



# ASBESTOS DISEASE SUPPORT SOCIETY

## 2022 Board Report to Members

My name is Phil Blair and I am the Chair of the Asbestos Disease Support Society. Thank you all for attending the 2022 Annual General Meeting.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respect to elders, past, present and emerging.

### **Passing of Members**

Before I deliver the 2022 Board Report, it is appropriate we acknowledge, remember and pay our respects to all those who have passed away as a result of asbestos and other dust related disease, such as silicosis, and those who are suffering as a result of their exposure.

We must remember that all they did was turn up to work to earn a living to support their families or just went about their daily lives – nothing more, nothing less.

### **Board Report**

I would like to acknowledge the Board of Directors here with me today.

- Bianca Neve, who is also the Deputy Chair
- Margot Hoyte
- Pat Cini
- Ross Davidson
- Garry Rogers
- Andrew Ramsay; and
- Trish Ramsay

Sheila Hunter, also a director is unable to be with us today.

## Governance

The Society is governed by nine Directors. This year the Society will see some changes to those Directors.

In July, Peter Close, a Director of the Society since 2015 resigned from the Board to concentrate on his very deserving retirement. Also stepping down from the Board are a further two (2) long term Directors - Trish Ramsay and Sheila Hunter. Trish Ramsay has been a director since 2015 and prior to that served on the Asbestos Related Disease Support Society Committee of Management from 2012 to 2015. Sheila Hunter has been a director since 2016.

On behalf of the Board, the Society's staff and our members I would like to sincerely thank Peter, Trish and Sheila for their stewardship of the Society and for their service and dedication in assisting our members who have asbestos and other dust related lung diseases.

I am also pleased to announce that in their place we have three new directors coming on to the Board.

- Ross Davidson who is the Training Manager for the CFMEU, Construction Division (Qld and NT);
- Trevor Torrens, who is the Society's retiring General Manager and is well known to our members; and
- Karen Selmon, who is the Society's clinical support nurse and is also retiring and also well known to our members.

With Trevor retiring, but coming on to the Board as a director, we have recruited a new General Manager, Lee McCallum.

Lee is a former lawyer of many years' experience, has been involved with not-for-profit organisations and also served in the navy for a period of time. With experience in financial management, human resources, governance, stakeholder management, submission writing etc. Lee has the skills and qualities for the position and to build on our current solid foundation. As a personal injuries lawyer, Lee has had first-hand experience in dealing with workplace injuries and understands the effects on the individual and their families.

## **30 Years of Providing Support**

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Asbestos Disease Support Society's assistance and service to those who have been affected by asbestos related disease.

Established in 1992 and known as the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society or QARDSS, the organisation has grown from humble beginnings of 35 members to approximately 800 in 2022, with many other affiliated organisations. QARDSS was established by Shirley White who, for her services, was awarded an OAM in 2003. Shirley saw the devastating effects of asbestos disease through her husband Reg. Shirley was the first President and remained in that position until her passing in 2009. Without the inspiration and commitment of Shirley, the founding committee members and volunteers, the Society would not be in existence today providing the much needed support to those and their loved ones who been affected by asbestos related disease.

In 1992, QARDSS was primarily focussed on providing support to sufferers of asbestos related diseases and their families through a network of dedicated and hardworking volunteers. Today, the Asbestos Related Disease Support Society, or ADSS, is a professionally managed organisation with a Board of Directors and an expanded mission. ADSS's undertakings now go beyond support and include increasing awareness of the dangers of exposure to asbestos fibres, advocating for improvements in relation to asbestos issues and working with the health community to aid in a better understanding of asbestos related disease. Members also now have access to a broader range of services including a social worker, nurse, occupational therapist, medical aids loan scheme and welfare assistance - to name a few.

In 2018, ADSS expanded support services to those affected by other dust related diseases such as silicosis. This service operates under the banner of the Silicosis Support Network.

