

POLICY & ADVOCACY REPORT

Report for quarter Q1 January to March 2023

This report is valid until end of March 2023

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians

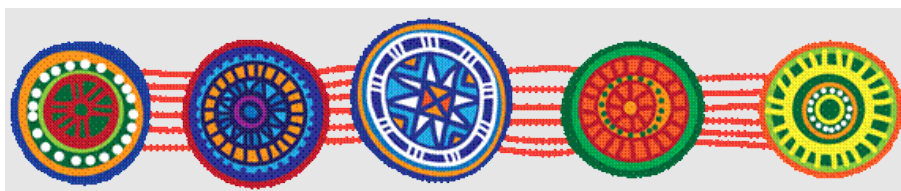
The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of over 20,000 physicians and almost 10,000 trainee physicians, across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The RACP represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, infectious diseases medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine, and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients and the community.

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We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians and Elders – past, present and emerging – of the lands and waters on which RACP members and staff live, learn and work. The RACP acknowledges Māori as tangata whenua and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.





Highlights

- The RACP has released the **2023 Pre-Budget Submission to the Australian Treasury**. The submission outlines the College's policy and advocacy priorities for the next Budget, with a focus on delivering systemic improvements to the health sector and ensuring equitable health and wellbeing outcomes for all Australians. The submission will be the basis for our media- and MP-facing advocacy in the run up to the May 2023 Budget.
- A productive meeting between RACP President Dr Jacqueline Small and Health Minister Mark Butler took place on 19 January 2023. The meeting covered a range of College priorities, focusing on issues such as the key role of specialists in multidisciplinary integrated/community care and workforce issues related to specialist shortages and burnout. The meeting has been a part of ongoing College advocacy for better integration of specialists in multidisciplinary care and the need for systemic support for physicians and other health care workers as they deal with burnout.
- In early March, EGM Policy and Advocacy, Ms Nicola Lewis, held a range of meetings with Canberra-based DoHaC officials and Parliamentary staffers to promote our reform agenda, prevention and equity asks and campaigns for children's health and climate change and health.
- RACP President, Dr Jacqueline Small, attended the National Early Years Summit in Canberra on 17 February. The event brought together around 100 attendees from a range of stakeholders to inform the development of the Commonwealth Early Years Strategy. The Strategy aims to provide a road map to guide early years' policies and programs across the Commonwealth for the next decade, providing a vision of what Australia wants to achieve for children and families in the early years. The Strategy will be led by Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, in partnership with Minister for Early Education, Dr Anne Aly.
- In response to the College's NSW election statement and advocacy, the new ALP Government has committed to:
 - building new preschools as part of a commitment to "universal preschool for four-year-olds before 2030".
 - funding an additional 250 school counsellors as a mental health promotion measure.
 - long-term structural reform to the healthcare system by introducing minimum and enforceable Safe Staffing Levels to public hospitals, starting with emergency departments and then progressively out into other areas.
 - convening a drug summit in its first term to bring together health and medical experts, police, drug user organisations, families, and other stakeholders to build consensus on the way NSW deals with drug misuse.

- Recent national media attention on the accelerated silicosis epidemic, which has been slow to be addressed in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, has opened opportunity for Lead Fellows and the College to drive key calls to action that have lagged (see the media section in this report). Out of this has come front page print media coverage, television and radio spotlights for the RACP spokesperson, Dr Graeme Edwards FAFOEM. The RACP President and AFOEM President wrote a joint letter to the recent Standing Council of WHS ministers meeting (28 February 2023) called to address this issue, proposing three key areas for undelayed action. The AoNZ spokesperson, Dr Alexandra Muthu, has also been interviewed regarding address in AoNZ (1 March 2023). A meeting with AFOEM representatives and Worksafe NZ, including Dr Muthu was arranged to discuss progress on this issue in December 2022.

Advocacy campaign updates

- NSW Election: The NSW Election Statement has been published and promoted via media and social media. The statement was distributed to relevant NSW Members of Parliament on behalf of the Chair of the NSW-ACT Regional Committee. As part of the development of the election statement, state-specific policy recommendations for the Healthy Climate Future and Kids COVID Catch Up campaigns were devised, in consultation with members. The recommendations have featured in dedicated NSW election pages on each of the campaign websites and in eye-catching social media posts, tagging relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers. Through the Kids COVID Catch Up campaign, letters from the President and NSW-ACT Committee were sent to the NSW Education and Early Learning Minister and Shadow Minister calling for increased investment in early childhood education. A positive election announcement from the NSW Government on early childhood education followed this advocacy. The NSW pre-election statement also reiterated the College's commitment to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years.



