the cutting edge and looking for solutions that are appropriate for our population. We are making sure the minister can ensure that its governance is nimble and that donations and contributions are made in a contemporary way. We really want to make sure this institution thrives into the future and remains a world leader and one of our most powerful research institutions here in Queensland.

Other members have spoken about the QIMR success stories, including the melanoma risk calculator and TMS depression trials. QIMR have also delivered various cancer drugs. I support the bill. I thank Clive very much and I thank the minister for a great piece of legislation.