



Australian Government

Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

A collage of seven diamond-shaped images arranged in a circular pattern. The images show: 1) A modern house with a brown roof. 2) A close-up of a weathered metal roof edge with a white pipe. 3) A corrugated metal wall with green foliage. 4) A close-up of a wavy, textured surface, possibly asbestos, against a blue sky. 5) A blue house with white window frames. 6) A close-up of a corrugated metal roof. 7) A close-up of a green-painted metal surface.

2012 ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT REVIEW REPORT: 2023 ANALYSIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	2
Executive summary	3
Table 1: Implementation summary of AMR recommendations as at 30 June 2023	5
Background	9
Recommendations	12
Recommendations 1 and 2: National Strategic Plan	12
Recommendation 3: Improving asbestos identification	18
Recommendation 4: Improving asbestos management	29
Recommendation 5: Improving transport, storage and disposal	38
Recommendation 6: Improving asbestos awareness	47
Recommendation 7: Improving asbestos education	54
Recommendations 8: Improving data and information sharing; and 10: Medical research.....	60
Recommendation 9: Administration of the National Strategic Plan	71
Recommendation 11: International obligations	76
Recommendation 12: Former compulsorily acquired property	83
Conclusion	85

Abbreviations and acronyms

2019 Review	Review of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency's Role and Functions
ABDS	Australian Burden of Disease Study
ABF	Australian Border Force
ACM	asbestos-containing material
ACR	asbestos content report
ADDRI	Asbestos and Dust Diseases Research Institute
AI	artificial intelligence
AIRSystem	Asbestos Identification and Rating System
ARD	asbestos-related disease
AMR	Asbestos Management Review 2012
AMR Report	Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012
ANSP	National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management
APHEDA	Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad Incorporated (known as Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA)
ASEA	Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency
ASEA Act	<i>Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Act 2013</i> (Cth)
ASEC	Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CEO	chief executive officer
DIY	do-it-yourself, referring to homeowner renovators
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
GBD	global burden of disease
HSE	Health and Safety Executive (the UK WHS regulator)
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NAAC	National Asbestos Awareness Campaign
NAAW	National Asbestos Awareness Week (held annually in November)
PCBU	person conducting a business or undertaking
RRP	Rapid Response Protocol (in relation to illegal asbestos or ACM imports)
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
UI	uncertainty interval (of data)
VAEA	Victorian Asbestos Eradication Agency
VET	vocational education and training (recognised under a national regulatory system)
WHS	work health and safety

Executive summary

The main aim of the Asbestos Management Review 2012 (AMR) was ‘to make recommendations for the development of a national strategic plan to improve asbestos awareness and management’.¹ Reflecting this, the first 2 recommendations concern the establishment of the National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management (ANSP) and its aims and priority areas, and most of the recommendations are couched in terms of recommending ‘that the National Strategic Plan provide for ...’ (recommendations 3–8). The remainder relate to: the establishment of the new national agency (recommendation 9), funding medical research (recommendation 10); international obligations (recommendation 11) and compulsorily acquired property (recommendation 12).

While the AMR recommendations laid the foundations for a nationwide response to asbestos management, they necessarily have been, and continue to be, refined in their implementation. As envisaged by the AMR itself, the ANSP’s content needs to remain ‘flexible enough to respond to changed circumstances and evolve over the medium to long term’ to play a crucial role in providing a framework to direct and coordinate asbestos management and awareness efforts nationally into the future.²

From the outset the recommendations needed to be translated into a plan that all jurisdictions could agree to. In the initial phase of implementation, when the interim Office of Asbestos Safety was established to coordinate the development of the ANSP, Minister Shorten acknowledged that this new body would need to ‘look at the practicalities of implementing the recommendations of the review’ and acknowledged the need for the ANSP to have ‘the buy-in of all Australian governments and political parties’ to underpin effective national action.³

There have also been contextual changes as the ANSPs have evolved, including advancements in technology and new research findings which have meant that the intended outcomes of some recommendations are achieved by different means. Other recommendations by their very nature need ongoing action, including medical research on asbestos-related disease.