- **AoNZ Election:** A survey of AoNZ members, regarding their priorities for advocacy in the AoNZ General Election (October 2023), is underway. A public affairs agency based in Wellington has been contracted to provide research and analysis of key AoNZ election issues, Government and Opposition positions, and advocacy opportunities for the RACP. The survey results and external analysis will be presented to members to inform decisions about the focus of the election campaign.
- **Australian Federal Campaigns:** 2023 campaign plans have been developed for both the Kids Catch Up Campaign and the Healthy Climate Future Campaign. The plans are designed to both engage supporters and to further policy outcomes. In the first half of 2023, the Kids COVID Catch Up campaign will focus on regulation of junk food advertising to children, in order to take advantage of the opportunity presented by a Private Members Bill in the Federal Parliament. In 2023, the Healthy Climate Future campaign will focus on strengthening the development of the Australian Government's National Climate, Health and Wellbeing Strategy to ensure it is comprehensive and appropriately funded.

CPAC Plan Focus Areas

1 First Nations Health and Equity

Raise the Age

- The College continues to actively support the National Raise the Age Campaign. This year, the campaign will focus on the health impacts of incarceration on children and young people and national advocacy for the implementation of the **draft Final Report of the Council of Attorneys-General: Age of Criminal Responsibility**.
- The draft report was released by the Commonwealth Attorney General Mark Dreyfus on 9 December 2022 in response to an Open Letter to the Standing Council of Attorneys' General calling for its release and raising the age of criminal responsibility.



- The College continues to support raise the age advocacy in the regions, and has undertaken a range of advocacy activities, including; a letter co-signed with the Derbal Yerrigan Aboriginal Medical Service on the detainment of children at Banksia Hill Youth Justice Centre, and drafted a letter into the Queensland Government in response to new legislative reforms introducing harsher penalties for youth offenders, which has the potential to increase incarceration rates of young people and children across the state. A key feature of both letters was the need to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years.
- The Victorian Government recently announced that it would introduce a range of youth justice reforms, relating to the bail and incarceration of children. The Premier has also indicated that they are considering raising the criminal age of responsibility in Victoria to 14.
- The ACT Government are set to raise the age of criminal responsibility sometime this year. At this stage, there is no indication that it will be raised to 14, and the RACP continues to work with the RTA Steering Committee to advocate on this issue in the territory.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Committee

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Committee convened on 9 March for the first time this year. A key focus of the meeting was the inclusion of the Indigenous object in the RACP Constitution. Members will vote on the inclusion of the Indigenous object in the Constitution at the next Annual General Meeting, which is scheduled for 5 May 2023. This has been a key priority for ATSIHC.

Indigenous Strategic Framework Steering Committee

- The Indigenous Strategic Framework Steering Committee (the 'ISF Committee') met on 22 March 2022. A key focus of the Committee is improving the governance of the Indigenous Strategic Framework to support to enhance delivery of the key outcomes. This will include review of the Committee's terms of reference, membership and reporting structures.
- Ensuring that Cultural Safety is BAU for all teams at the College is also a priority focus of the Committee.

2 Health reform

- P&A delivered the 2023-2024 **Pre-Budget Submission to the Australian Treasury** and has since produced an **easy read overview** of recommendations as a quick reference guide.
- Key Pre-Budget recommendations for health reform, equity, prevention and the environment are being promoted via social media and media channels in the run up to the May Budget.

- The Health Reform Working Group held its first meeting in early March. The Group is currently developing its workplan which will assist them in prosecuting the case for systemic reforms of health care and the central role of specialists in multidisciplinary integrated care.
- P&A updated and expanded a review on the efficacy of phone telehealth compared to video consultations to identify the evidence base supporting reinstatement of all phone consultations to support ongoing Government-facing advocacy on longer telephone consultations.
- Throughout February and early March, P&A worked closely with partners from the Obesity Policy Coalition and the Obesity Collective to heighten awareness of overweight, obesity, the systemic policies required for tackling obesity and the need to reduce weight stigma in the lead up to World Obesity Day.
- P&A developed the Evolve implementation plan 2022-26 consultation summary and updated the Evolve Implementation plan 2022-2026 as per consultation feedback from DFACS, CPAC and Evolve PAIG. The draft plan will be provided to CPAC for approval soon.
- In February P&A produced 3 Evolve animations to complement existing Evolve Top-5 recommendations for:
 - **The Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology**
 - **The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand Paediatrics**
 - **The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand Adult**
- P&A has promoted the Evolve animations on the **Evolve website**, via social media, the ROC and to the Evolve PAIG. A total of 5 Evolve animations will be promoted on a bi-monthly basis throughout 2023 as per an annual promotional plan.