Australis's 'love affair' with asbestos cannot be understated. History shows Australia as one of the highest users of asbestos worldwide. Despite its use being banned since 2003, substantial amounts of asbestos are still present in many Australian homes and workplaces. In fact, there is a good chance a house or commercial building constructed or renovated before 1990 will have asbestos containing materials.

Asbestos was used in more than 3,000 common products which has resulted in Australia having one of the highest rates of asbestos related disease in the world. Sadly resulting in an estimated 4,000 people still dying each year in Australia from past exposure to asbestos fibres. We are now heading into the next phase, or the third wave of exposure – DIY home renovators.

There is still much work to be done and on behalf of the ADSS Board of Directors and staff I would like to thank everyone who has supported ADSS over the years.

## **Services**

The services provided by the Society continues to play an important role in the life journey of many of our members. It is worth noting these services -

- Support from a Social Worker and Clinical Support Nurse
- Medical equipment on loan - for example portable oxygen concentrators.
- Occupational therapy assessment
- Nutrition and dietary consultation and information
- Telephone support from our volunteers
- Community morning teas
- Peer to peer support through our member groups
- Up to date information through the quarterly newsletter
- Legal Assistance through Turner Freeman Lawyers, who are outstanding in their commitment, compassion and outcomes for the Society's members.

It takes a lot of support to provide the services just mentioned. On behalf of the Society, I would like to thank the construction industry for their ongoing support. In particular, recognition and thanks must go to the CFMEU and other unions such as the ETU for their efforts to support this important cause.

I would also like to thank our corporate sponsors for their ongoing support and for the many donations from individuals that we regularly receive.

Special thanks to Turner Freeman Lawyers and in particular, Thady Blundell. Thank you for not only supporting the Society as an organisation, but also your team's dedication in ensuring maximum compensation is achieved for people with asbestos and other dust related lung diseases.

## **Finances**

Despite challenging fiscal times, the Society is in a sound financial position. In the 2021/22 financial year, the Society produced a surplus of \$89,530.00 and has a net asset base of approximately \$2.8m. Income increased from \$1,106,427.00 in 2020/21 to \$1,153,277.00. As we emerged from COVID, our expenses also increased from \$783,146.00 in 2020/21 to \$865,516.00.

The Society's investment portfolio, which commenced in October 2020, was not immune to the prevailing economic conditions and recorded a deficit of \$198,231.00 at the end of the 2021/22 financial year. Whilst not ideal, the funds under investment are "reserve funds" and are professionally managed by JB Were (an investment advisory firm) with the aim to produce a positive, but conservative return of CPI plus 3%. The Board established the investment portfolio with a long term investment horizon of more than 5 years to fund long term obligations/commitments or strategic initiatives.

The value of the portfolio, as of 30 September 2022, is \$2,181,322.00.

## **Silicosis**

Following the changes to the Society's Constitution at the 2018 AGM, we continue to build our support arrangements for those who have been diagnosed with other "dust" related lung disease - in particular silicosis – an occupational lung disease with symptoms similar to asbestosis. This support is provided under the banner of "Silicosis Support Network".

The Network operates on the successful and long-standing principles and services provided to those suffering from asbestos related disease. The Network aims to create a community where we all work together to offer support to sufferers of Silicosis including their partners, loved ones and families.

Additionally, the Society has now purchased three (3) Portacount Respirator fit testing machines as part of our silicosis prevention strategy. These machines are on loan to Future Skills, a registered training organisation, which provides on-site worker respirator fit testing at no cost through grant funding obtained from Construction Skills Queensland. To date, over 2,000 workers have been "fit tested". This ensures their personal protective equipment provides the highest standard of safe guarding possible.

## Strategic Planning Issues

The number one priority of the Society is to support and provide services to our members (including their families and carers) who have an asbestos or other dust related lung disease. However, as part of our mission to eliminate asbestos and other dust related disease, the Society also lobbies and advocates for improvements on asbestos and other dust related issues. There are still a number of “bad laws” that appear to ignore the World Health Organisation’s advice that there is no safe level of exposure that can protect a person from developing an asbestos related disease – particularly mesothelioma.