The AMR laid the foundations for crucial targeted and coordinated national action and continues to inform the work of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA). This report is intended as a ‘stocktake’ of its recommendations, to provide a clear picture of the evolution of the AMR recommendations over the past 10 years and where they now fit into broader national action on asbestos. It considers each recommendation in detail, outlining its context, actions taken to date (with particular focus on the ANSPs), providing an implementation summary for each. It identifies areas of future need and will help inform the development of the next phase of the ANSP and ASEA’s ongoing work plan. As this report shows, while there has been significant progress on most AMR recommendations, there is still more work to be done.

¹ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 3.

² [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 18.

³ The Hon Bill Shorten MP, media release: [A national approach to asbestos management | Ministers’ Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#), 4 September 2012.

Implementation of the AMR recommendations falls into 4 broad categories. Some have been fully implemented (for example, establishment of ASEA and the ANSP); some have been fully implemented and need ongoing efforts (for example, our international engagement and asbestos awareness work); some have been partly implemented with future work needed (for example, asbestos identification, management and removal); and one was not implemented as it was not progressed from the outset (former compulsorily acquired property).

Table 1 summarises these findings for all recommendations.

Note that this report includes developments up to 30 June 2023 and does not seek to outline all of the work undertaken by states and territories because this is already done as part of ASEA's ANSP reporting work and would be unduly repetitive.

Table 1: Implementation summary of AMR recommendations as at 30 June 2023

Recommendations 1 & 2: A National Strategic Plan, including aim and priority areas	Fully implemented 
▶ The National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management (ANSP) reflects the Asbestos Management Review (AMR) recommendations and has been endorsed by all jurisdictions.	
Recommendation 3: Improving asbestos identification	Partially implemented: future work required 
▶ The residential heatmap has created an evidence-based national picture assessing the likelihood of asbestos in the residential environment. ▶ Work health and safety (WHS) asbestos register requirements apply for all workplaces (including government and commercial) but there are varying degrees of centralisation of registers. ▶ Asbestos assessments are not mandatory for non-workplaces. Residential property disclosure requirements for asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) exist in some form in all jurisdictions but these vary and could be improved. ▶ All state and territory governments capture data on asbestos waste disposal from their tracking systems, and asbestos waste data estimates for Australia are updated as part of national hazardous waste reporting. Future work ▶ Exploring options for centralised asbestos registers and a national database. ▶ Promoting asbestos survey consistency, including for guidelines and training for assessors, consistent software and ‘competent person’ requirements. ▶ Improving incentives for asbestos identification in residential properties and considering introducing labelling requirements. ▶ Examining using artificial intelligence (AI) to identify legacy asbestos in First Nations communities classified as remote to inform asbestos management.	

Recommendations 4: Improving asbestos management

Partially
implemented:
future work required



- ▶ A comprehensive socio-economic evaluation of asbestos management and removal options in the built environment will inform the next (third) phase of the ANSP with timing for removal options based on ACM stocks and flows and asbestos removal options developed in that phase of the ANSP.
- ▶ Nationally consistent asbestos management laws, policies, licensing regimes and procedures largely exist under WHS law although unlicensed removal requirements vary, particularly in the residential sector.

Future work

- ▶ The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) will continue to explore incentives to encourage safe removal of ACMs from homes.

Recommendation 5: Improving transport, storage and disposal

Partially
implemented:
future work required



- ▶ Infrastructure for asbestos disposal will be needed for many decades to come with ongoing stocks and flows research informing demand.
- ▶ ASEA has established a searchable online map for asbestos disposal facilities nationwide, including travel times to facilities.
- ▶ ASEA developed an evidence-based guide for local government providing advice to change community behaviour regarding illegal dumping and improper disposal of asbestos.

Future work

- ▶ More coordinated and comprehensive data to identify illegal dumping – work towards a national digital reporting system.

Recommendation 6: Improving asbestos awareness

Fully
implemented
and ongoing



- ▶ Nationally consistent awareness resources have been developed and disseminated: these will continue to be refined based on regular evaluation data and other research.