3 Climate

- On 17 February, the RACP Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) met for the first time to discuss the College's key climate change and health policy and advocacy initiatives, including the National Health and Climate Strategy. The CCHWG provided input on key focus areas for the College's input into the Strategy, particularly around climate health adaptation and health equity. The CCHWG was also interested in what teams across the College were doing in the climate change and health and environmental sustainability space, particularly around education and reducing the College's carbon footprint.
- At the same meeting, the CCHWG resolved to support a proposal regarding the development of a briefing paper on fossil fuel phase out and subsidies from a health perspective, led by the MJA-Lancet team. The paper will outline the health harms of fossil fuels and health opportunities of phaseout. The proposal was considered by CPAC and approved in March. P&A will liaise with

the MJA-Lancet team to progress this matter and liaise with relevant College bodies to provide feedback on the paper.

- On 6 March, P&A met with Assistant Secretary Mr. Stephen Bouwhuis from Environmental Health & Climate Change Branch of Australian Government, Department of Health, who was interested in the College's climate change and health asks and agreed on the importance of seeking funding to implement the National Health and Climate Strategy.
- In January the College provided a **submission on the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care Sustainable Healthcare Module**. The Module is designed to assist healthcare services to include sustainability measures and targets, reduce waste, low value care and unwarranted variation across the healthcare system.
- On Tuesday 7 March a meeting was held with interested members of the Climate Change and Health Multi-College Advisory Committee to discuss adaptation asks and key points to raise in the RACP future feedback on the National Health and Climate Strategy feedback.
- The Healthy Climate Future campaign asks were adapted for the NSW State election. The campaign website was updated with these asks and work underway to grow campaign supporters.

4 Populations in Focus

Paediatrics and Child Health

- PCHD President, Professor Nitin Kapur, attended a health policy roundtable on 10 February. The roundtable hosted by Dr Sophie Scamps MP provided an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input ahead of the drafting a Private Members Bill to ban the unhealthy marketing of junk food to children being led by Dr Scamps.
- RACP President, Dr Jacqueline Small, attended the National Early Years Summit in Canberra on 17 February. The event brought together around 100 attendees from a range of stakeholders to inform the development of the Commonwealth Early Years Strategy. The Strategy aims to provide a road map to guide early years' policies and programs across the Commonwealth for the next decade, providing a vision of what Australia wants to achieve for children and families in the early years. The Strategy will be led by Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, in partnership with Minister for Early Education, Dr Anne Aly.
- Between 19-23 February, RACP President, Dr Jacqueline Small, and PCHD President, Professor Nitin Kapur, attended the International Pediatric Association's (IPA) 30th biennial conference in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India. The conference was hosted together with the 60th Annual Conference of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics. The theme of the conference was Quality of Care for Every Child Everywhere -The international need of the hour. The event provided an

opportunity for the RACP to engage with paediatric specialists, experts, teachers, students, professors, scientists and editors from around the world, with Professor Kapur invited to represent the RACP on the **IPA Standing Committee** which brings together the leaders of paediatric and child health organisations from around the world.

- Revision of the Health Care of Children in Care and Protection Services position statement continues with discussion underway to determine how best to present the document and ensure that First Nations perspective is incorporated.

Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine

- Work on the new position paper on Youth Appropriate Health Care continues. Led by the Youth Appropriate Health Care working group, the position statement will focus on secondary and tertiary level healthcare services and make recommendations which are applicable to the spectrum of services, from large to small, and metropolitan to regional, rural and remote services. An EOI to establish a Youth Advisory Group to incorporate the voice of young people in the development of the position statement is underway.

Disability

- Work continues on the revision of the RACP NDIS Guides for Paediatricians and Physicians, via a commission with the National Disability Services (NDS). It is anticipated that the updated guides will be finalised and published in mid2023.

