



10 August 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 and the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2023

Cancer Council welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee on the above Bills. Cancer Council Australia is the nation's peak non-government cancer control organisation. Cancer Council's Occupational and Environmental Cancer Committee (the Committee) includes members with national standing in relevant disciplines including epidemiology, molecular biology, occupational health, occupational hygiene, clinical oncology, and public health. Comments from the Committee form the basis of this submission and their contribution is acknowledged.

Silica dust is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, because prolonged exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) increases the risk of lung cancer. Exposure to RCS and the resulting increase in cases of silicosis in the engineered stone, construction, and other industries in Australia has been the catalyst for the wider recognition of the need to establish a national registry of occupational respiratory disease. However, there are also many other occupational exposures that result in respiratory diseases, including lung cancer. These exposures include asbestos, diesel engine exhaust, and welding fume to name just a few examples. Currently, there are limited data available relating to the prevalence and extent of occupational exposure to these respiratory carcinogens and the burden of the resulting cancers in Australia.

We commend the Government for introducing the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 (NORDR Bill) and the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2023, which form part of its response to the recommendations arising from the National Dust Disease Taskforce's Final Report. We note that the purpose of the NORDR Bill is to establish the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry (the Registry), which will contain specific information on individuals diagnosed with, or are being treated for, occupational respiratory diseases in Australia. We note the Registry is intended to facilitate the national collection, analyses, and publication of occupational respiratory disease statistics. This will be important for identifying the incidence of occupational respiratory diseases in Australia, as this burden is currently unknown. Furthermore, this has the potential to help support the identification of industries, occupations, workplaces, and tasks at high risk of exposure to

respiratory disease-causing agents. It is anticipated that the Registry will facilitate the detection of new and emerging occupational respiratory disease issues and enable the implementation of timely and targeted interventions and prevention activities, including compliance and enforcement actions, to reduce further worker exposure and disease. It is very important that the design and implementation of the Registry actually allows this to be the case. We believe that such timely action should contribute to stopping any emerging issues from progressing to the scale of what has been seen with the re-emergence of silicosis in Australia. From Cancer Council's perspective, the Registry, if properly established and functioning, will be critical to identifying priority areas where exposure to occupational respiratory carcinogens is occurring and informing activities aimed at preventing or reducing workers' exposure to these carcinogens. Therefore, we support the introduction of the NORDR Bill and Consequential Amendments.

We acknowledge that limited details on key elements of the proposed registry are contained within the NORDR Bill, including the list of occupational respiratory diseases that will be captured and the nature and level of detail on relevant exposures. We strongly support the NORDR Bill enabling information to be collected on occupational respiratory disease that is not limited to occupational dust-related disease, and that information on respiratory cancers, such as lung cancer, mesothelioma, and cancers of the nose, paranasal sinuses, and nasopharynx, that are determined to be occupationally caused or exacerbated, be included in the list of diseases captured in the Registry. Similarly, we also support the Registry including information on additional causative agents rather than 'only' dust, which could enable the collection of important information regarding workplace exposures, and exposure circumstances, to carcinogens such as welding fumes, diesel engine exhaust and second-hand tobacco smoke.

Although collecting data on occupational respiratory diseases in Australia is necessary and important for identifying new and emerging threats to workers' respiratory health, it is not sufficient to prevent future cases on its own. Therefore, the focus of the Registry should be prevention. In order for this to be the case, it is essential that information on exposure and exposure circumstances is collected. In addition, it is critical the Government continue to focus on the prevention and control of exposure of workers to respiratory hazards that increase the risk of respiratory diseases, including cancers, alongside the establishment of the Registry.

Please do not hesitate to contact Megan Varlow, Director, Cancer Control Policy, Cancer Council Australia, at [redacted], should you require additional information or have any queries in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Tanya Buchanan
Chief Executive Officer

Professor Tim Driscoll
Chair, Occupational and Environmental Cancers
Committee