Recommendation 7: Improving asbestos education

Partially
implemented:
future work required



- ▶ WHS laws mandate training for licensed removal.
- ▶ The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council (ASEC) has referred recommended nationwide consistent mandatory vocational education and training (VET) for asbestos awareness for all workers in relevant trade occupations to Safe Work Australia to action.

Future work

- ▶ Options for mandatory training beyond asbestos awareness training for tradespeople undertaking unlicensed removal up to 10m² of ACMs in jurisdictions where this is permitted.
- ▶ Considering options for real estate agent/property manager training for asbestos-related obligations.

Recommendations 8 and 10: Asbestos data and information sharing, and Medical research

Partially
implemented:
future work required



- ▶ ASEA's research is on preventing exposure to ACMs to prevent asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) and the social and economic impacts of ARDs, as distinct from funding medical research itself.
- ▶ The residential heatmap provides a nationwide indication of ACM location likelihood and will assist with civic and disaster planning and abatement policies.
- ▶ The Australian Mesothelioma Registry has continued to be funded through Safe Work Australia.

Future work

- ▶ Consideration of all current and potential ARD registries to examine more effective centralisation of all ARD data across a range of diseases. This should comprise ARDs however acquired and seek to improve the consistency and accuracy of the input data, including consideration of mandatory reporting by medical professionals for all ARDs.
- ▶ Research into the effects of low-level exposure to ACMs, both occupational and non-occupational.

Recommendation 9: Administration of the National Strategic Plan

Fully
implemented



- ▶ This was fully implemented with the creation of ASEA and its underpinning legislation.

Recommendation 11: International obligations

Fully
implemented
and ongoing



- ▶ Ongoing work includes:
 - continuing prevention of ACM illegal importation
 - assisting in the international campaign to ban production and trade of asbestos and ACMs including influencing the progression of bans on asbestos production and use in South-East Asia and the Pacific
 - sharing best practice for the management, removal and disposal of ACMs internationally.

Recommendation 12: Former compulsorily acquired property

Not
implemented



- ▶ This recommendation was not implemented. The reasons for this are not clear, but it appears it was based on one submission and was not a systemic issue.

Background

The Asbestos Management Review (AMR) was established in 2010 to conduct a national investigation into asbestos management and research. This was against the backdrop of Australia's long history of asbestos use and its ongoing legacy, including that the nation has one of the highest rates of mesothelioma and other asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) in the world.

The primary aim of the AMR was 'to make recommendations for the development of a national strategic plan to improve asbestos awareness and management within Australia'.⁴ The AMR was assisted by an expert advisory group and undertook extensive public consultation. More than 50 submissions were received from government representatives, unions, community organisations, business enterprises, industry representatives, academics and individuals.

The [*Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012*](#) (AMR Report) recommended that the Australian Government coordinate with its state and territory counterparts to establish a 'National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management in Australia' to improve asbestos identification, management and removal. It also included a recommendation that a national agency be established to have responsibility for the implementation, review, refinement and further development of the ANSP.

The AMR Report found that asbestos management and awareness-raising activities in Australia were fragmented and inconsistent.⁵ All levels of government – Commonwealth, state, territory and local – have responsibilities for managing asbestos within their jurisdictions. Further complexity is added because asbestos management traverses multiple policy areas such as WHS, public health, consumer safety, environmental protection, urban planning and border controls. The AMR Report also proposed that nationally coordinated action was needed to avoid the overlap, confusion and gaps caused by the fragmented management of asbestos.

In September 2012, the Australian Government announced it would establish the Office of Asbestos Safety to work with state, territory and local government to consider the AMR recommendations.⁶ The Office of Asbestos Safety was initially set up within the then Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to formulate the first version of the ANSP. The then federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the Hon Bill Shorten MP, said that the Office of Asbestos Safety would 'set out a road map for improving our handling of asbestos and look at the practicalities of implementing the recommendations of the Review'.⁷ In the same statement, the minister also announced a number of research projects on management and awareness of asbestos 'consistent with the recommendations made by the review' to 'underpin the future work of the office' and to 'inform the priorities of the agency'. These included a study into the current and future capacity of infrastructure dealing

⁴ [*Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012*](#) p 3.