Rehabilitation

- During late 2022, the AFRM leadership met with RMSANZ to discuss the development of a Bi-National Rehabilitation Strategy, which will be the key area of focus for policy and advocacy for the Faculty this year.

Palliative medicine

- Following Board approval of the AChPM Workplan P&A will be preparing for revision of the **Decision-Making at the End of Life in Infants, Children and Adolescents** position statement. This will be led by the AChPM in collaboration with the PCHD.

Addiction medicine

- Professor John Saunders, President-Elect of the RACP's Australasian Chapter of Addiction Medicine (AChAM), was appointed as the RACP representative to attend a public hearing of the **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs' inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm**. Professor

Saunders is a member of the joint RANZCP/RACP Problem Gambling working group led by the RANZCP.

COVID-19

- The College continues to be represented on various Government COVID-19 committees/taskforces, including the National Clinical Evidence Taskforce, COVID-19 General Practitioner Peak Bodies Advisory Group and COVID-19 Disability Advisory Committee.
- The College is keeping a watching brief on the progress of the Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections, to which a [College submission](#) was made. Led by paediatrician and RACP Fellow, Dr Mike Freeland MP, as Chair, the Committee are currently undertaking public hearings.

Health care of workers

- Occupational respiratory diseases, including accelerated silicosis. AFOEM has a strong collaborative group, the Lead Fellows for Accelerated Silicosis involving TSANZ and RANZCR which has been active since 2018. Recent national media attention on this epidemic, which has been slow to be addressed in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, has opened opportunity for Lead Fellows and the College to drive key calls to action that have lagged (see the media section in this report). Out of this has come front page print media coverage, television and radio spotlights for the RACP spokesperson, Dr Graeme Edwards. The RACP President and AFOEM President wrote a joint letter to the recent Standing Council of WHS ministers meeting (28 February 2023) called to address this issue, proposing three key areas for undelayed action. The AoNZ spokesperson, Dr Alexandra Muthu, has also been interviewed regarding address in AoNZ (1 March 2023). A meeting with AFOEM representatives and Worksafe NZ, including Dr Muthu was arranged to discuss progress on this issue in December 2022.
- Fitness to drive: the medical assessment of commercial drivers is a key issue for AFOEM. Members addressed a draft exposure bill for an ACT framework for mandatory medical reporting which proposed to allow for a scheme that requires health practitioners to notify Access Canberra when they believe a patient has a permanent or long-term illness, injury or incapacity that may impair their fitness to drive a heavy vehicle safely.

Aotearoa New Zealand

Recent Submissions

- [Submission](#) to the Ministry of Health on the Long-Term Insights Briefing on Precision Health in January

- **Submission** to the Justice Committee on the Sale and Supply of Alcohol (Community Participation) Bill in February
- **Submission** to the Ministry of Health on the Proposals for the Smoked Tobacco Regulatory Regime in March

General Election 2023

- The College has begun planning and survey work to find potential areas for advocacy leading into the New Zealand General Election on 14 October 2023. A survey was conducted in March asking members what they believe are priorities for advocacy ahead of the election, based on the following topics:
 - Health workforce
 - Access to healthcare, including care delayed by Covid-19
 - Social determinants of health, as determined by **Make It The Norm**
 - Māori co-governance of health services
 - Impact of climate change on healthcare
- The College also contracted a private Government Relations firm to undertake a political landscape analysis of the New Zealand political environment. This will allow the College to build advocacy and engagement opportunities from existing political policies and statements.
- The Aotearoa New Zealand Policy and Advocacy Committee (AoNZ PAC) will meet in May to discuss the survey results and the landscape analysis. This will help the college develop the advocacy priorities that best represent the member's views.

Regional advocacy

Between January – March 2023 advocacy included:

Northern Territory

- A College submission has been prepared in response to the **Draft Northern Territory Alcohol Action Plan**. The submission highlights the need to address the social determinants of health and health inequalities, cultural safety and the importance of ensuring actions are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the need to address the impacts of alcohol advertising and work with other jurisdictions on a nationally coordinated approach and the need to focus on harm minimisation and outline how services will meet the needs of the population.
- In response to concerns about the increase of alcohol-related violence in Alice Springs, the RACP released a **media statement supporting the re-instatement of alcohol restrictions in the Northern Territory**.
- In the media statement, the College recognised the importance of self-determination and the need for governments to co-operate with First Nations people to gain a full understanding of the Alice Springs community's priorities.

