

# Media Release

**Ingrid Stitt MP**  
Minister for Workplace Safety  
Minister for Early Childhood



Thursday, 16 September 2021

## **NATION-FIRST CARE FOR VICTORIAN TRADIES AGAINST SILICOSIS**

Victorian stonemasons at risk of silicosis will be able to get free world-class health screenings and treatments thanks to a landmark partnership between WorkSafe and The Alfred.

Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt today announced Australia's only dedicated public hospital occupational respiratory clinic, The Alfred Occupational Respiratory Clinic.

For the first time, eligible workers in the stonemason industry can now undergo a full health assessment for silicosis and receive both their health outcome and a treatment plan during a one-day clinic visit. This will reduce time off work and take away much of the stress and anxiety of waiting for results.

The clinic builds on the work of WorkSafe's free silica health screening program, which was launched in May 2019 as part of the Andrews Labor Government's comprehensive plan to protect workers from exposure to crystalline silica and provide ongoing care to those affected.

More than 90 per cent of Victoria's estimated 1,400 past and present stonemasons have since registered for screening. While reaching this registration milestone is an achievement, tragically there have been 168 claims to WorkSafe following positive diagnoses for silicosis.

A fast-tracked compensation process is in place for affected workers and their families so they can get the personalised treatment and support they need.

The clinic will provide a central location for assessments of eligible workers in the stonemason industry and an ongoing centre for those with a positive diagnosis to manage their illness.

Stonemasons are at a particularly high risk of silicosis due to working with engineered stone which contains high concentrations of crystalline silica.

The Government's *Silica Action Plan* includes a state-wide ban on the uncontrolled dry-cutting of engineered stone, a tough new compliance code, developing Australia's first licencing scheme and an enforcement blitz by WorkSafe inspectors.

### **Quote attributable to Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt**

*"Silicosis has had a debilitating effect on too many tradies – this partnership will mean many people facing this horrible disease will be able to get the care and support they deserve from a dedicated team of health professionals."*

### **Quote attributable to WorkSafe CEO Colin Radford**

*"Silica health screening and treatment is often a stressful experience for workers and their families, which is why having a centralised clinic to manage their health journey will make such a difference."*

### **Quote attributable to Alfred Health Chief Executive Professor Andrew Way**

*"Responding to the public health needs of our community is what we do best. Our specialist respiratory team will offer holistic care of this disease, while investigating new treatment technologies to improve health outcomes."*

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