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For Information:

**The Hon. Kelly O'Dwyer MP**

**The Hon. Greg Hunt MP**

To whom it may concern,

**Re: Silicosis epidemic in Queensland**

The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) is the only health professional peak body in respiratory health in Australia and New Zealand. TSANZ has approximately 1600 members working in all areas of respiratory health and medical research across Australia and New Zealand. Our mission is to "lead, support and enable all health workers and researchers to prevent, cure and relieve disability from lung disease."

Members of TSANZ first contacted SafeWork authorities regarding the possibility of an epidemic of silicosis in artificial stone workers in 2016. Concerns were raised about excessive exposure to free silica and lack of compliance with existing regulations, with resultant risks to workers health.

However, it wasn't until August 2018, that a concerted effort to conduct surveillance on workers took place in Qld. Since early September 2018, more than 30 workers have been documented with the rapidly progressive form of this totally preventable disease in Queensland alone. It is estimated that there will be 300 new cases in Queensland alone by the end of 2018, and 150 with progressive massive fibrosis (PMF). PMF inevitably leads to severe disability and death in such workers. Estimates suggest that more than 2,500 cases of silicosis exist throughout Australia now, with many workers still being exposed and likely to develop disease. There currently is no effective treatment for silicosis other than lung transplantation.

TSANZ is very concerned about this.

TSANZ urges SafeWork Australia to take the following actions:

1. Identify all businesses where exposure to artificial stone occurs, with assessment of dust levels and identification of all potentially affected workers
2. Actively enforce regulations regarding stone benchtop manufacture and cutting in every state of Australia, including banning of dry cutting, measurement of dust levels and use of effective dust suppression measures.
3. Consider banning the product or substituting this with a less dangerous product in workplaces where adequate dust suppression measures cannot be demonstrated.
4. Ensure that all workers are screened for disease using internationally recommended methods for respiratory surveillance and appropriate blood tests.
5. Implement a national surveillance program and make occupational lung diseases notifiable to a national disease registry
6. Urgently fund relevant research in this area

Yours sincerely,

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