South Australia

- The College was invited to comment on the South Australian *Draft Veteran Wellbeing Action Plan*. As insufficient member feedback was received, an official College response was not possible. However, P&A facilitated individual member feedback to the South Australian Government.

Western Australia

- The RACP has met with Derbarl Yerrigan Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) about the detainment of young people at Casuarina prison, a maximum-security prison for adult males in WA. This came after senior paediatric physicians from WA expressed their concerns to the College.
- A joint letter to the WA Premier has been drafted to be co-signed by the PRACP, CEO, Derbarl Yerrigan AMS, ATSIHC Chair, Chair WA Regional Committee and Chair of PPAC.

NSW pre-election statement

- The College published a pre-election statement in the lead up to the NSW state election on 25 March 2023. The election statement features a range of asks including:
 - Supporting the specialist workforce to meet growing healthcare needs
 - Fostering a culture of wellbeing for physicians and trainee physicians
 - Delivering appropriate and sustainable Urgent Care Clinics
 - Creating a climate-ready and climate-friendly healthcare system (Healthy Climate Future Campaign)
 - Supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people to recover from the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years
 - Reducing harm by responding to drug use as a health issue.
- In response, the new ALP Government has committed to:
 - building new preschools as part of a commitment to “universal preschool for four-year-olds before 2030”.
 - funding an additional 250 school counsellors as a mental health promotion measure.
 - long-term structural reform to the healthcare system by introducing minimum and enforceable Safe Staffing Levels to public hospitals, starting with emergency departments and then progressively out into other areas.
 - convening a drug summit in its first term to bring together health and medical experts, police, drug user organisations, families, and other stakeholders to build consensus on the way NSW deals with drug misuse.

Victoria

- In February 2023, the Victorian Government announced that it would bring legislation before the Parliament to address youth justice, child protection and bail reforms in the state. Premier Andrews gave a strong indication that his Government is intent on raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, stating that 'Victoria was prepared to abandon the national process, and go it alone'.

Queensland

- The College is preparing a letter to the Queensland Government expressing concern about the new laws which are likely to increase the number of children and young people in detention. These laws will adversely affect the health and wellbeing of young people in contact with the youth justice system, and that they will disproportionately impact First Nations young people and their communities.

Submissions and endorsements

January – March 2023

- **Submission** to TGAs Consultation on the proposed reforms to the regulation of nicotine vaping products (NVPs) in Australia
- **Submission** to ACQSHC Sustainable Healthcare Module
- Submission to the DoHA Draft Intellectual Disability Health Core Capabilities
- **Submission** to the Treasury's Budget Paper No 1: Statement 4: Measuring What Matters
- **RACP feedback** to the DoHA draft National Dementia Action Plan 2023 – 2033
- **Submission** to the (AoNZ) Ministry of Health: Long Term Insights Briefing on Precision Health
- **Submission** to the (AoNZ) Justice Committee on the Sale and Supply of Alcohol (Community Participation) Bill
- **Submission** to the Australian Parliamentary Inquiry titled Australia's illicit drug problem: Challenges and opportunities for law enforcement
- Submission to Department of Social Services' consultation on new Act to replace the Disability Services Act 1986 (*not for public release*)
- Endorsement of Doctors for the Environment Green College Guidelines
- **RACP Feedback** on proposed the ACT framework for mandatory medical reporting: Exposure Draft Regulation 2022
- **Submission** on Medical Board of Australia's Draft revised Guidelines for Telehealth consultations with patients
- **Submission** to Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Media and advocacy

February

Media releases:

- [RACP says respiratory protection program must be on agenda to prevent further silicosis deaths \(27 February 2023\)](#)
- ['Accelerated silicosis the tip of the iceberg.' - Physicians call for national approach to protect workers \(20 February 2023\)](#)
- [New research finds singles living alone are at increased risk of unnecessary hospitalisation \(14 February 2023\)](#)
- [Physicians support reinstatement of NT alcohol restrictions, but more community programs needed to support this \(13 February 2023\)](#)
- [RACP welcomes report from Medicare Taskforce and the focus on multidisciplinary care, but patients need more access to specialist care \(3 February 2023\)](#)
- [Patients to suffer without including specialist care in Medicare reform \(2 February 2023\)](#)
- [RACP concerned about trainee burnout as new survey shows increased workload pressures \(1 February 2023\)](#)

