

Media Release

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MORE SUPPORT FOR SILICA-AFFECTED WORKERS AND FAMILIES

Workers and families affected by the devastating effects of silicosis and similar occupational diseases can now access more support to get compensation thanks to changes from the Andrews Labor Government to occupational health and safety laws.

Changes made under the *Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Act 2022* which come into effect today recognise the progressive and ongoing nature of diseases such as silicosis.

The reforms mean eligible workers no longer need to prove that their injury has stabilised to access lump sum payments, while workers who have already received compensation for certain occupational diseases can now apply for additional benefits if they develop a further related disease or injury.

Greater support is also now available to Victorians who require a lung transplant due to a work-related injury and compensation for counselling services has been extended to families of workers with an eligible progressive disease.

It comes after a WorkSafe review of compensation arrangements found that the former benefit evaluation process did not consider the difficulties in assessing diseases that deteriorate rapidly or over a long period of time.

Separate reforms also taking effect today deliver further support to families of deceased workers and acknowledge the hardships and challenges they may face following a workplace death.

This includes recognising the additional needs of certain dependants by extending the child support pension from the age of 16 to the age of 25 for children living with a disability and allowing an appointed trustee to receive provisional payments of behalf of a person with a disability or a minor.

Families of injured workers receiving household help services will continue to be provided with help for six months after the worker's death. Compensation is also now available for costs incurred outside of Australia related to the funeral, burial, cremation, or repatriation of a deceased worker's body.

The changes complement the Labor Government's Silica Action Plan, which includes Australia's first licensing scheme for businesses working with engineered stone, a permanent ban on dry-cutting of the product and free health screenings for Victoria's past and present stonemasons.

Anyone working with engineered stone is at high risk of exposure to respirable crystalline silica dust, which can lead to deadly lung and respiratory diseases such as silicosis.

While there have been no silicosis-related workplace fatalities in Victoria so far this year, WorkSafe has received 26 workers compensation claims for silica related diseases since January.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt

"Sadly, we know that silicosis and other related illnesses will continue to have a debilitating impact on far too many Victorian workers, and their families, for some time to come."

"That's why we have strengthened the available support for affected workers, especially those who may have previously had difficulties in accessing the help they deserve due to the nature of this terrible disease."

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