⁵ [*Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012*](#) p 49.

⁶ The COAG Select Council on Workplace Relations had noted the release of the AMR Report and the Minister's intention to consult further with jurisdictions regarding its recommendations in August 2012: [Communique 2](#).

⁷ The Hon Bill Shorten MP, media release: [A national approach to asbestos management | Ministers' Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#), 4 September 2012.

with asbestos waste, as well as community awareness of, and attitudes towards, asbestos.

The Office of Asbestos Safety was the precursor to the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (the agency or ASEA) which was established on 1 July 2013 following the passage of the [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Act 2013](#) (the ASEA Act). ASEA's functions⁸ are to:

- encourage, coordinate, monitor and report on the implementation of the ANSP, as well as reviewing and amending the ANSP as required and publishing and promoting the plan
- provide advice to the minister about asbestos safety at the minister's request
- liaise with Commonwealth, state, territory, local and other governments, agencies or bodies about reviewing and implementing the ANSP and about asbestos safety
- commission, monitor and promote research about asbestos safety
- raise awareness of asbestos safety, including by developing and promoting materials on asbestos safety
- collect and analyse data required for measuring progress on preventing exposure to asbestos fibres and informing evidence-based policies and strategies
- promote consistent messages, policies, and practices in relation to asbestos safety.

ASEA is not a regulator. Rather, it coordinates national actions to improve asbestos awareness and the effective and safe management, removal and disposal of asbestos; and drives national action under the ANSP. All Commonwealth and state and territory ministers with responsibility for WHS have endorsed the ANSP.

An initial draft ANSP was developed by the Commonwealth before ASEA's establishment. When Minister Shorten released the draft plan on 3 May 2013, he noted that 7 out of 8 state and territory representatives were supporting the development of the national plan.⁹ Before that, in April 2013, Minister Shorten had noted that the Commonwealth's preferred position was to reach consensus with all states and territories on the national strategic plan.¹⁰

In September 2013 there was a change of government and the Hon Eric Abetz became the new Minister for Employment. In April 2014, Minister Abetz met with his state and territory ministerial counterparts and further consultation on the ANSP was sought.¹¹ Ministers generally supported strategies on awareness, research and international leadership but noted the cost and feasibility of removal and identification strategies would be difficult to achieve in the timeframes provided in the plan.¹²

⁸ These are functions under the [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Act 2013](#) and the [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Rule 2022](#).

⁹ See Minister Shorten's [media release of 3 May 2013](#).

¹⁰ [Communique 3](#) of the COAG Select Council on Workplace Relations, 3 April 2013.

¹¹ [Final Communique](#) of the COAG Select Council on Workplace Relations, 11 April 2014.

¹² These 'timeframes' presumably referred to the target date of 2030 for removal of all ACMs from government and commercial buildings which was recommended in the AMR Report (recommendation 4) and which was not ultimately included in the agreed NSP.

The ANSP was revised and on 28 August 2015 the revision, the [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014-2018](#) (ANSP 2014–18), was endorsed by all jurisdictions' ministers with responsibility for WHS.¹³ In the introduction to ANSP 2014–18, Mr Geoff Fary, who chaired the AMR and was later appointed as Chair of the ASEC, observed:

*Following many months of research, consultations, and detailed analysis of all the submissions received, the Asbestos Management Review Report ... laid the foundations for a national strategic plan ... The Council has worked closely with agency to review the plan and ensure a national consensus is maintained to deal with our nation's legacy of asbestos. This revised plan presents a comprehensive set of achievable national goals and outcomes for asbestos awareness, handling and eradication.*¹⁴

This plan explicitly established a 3-phased strategy for asbestos management: the first phase would focus on establishing an evidence base; the second would build on this base to identify achievable asbestos management goals; and the third would identify the ongoing risks posed by the remaining ACM in the built environment and support prioritised removal.¹⁵

The subsequent 5-year phase of the ANSP, the [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2019–23](#) (ANSP 2019–23), is still current and planning is underway for the third phase of the ANSP proposed to run from 2024 to 2030 (ANSP 2024–30).

