

Speech By

Wayde Chiesa

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHIESA (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (6.16 pm): I rise to support the Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. The Crisafulli government is healing Labor's health crisis after a decade of decline, and this bill is another important part of restoring health services for Queenslanders. We inherited a system from Labor where ambulance ramping had tripled and the elective surgery waiting list had almost doubled, eventually peaking at more than 66,000 Queenslanders. Labor's failed hospital capacity expansion program blew out by $7 billion, with projects delayed, underscoped and, in some cases, simply undeliverable.

We are turning that around. Ramping is now trending down, with the June quarter recording the lowest quarterly rate since December 2020. The elective surgery waiting list has fallen to its lowest level in more than two years. We have added 10,000 additional health workers. For regional Queenslanders who have to travel for health care, we have delivered an $11.7 million uplift to the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, increasing the subsidy from 35 cents to 45 cents per kilometre. It is now the most generous rate in the nation. There is still more to do, but Queensland's health system is heading in the right direction.

This bill continues that work. It strengthens our ability to deliver health infrastructure, protects Queensland's community pharmacy model and gives our public health officers stronger tools to tackle illicit tobacco and nicotine products.

One of the most significant reforms relates to health infrastructure. The Crisafulli government's Hospital Rescue Plan is delivering three new hospitals, 10 major hospital expansions and new and upgraded health facilities across Queensland, and North Queensland is benefiting. Labor's failed capacity expansion plan for Townsville University Hospital blew out by $500 million—from $530 million to more than a billion dollars—and was delayed by at least two years. Critically, Labor's plan did not even include a pharmacy, a sterilising department or a link bridge to the existing hospital. We are fixing that. Our Hospital Rescue Plan will deliver more than 165 new overnight beds at Townsville University Hospital by 2029, with procurement progressing to select the contractor to deliver the expansion. By removing Labor's costly BPIC arrangements, we are already getting better value for Queensland taxpayers.

Mr MELLISH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. It is a broad bill, but he is not really being relevant to the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McDonald): I believe that many members have been very broad in their speeches and thanking their health services. I did not think it was anything obscure. Member, please continue with your contribution and remain relevant to the bill.

Mr CHIESA: I will, Mr Deputy Speaker, especially in relation to removing BPIC arrangements. I am sure those opposite would like to read the *Courier-Mail* today and the reporting in relation to what has happened. Please do so.

On the Townsville University Hospital car park alone, removing BPIC will see savings of around $90,000 per parking space, meaning the new facility will almost be double the size. Imagine how much more bang for buck we could have made removing BPIC earlier! This is what better productivity means in the real world: getting more infrastructure for taxpayers' money. This bill helps us continue that work.

Currently, when Queensland Health needs to acquire land for health infrastructure, that process is undertaken on its behalf through another department. This bill allows Queensland Health to directly lead that process, including acquiring land compulsorily or by agreement for health infrastructure purposes. Compulsory acquisition is never the preferred option. It is a measure of last resort. Importantly, existing safeguards remain including notice, objection and compensation processes. When land is required, Queensland Health will be able to directly engage with affected individuals and communities and progress acquisitions according to health priorities and project timeframes. That is practical reform designed to help us deliver the health infrastructure Queenslanders need.

This bill also protects Queensland's community pharmacy model. This is particularly important to regional communities like those I represent. Across Hinchinbrook, from the northern suburbs of Townsville through to Ingham, Cardwell and Tully, our community pharmacies are an important part of the local health system. For many people, the local pharmacy is more than somewhere to collect a prescription. It is accessible, it is local and it is trusted. Our pharmacists know their communities and strong pharmacy ownership laws help ensure those businesses can remain locally owned and operated. Existing legislation restricts supermarkets from operating pharmacy businesses and prevents community pharmacies being directly accessible from supermarkets. This bill ensures those principles apply equally online. Because medicines are not ordinary consumer goods and a pharmacy is not simply another supermarket aisle, Queenslanders should continue to receive the professional advice and oversight that comes with a pharmacist-led model of care. As technology changes the way people shop, we should not allow it to undermine the principles that protect our community pharmacies.

The bill also strengthens our fight against illicit tobacco and nicotine products. The updated enforcement figures demonstrate exactly why this matters. In just eight months, between November 2025 and June this year, more than 42 million illicit cigarettes, 380,000 vapes and 6.5 tonnes of loose tobacco have been seized across Queensland. The estimated value of those seizures is almost $60 million. This is not just a Brisbane problem. In the Townsville Public Health Unit region alone, officers conducted 205 inspections and seized more than 1.5 million illicit cigarettes, more than 11,700 vapes, over 11,000 nicotine pouches and more than 250 kilograms of loose tobacco. Twenty-three 90-day closure orders have been issued in the Townsville region. That is enforcement happening in our own backyard.

It stands in stark contrast to Labor's weak laws, under which hundreds of illegal tobacco and vape stores were allowed to operate in plain sight. We strengthened those laws last year. Illegal businesses can now be shut for 90 days, rather than just three. Landlords have stronger powers and responsibilities, and Queensland Health officers can conduct undercover operations. This bill goes another step. It removes show cause and appeal provisions for seized illicit tobacco and nicotine pouches, bringing them into line with the approach already applying to vapes. That allows these illegal products to be forfeited immediately and promptly destroyed. That is common sense. If our public health officers seize illegal products, those products should not sit around unnecessarily. Seize them, forfeit them and destroy them.

The bill also makes important amendments to mental health and public health legislation, including measures aimed at increasing adolescent immunisation uptake and improving hepatitis C monitoring. The Health, Environment and Innovation Committee received 35 submissions, with stakeholders largely supportive, particularly of the public health and pharmacy reforms. The committee made one recommendation—that the bill be passed. There was no dissenting report.

The Crisafulli government is restoring health services for Queenslanders. We are reducing waiting lists, we are investing in our health workforce, we are delivering the Hospital Rescue Plan, we are getting better value for health infrastructure and we are making sure regional Queenslanders get their fair share. This bill supports that work. It helps deliver the infrastructure Queenslanders need, protects the community pharmacy model Queenslanders trust and gives our public health officers stronger tools to protect our communities. They are practical reforms that strengthen our health system and deliver better health services for Queenslanders. I support this bill.