

Submission  
No 4

**INQUIRY INTO WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY  
AMENDMENT (INFORMATION EXCHANGE) BILL 2020**

**Organisation:** Unions NSW  
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# Inquiry into the Work Health and Safety Amendment (Information Exchange) Bill 2020

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## **Introduction**

Unions NSW welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Legislative Council's Law and Justice Committee on the Inquiry into the Work Health and Safety Amendment (Information Exchange) Bill 2020.

Unions NSW supports the submissions of our affiliate unions.

Unions NSW is the peak body for NSW Unions. Unions NSW represents approximately 60 affiliated unions comprising over 600 000 members. These unions represent a diverse range of workers from both blue and white-collar industries.

Unions NSW supports the introduction of a dust diseases register and has made a clear case for the necessity of such a register since the re-emergence of silicosis, a life-threatening disease, (possibly present in thousands of workers due to their exposure to crystalline silica), has become well known.

## **The Urgent Need for an Occupational Dust Lung Disease Register**

Unions NSW understands that there is a significant gap in the reported instances of silicosis recorded by SafeWork NSW statistics and the actual spread of the disease. We support the calls for a centralised, comprehensive health surveillance and occupational lung diseases national register by the Lung Foundation Australia, the Thoracic

Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) and the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM)<sup>1</sup>.

Exposure to high concentrations of silica comes often as a result of the installation of manufactured stone benchtops in residential kitchens and bathrooms, or during underground tunnelling projects.

Thoracic specialists are extremely concerned by the growing number of young workers presenting with this disease. The prognosis for these workers is very poor. Many present when the disease is advanced, and the patient's quality of life has significantly deteriorated. No viable treatment is available other than lung transplant. These workers often have very little time left and are dying in their 20's and 30's. These deaths are preventable.

NSW should be leading the country in working towards preventing occupational lung diseases by establishing a dust lung disease register.

The Work Health and Safety Amendment (Information Exchange) Bill 2020 does not create a such a register.

Unions NSW urges the Committee to consider an Amendment Bill that creates a register of notifiable dust lung diseases similar to the Queensland model.

The tracking and tracing of patients who present with dust diseases will assist health practitioners and the Regulator to identify workplaces where workplace breaches and poor practices exist.

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<sup>1</sup> Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice, First Review of the Dust Diseases Scheme, Report 61 August 2017 at 2.40 ff.

Currently workers are unlikely to report safety breaches fearing the loss of their employment. Many are reluctant to be tested also fearing the loss of employment. A Register will allow for workplaces to be identified and workers to be tested once one worker has been identified. This may allow for the early detection of disease which may assist in the treatment of disease improving quality and longevity of life.

## **Summary**

Unions NSW would endorse an amendment based on the changes to the *Queensland Public Health Act 2005* and the Public Health Regulation 2018 as a response to the emergence of occupational lung diseases. These legislative changes provided Queensland with the framework to establish a notifiable dust lung disease register. This allows for Queensland Health to monitor and analyse data. Ultimately the purpose of such a register should be to work towards the elimination of preventable occupational dust and lung diseases.