The purpose of this present review is to analyse each of the recommendations of the AMR Report in the 10 years since its release to identify areas where more work is needed. This will inform the next iteration of the ANSP, which will also address the recommendations that are ongoing by their nature.

It is also important to emphasise that the recommendations have been considered contextually to explore their underlying intention. This is significant because since the AMR Report was written, new research and emerging technology has meant that the intended outcome of some recommendations has been achieved by different means not contemplated at that time.

¹³ See [National plan to reduce the risk of asbestos. Ministers' Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#), 28 August 2015.

¹⁴ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 3.

¹⁵ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 8.

Recommendations

Each of the AMR Report's recommendations is considered below, including outlining the context in which they were recommended and the actions taken to date (particularly in relation to the ANSPs). These have been grouped where appropriate for ease of discussion. Areas where further work could be done have been identified in relation to some recommendations.

Recommendations 1 and 2: National Strategic Plan

1. The review recommends that the Australian Government lead and advocate for all jurisdictions to agree to the development of a National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management in Australia (the National Strategic Plan), based as a minimum on the principles and recommendations outlined in this report.
2. The review recommends that:
 - (a) The aim of the National Strategic Plan be: *'To prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia'*.
 - (b) The priority areas of the National Strategic Plan be to improve asbestos:
 - Identification;
 - Management;
 - Transport, storage and disposal;
 - Awareness;
 - Education; and
 - Information sharing.

Context

The AMR Report found that there is a continuing risk of asbestos exposure due to the considerable quantities of ACMs present in the built environment and disposal sites.¹⁶ It noted that Australia has one of the highest incidences of mesothelioma in the world and cited research suggesting that deaths from ARDs were likely to increase, often due to exposures in the domestic environment.¹⁷ Systematic nationwide action was recommended, noting that while the national WHS framework provided some regulation within workplaces, there was a need for a coordinated framework to apply beyond this to include exposure outside the workplace context. The ANSP was recommended as the 'appropriate tool to better drive, focus and coordinate efforts to address asbestos-related efforts across Australia's diverse communities'.¹⁸

¹⁶ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 17.

¹⁷ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 14.

¹⁸ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 17.

The ANSP was seen as playing a crucial role in providing a framework to direct and coordinate asbestos management and awareness efforts nationally into the future and so it needed to stay 'flexible enough to respond to changed circumstances and evolve over the medium to long term'.¹⁹ In determining the aim of the ANSP, the AMR contemplated a range of views, from aspirational aims for the total eradication of ARDs or removal of all ACMs in the built environment, to lesser, arguably more pragmatic aims, citing the volume of legacy ACMs, ARD latency and limitations of medical science. Ultimately it was considered that an aspirational aim was preferable, noting that aiming for less could be regarded as being 'akin to the nation acquiescing to a level of preventable disease and death'.²⁰

The 6 priority areas were also recommended to direct the realisation of the ANSP's aim, namely: identification; management; transport, storage and disposal; awareness; education; and information sharing.

Identification was seen as crucial given the absence of reliable data about the precise location and condition of large quantities of ACM. Wide jurisdictional policy and procedural variation was identified in relation to the handling, removal, transport, storage and disposal of asbestos and so a pressing need for a nationally consistent regime for safe management was identified. Improved asbestos awareness and education was seen as a priority due to considerable evidence that many Australians at risk of exposure lacked the knowledge to protect themselves. Sharing best-practice information across all facets of asbestos management was also seen as vital.

It was also acknowledged that practical and achievable targets needed to be developed to allow measurement of progress against the ANSP.

