

Speech By

Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Dr ROWAN (Moggill—LNP) (5.56 pm): I rise to support the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. This is a practical omnibus bill that strengthens Queensland's health legislation across several important areas. It supports the delivery of new and expanded health infrastructure, protects our community pharmacy models, strengthens the enforcement response to illicit tobacco and improves the operation of several public health and mental health provisions. These are sensible reforms that will support safe professional practice, improve patient outcomes and strengthen Queensland's public health system.

The Health, Environment and Innovation Committee received 35 submissions during its examination of the bill. Stakeholders were broadly supportive, particularly with respect to elements of the state government's public health and pharmacy reforms. I note that the committee made one recommendation, that the bill be passed, and that there was no statement of reservation.

It is a matter of record that the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government inherited a health system that was under immense pressure following a decade of decline under the former Labor government. Ambulance ramping had tripled under Labor. The elective surgery waitlist had almost doubled, increasing from over 35,000 patients to more than 64,000 patients by September 2024, before peaking at more than 66,000 patients in December 2024. Labor's failed capacity expansion program was characterised by unrealistic promises, inadequate planning, serious design flaws and a $7 billion cost blowout. An independent review found that not one new or expanded hospital project was expected to be delivered within its original funding envelope or timeframe.

An opposition member interjected.

Dr ROWAN: I know Labor opposition members like to interject but they do not like to hear about their record when it comes to health care in Queensland and the lack of infrastructure that was built, the poorer service delivery outcomes and the fact that the health workforce was decimated under the former Palaszczuk-Miles Labor government. The former Labor state government announced projects without properly scoping them, without providing adequate funding and, in some instances, without including essential facilities such as surgical theatres, pharmacies and pathology services.

We know that the former Labor government was in bed with the CFMEU. They were not doing anything to address the misogyny, bullying, harassment, intimidation and all the other matters that have been well and truly canvassed by and are coming out through the royal commission inquiry into the CFMEU and the fact that the Labor Party aided and abetted the CFMEU.

When it comes to health infrastructure planning here in Queensland, the Crisafulli state government is now undertaking the difficult but essential work required to repair the damage, to build that infrastructure and to restore health services for Queenslanders. We have started to see some improvements, but we know there is so much more to be done, particularly after 10 years of decline under the former Labor government.

Ramping is trending down, with the statewide rate falling to 35.5 per cent in the June quarter of 2026—the lowest quarterly rates since December 2020. The elective surgery waiting list has also fallen to its lowest level in two years, representing an 11.6 reduction from Labor's peak. Again, I know that the Labor opposition do not like hearing the facts and do not like hearing the numbers, but certainly that is the record being achieved under the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government. I certainly have to acknowledge the health minister, the Hon. Tim Nicholls MP, the member for Clayfield, for all of the work he is doing. Through Surgery Connect, our government is investing $1.8 billion over four years to deliver additional procedures and reduce the time Queenslanders spend waiting for care.

As a former president of the Australian Medical Association, I understand the importance of ensuring patients can access appropriate health services regardless of where they live, right across Queensland, whether that be in urban areas or in rural or regional parts of our state. I also understand the value of a health system which supports its clinicians, plans infrastructure properly and directs resources towards better patient care. The fact that the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government has already added 10,000 additional health workers demonstrates the scale of our commitment to rebuilding capacity throughout the health system. The amendments to the Hospital and Health Boards Act will assist Queensland Health to plan and progress future health infrastructure according to health priorities and delivery timeframes.

Another important element of this bill concerns the Pharmacy Business Ownership Act 2024. Community pharmacies are an essential part of Queensland's health system. For many Queenslanders, particularly those living in rural and regional Queensland, their local pharmacist is one of the most accessible and trusted health professionals available to them. Our community pharmacy model recognises that medicines are not ordinary consumer products. Their dispensing requires professional advice, appropriate clinical oversight and a clear focus on patient safety. Existing legislation prevents a community pharmacy from being directly accessible from a supermarket in a physical retail environment, and this bill ensures the same principle applies online.

Before issuing a pharmacy business licence, the Queensland Pharmacy Business Ownership Council will need to be satisfied that there are no prohibited promotional arrangements between the pharmacy business, or its franchisor, and a supermarket business. This will help maintain a clear distinction between essential medicines and ordinary grocery products. It also protects a patient centred, health professional led model of care in which ownership and control remain with pharmacists rather than supermarkets or other large commercial interests.

This legislation also strengthens Queensland's response to illicit tobacco. It amends the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act to remove the show cause and appeal provisions that presently apply to seized illicit tobacco and nicotine pouches. This will align their treatment with the existing approach to seize vapes, allowing these illegal products to be forfeited immediately and destroyed promptly. This is a straightforward enforcement reform. Once illicit tobacco or nicotine products have been lawfully seized, they should not remain in storage for extended periods while unnecessary administrative processes are undertaken.

These amendments build on the nation-leading laws passed by the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government last year. Those laws gave Queensland Health stronger powers to close illegal businesses, seize illicit products, undertake undercover operations and hold commercial landlords accountable when they knowingly permit unlawful activity. The results demonstrate why decisive action was necessary. Between November 2025 and June 2026, authorities seized more than 42 million illicit cigarettes, approximately 380,000 vapes, 6.5 tonnes of loose tobacco and more than 850,000 nicotine pouches. The combined estimated value of those seizures was approximately $58 million.

That enforcement record stands in stark contrast to Labor's weak response, which allowed hundreds of illicit tobacco and vape stores to appear across Queensland. Under the former government's laws, public health officers could not even issue on-the-spot fines to stores caught supplying illicit vapes or seize illegal nicotine pouches. The Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government has given enforcement officers the powers they need, and this bill will make those powers more efficient by ensuring seized illicit products can be destroyed without unnecessary delay.

Finally, this legislation contains a range of other amendments to improve the operation of Queensland's health legislation. This includes amendments supporting the operation of the Mental Health Act, measures to facilitate higher rates of adolescent immunisation, improvements to the monitoring of hepatitis C, and several minor administrative and consequential amendments. Individually, many of those changes are technical. Collectively, they contribute to a safer, more responsive and more effective health system.

This bill reflects the Crisafulli state government's practical approach to health reform. It supports the delivery of health infrastructure, protects independent community pharmacies, strengthens action against illicit tobacco and improves public health arrangements. After a decade of Labor mismanagement, Queenslanders expect a government that will focus on delivery, support frontline health professionals and make the health system work better for patients. As such, this bill advances that work. I commend the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 to the House.

It is terrific to have a state government in Queensland that is focused on the health system here, delivering infrastructure and delivering services for the benefit of not only patients but also health professionals right across Queensland. We saw that the former Labor government did nothing when it came to our health system. We had a decade of decline, very similar to the Beattie and Bligh Labor years when our hospital system was left in complete chaos. In fact, the former Labor premier Bligh was going to break up the Department of Health because they could not manage that whole department. You will remember there were clinical governance failures. They had the Patel debacle and all of those circumstances in relation to Bundaberg, there was the fake Tahitian prince where there was a lot of fraudulent expenditure of money in the health department, and many other matters.

Here in Queensland we have this amazing bill before us which is delivering significant improvements across the system and is making significant changes. I know that the health minister has worked diligently in bringing this legislation before the House. I certainly would like to acknowledge the committee as well for all of their work and the secretariat in preparing the report. I commend the bill to the House.