Media coverage:

- [Wrapping reactions to the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce report | Croakey, February 3, 2023](#)
- ['Children were invisible': commissioner calls for national kids' minister as part of COVID recovery | The Age, February 12, 2023](#)
- [Unions call on Albanese to enact immediate ban on engineered stone | The Age, 20 February 2023](#)
- [Unions heap pressure over 'asbestosis of the 2020s' | The West Australian, 21 February 2023.](#)
- [Calls to ban silica stone | The Saturday Paper 21 February 2023.](#)
- [Albanese urged to ban toxic material \(attached\) | Sydney Morning Herald, 21 February 2023.](#)
- [Renewed Push to Ban 'asbestos of the 2020s' | Newcastle Herald, 21 February 2023.](#)
- [Silicosis warnings missed: doctor | Sydney Morning Herald, 21 February 2023.](#)
- [Silicosis response tantamount to industrial manslaughter, says expert | The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 February 2023](#)
- [7 News interview with Dr Graeme Edwards FRACP | 27 February 2023.](#)
- ['It's no change': Frustration as ministers defer decision on banning deadly stone | The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 February 2023](#)
- [ABC RN Interview with Minister Burker, referring to RACP as "Royal Australian College of Physicians" | 28 February 2023.](#)
- [5AA Adelaide interview with Dr Graeme Edwards FRACP | 28 February 2023.](#)
- [Sydney Morning Herald \(1 March 2023\) <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/states-and-territories-agree-to-ban-engineered-stone-20230228-p5co5m.html>](#)

Albanese urged to ban toxic material



Angus Thompson, Natassia Chrysanthos

The country's most powerful union bosses are pushing the government to impose an immediate ban on the engineered stone causing disease and death among Australian tradies as Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke flags ending importation before a ministerial gathering next week.

State ministers also backed a ban on the manufactured stone commonly used in kitchen benchtops, while members of the former taskforce on dust disease said government delays on stronger regulations were costing lives.

A joint investigation between the *Herald* and *60 Minutes* revealed workers were battling the debilitating symptoms of silicosis while state-based regulators failed to effectively police workplaces to guard against the

dangers associated with ingesting dust from engineered stone. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the government should respond "as quickly as we can".

"But we want to work this through with state and territory governments, with the industry as well, to make sure there aren't any unintended consequences," he said.

ACTU secretary Sally McManus called for an immediate ban on imports of engineered stone, saying its use should be prohibited "because it's killing people".

Zach Smith, incoming head of the national construction union, called on the federal government to ban the product "as soon as possible" before a union-led ban on use of the product by July 2024.

ACTU deputy secretary Liam O'Brien said the July 2024 deadline for a ban was proposed when authorities were only just beginning to gauge the severity of the problem.

"This ship isn't turning around, it's getting worse," he said. "We can't twiddle our

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Silicosis warnings missed: doctor

EXCLUSIVE

Angus Thompson

A doctor who was key to sounding the alarm on the emerging silicosis epidemic five years ago has described the response of Australian governments to the deadly threat to workers as "tantamount to industrial manslaughter".

Graeme Edwards, a former member of the national dust diseases taskforce and a Royal College of Physicians (RACP) fellow, said the Commonwealth had re-

peatedly missed deadlines for a lifesaving database to combat the dust disease despite agreeing three years ago to create one.

A joint investigation by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *60 Minutes* this month revealed workers exposed to silica dust were battling the debilitating symptoms of the lung disease silicosis while state-based regulators failed to effectively police workplaces to guard against the dangers associated with ingesting dust from engineered stone. **NEWS PAGE 1**

Renewed push to ban the 'asbestos of the 2020s'

THERE'S a fresh push to ban engineered stone commonly used in kitchen benchtops and linked to an incurable lung disease likened to asbestosis.

Engineered stone is cheaper than naturally occurring stone but silica dust created during the manufacturing process can pose a serious health risk.

Diagnosed cases of silicosis have jumped over the past decade and unions are calling on state governments to outlaw the material as they push for stronger protections for 600,000 workers exposed to silica dust.

The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining Energy Union is also threatening to ban members from working with engineered stone by mid next year unless impacts are stopped and measures taken to ensure it is no longer used.