In 2020, the Queensland Government made an election commitment to *Consider the establishment of a Queensland Asbestos Eradication Agency* for government facilities. The commitment was a direct result of lobbying by the Society and unions.

A scoping paper has been prepared by a working group comprising the Society, Queensland Council of Unions and the CFMEU with support from the Department of Energy and Public Works. The Government’s decision should be known early in the new year.

Additionally, with the assistance of the CFMEU, the Government has committed to a review of the 10m<sup>2</sup> threshold rule under the public health and work health and safety regulations relating to the unlicensed removal of asbestos. This legislation allows DIY homeowners to remove up to 10m<sup>2</sup> of bonded asbestos or over 10m<sup>2</sup> if an on-line course has been completed. The Society’s position is that this is totally unacceptable legislation and it should be abolished and replaced with only licensed asbestos professionals authorised to undertake this work. The commitment to review this legislation has been included in the recently released *Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2022-2025*.

### Nationally

At the national level, the Society continues to play its part through membership of the *Non-Government Asbestos Advisory Committee*, which is overseen by the *Federal Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency*.

This committee is undertaking some interesting work, including:

- Developing consistent national messaging for National Asbestos Awareness Week

- Identifying asbestos safety training options for workers entering trades where they are likely to encounter asbestos
- Developing asbestos guidance and awareness materials for real estate agents and property managers
- Developing a national picture of where ACMs are located in homes - called a residential heatmap
- Working with local councils to improve their management of asbestos issues
- Exploring incentives to encourage the safe removal and disposal of ACMs from homes.

## **Membership**

As of 30 June 2022, we had 795 financial members - the old saying that “there is strength in numbers” is very true when it comes to communicating the Society’s message - whether it be to Government or other organisations. A strong support base provides the Society with a strong voice. I would like to thank our renewing members for their ongoing commitment to ADSS and I would ask you to continue to promote the Society’s message and encourage people who would like to support the Society by becoming a member.

## **Corporate Membership**

Corporate members of the Society are companies and industry organisations that show support for the Society’s mission and values. All corporate members are recognised in the quarterly newsletter and at selected functions and events and we thank them for their support.

## **Volunteers**

I would like to thank the Society’s volunteers for their support of the Society and our members. It would be impossible to name every single volunteer but I would like to mention Pat Cini – also a Director and life member and Mark O’Connor for making many hundreds of phone calls throughout the year to check on the welfare of our members. The service they provide is invaluable and gratefully received by our members.

Thanks also to our support group facilitators:

- Christine Grange: Rockhampton Support Group
- Lyn Maclean: Bundaberg Support Group
- Rosslyn Howitt-Steven: Hervey Bay Support Group
- Bev Robertson: Sunnybank Support Group

- Mark O'Connor: Chermside Support Group
- Karen Selmon: Sunshine Coast Support Group

## **Society Staff**

Thank you to the Society's staff:

Kerrie Williams: Office/Operations Manager  
Kay Ravbar: Accounts Officer  
Rhonda Wheatley: Social Worker

Your dedication and passion in supporting our members is acknowledged and appreciated.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Trevor Torrens, our retiring GM and Karen Selmon, the Society's clinical support nurse who is also retiring. Their knowledge, commitment and passion will not be entirely lost as they make a welcome addition to the Board as directors.

Special mention of Trevor who was appointed GM in April 2018. Trevor has made many improvements to our existing members services, identifying other needs and implementing programs to meet those needs. This has enhanced our profile and Trevor is very much respected and appreciated by our members.

## **Conclusion**

As I stated earlier, the Society is in a good financial position, we have a terrific management team and excellent support services for our members, their families and carers. Unfortunately, due asbestos legacy issues and disease latency periods, our services will still be needed for many years to come.