About one in four stone-masons who work with the product suffer from serious lung diseases and workers involved in mining, quarrying, manufacturing, building and construction can also be exposed to silica dust.

Engineered stone is the asbestos of the 2020s, according to the union's incoming national secretary Zach Smith.

"The companies flooding our markets with this cheap and nasty material know (the dangers), but to them profits are more important than people's lives," Mr Smith said.

Asbestos was banned 70 years after the dangers of

the product were first known and Australian Council of Trade Unions assistant secretary Liam O'Brien said authorities should not delay banning engineered stone.

"We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past," Mr O'Brien said on Monday. Stone-mason Kyle Goodwin was just 33 when he was diagnosed with silicosis after years of cutting, shaping and polishing engineered stone benchtops.

He received the devastating diagnosis four-and-a-half years ago and his medical team predicted he had just five years left before the disease claimed his life.

"Instead of planning a funeral, we're planning my funeral," Mr Goodwin says in an advertisement for the campaign. "I used to install kitchen benches. People liked engineered stone because it was cheap. But the dust got into my lungs causing deadly, incurable silicosis. That's too high a price for anyone to pay."

Australian work, health and safety systems have failed to protect workers from preventable occupational diseases, according to the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.

Occupational and environment physician Dr Warren Harter said diagnosed cases of silicosis had jumped in the past 10 years and called for mandatory air quality monitoring in dusty workplaces.

"Accelerated silicosis is just the tip of the iceberg

of dust causing harm to workers, as dust exposure which may cause silicosis and other diseases is common in many occupations across Australia," Dr Harter told reporters.

"These exposures in workers may not be evident until retirement, with chronic obstructive lung disease contributing to a burden on public health expenditure."

The full scale and impact of silicosis in Australia is still unknown but the numbers are increasing.

More than 600 workers in NSW, Victoria and Queensland have silicosis and up to 10,000 will develop lung cancer in their lifetimes from silica dust.

The companies

flooding our markets with this cheap and nasty material know (the dangers), but to them profits are more important than people's lives.

Zach Smith

Stakeholder meetings

March

- **2 March:** PRACP Dr Jacqueline Small, Professor Graeme Maguire, Dr Jennifer Mann, Dr Paul Hotton, Dr Robert Leitner, Dr Stephanie Lam and P&A GM met with the NDIS Review team.
- **6 March:** P&A EGM and the Health Reform Team Manager met with First Assistant Secretary of the Primary Care Division at the Department of Health and Aging Mr Simon Cotterell and Assistant Secretary of the Primary Care Reform Branch to discuss physician participation in integrated multidisciplinary primary/community care, models of care, Urgent Care Centers and VPR, and specialist integration in primary care via telehealth.
- **6 March:** P&A EGM and 2x Managers met with Assistant Secretary Mr. Stephen Bouwhuis from Environmental Health & Climate Change Branch of Australian Government, Department of Health, and Aged Care to discuss occupational respiratory diseases and climate priorities.
- **6 March:** P&A EGM and 1x Manager met with Assistant Secretary Tiali Goodchild and Assistant Secretary Carita Davis from Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care, to discuss the parliamentary child health round table event, Health Care of Children in Care and Protection Services position statement and RACP Kids catch up campaign.

February

- **23 February:** RACP president-elect Prof. Jennifer Martin and P&A EGM meet with Dr Pradeep Philip to discuss Medicare Integrity Review.

Government relations

March

- **3 March:** PRACP Dr Jacqueline Small, and P&A EGM met with MP Dr Mike Freeland to discuss a parliamentary child health round table event proposal for 2023.
- **6 March:** P&A EGM met with the office of Senator Dorinda Cox and Senator Steele-John to discuss the National Climate, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, RACP Federal Budget Submission and proposed parliamentary child health round table event.

February

- **2 February:** P&A EGM met with Minister Mark Butler's Chief of Staff Mr Nick Martin to continue discussing key points from the MP meeting.

January

- **19 January:** Follow-up meeting between Minister Butler and PRACP and EGM P&A. To discuss key issues facing the healthcare system and measures to be prioritised in the upcoming Budget to deliver quality, future-focused healthcare for all Australians.

Your feedback

We understand the importance of feedback. If you have the time, please complete a 2-question survey to help us understand if this is a helpful report and any improvements.

[Complete survey here](#)

P&A Team

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