Action taken

The recommendation that the ANSP be established was implemented in the ASEA Act. Section 5A of that Act provides for a detailed definition of the ANSP to mean the plan that:

- (a) is known as the *National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness*; and
- (b) aims to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia; and
- (c) addresses the following priority areas:
 - (i) the systematic identification of material containing asbestos in the built environment and of asbestos dump sites;
 - (ii) systems, timelines and processes for the prioritised safe removal of material containing asbestos from public and commercial buildings and the safe disposal of such material;
 - (iii) measures to assist the residential sector to minimise the risks of asbestos, including raising awareness, education and mechanisms for identifying and classifying risks associated with asbestos;
 - (iv) improving education and information about asbestos;
 - (v) improving asbestos safety;

¹⁹ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 18.

²⁰ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 19.

- (vi) improving the sharing of information about asbestos and asbestos safety; and
- (d) deals with any other relevant matters.

As noted earlier, an initial draft ANSP had been developed by the Office of Asbestos Safety before ASEA's establishment in 2013. On 28 August 2015 the revised plan, the [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014-2018](#) (ANSP 2014–18), was launched having been endorsed by all jurisdictions' ministers with responsibility for WHS. Echoing the AMR recommendation 2(a), its aim was 'to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia' and it contained the following 6 strategies:

- **Awareness:** Increase public awareness of the health risks posed by working with or being exposed to asbestos
- **Best practice:** Identify and share best practice in asbestos management, education, handling, storage and disposal
- **Identification:** Improve the identification and grading of asbestos and sharing of information regarding the location of ACMs
- **Removal:** Identify priority areas where ACMs present a risk, the barriers to the safe removal of asbestos and review management and removal infrastructure to estimate the capacity and rate for the safe removal of asbestos
- **Research:** Commission, monitor and promote research into asbestos exposure pathways, prevention and asbestos-related disease to inform policy options
- **International leadership:** Australia to continue to play a leadership role in a global campaign for a worldwide asbestos ban.

ANSP 2014–18 also outlined the following 5 guiding principles for its operation:

- **Precaution:** taking a proactive and cautious approach to ensure there is no increased risk to the community in any activities to be implemented under the plan
- **Evidence-based decision-making:** making decisions based on sound evidence and analysis from scientifically robust sources
- **Transparency:** operating in an open and transparent manner so all stakeholders have access to available information
- **Public participation:** considering the interests and concerns of all Australians
- **Collaboration:** involving all tiers of government in the management of asbestos through effective coordination between agencies and governments.

Under this ANSP, ASEA commissioned a considerable volume of research which was largely exploratory and provided a critical base for the next ANSP. The final report on this first phase ANSP highlighted the key elements of work done which were critical to achieving progress against the ANSP. This included the following fundamental pieces of research:

- national benchmark surveys of awareness and attitudes to asbestos of 2014, 2016 and 2018, which provided a comprehensive study into community awareness of, and attitudes towards, the hazards of asbestos²¹
- an Australian stocks and flows model for asbestos which estimates (based on modelling) the volume of ACMs remaining in the built environment ('stocks') and the volume of ACMs reaching the end of product life that will go into waste or disuse ('flows')²²
- research centred on ARDs in Australia, including the economic burden of ARDs²³
- issues and trends likely to impact asbestos-related work over the next 10–20 years, including implications for exposure risk, to inform asbestos management policy.²⁴

The second phase of the ANSP, ANSP 2019–23, was launched in November 2019 and with endorsement by all jurisdictions. While this ANSP continued the same aim, it builds on the previous plan's progress. It has 4 national priorities:

1. Improve asbestos awareness to influence behavioural change
2. Identification and effective legacy management
3. Safe prioritised removal and effective waste management
4. International collaboration and leadership.

Each of these priorities sets out underlying strategic actions which together reflect the priority areas outlined in AMR recommendation 2(b). This ANSP commits signatories to develop jurisdictional action plans aligned with these 4 priorities. Specific strategic actions are set out under each national priority.

Building on the principles of ANSP 2014–18 noted above, ANSP 2019–23 included 5 principles to guide implementation. Three of the original principles – 'precaution', 'evidence-based decision-making' and 'transparency' – were replicated. The remaining 2 – 'public participation' and 'collaboration' – were updated to 'sharing best practice' and 'consultation, collaboration and cooperation'.

A crucial difference between the first and second phases of the ANSP was the introduction of specific targets.

The need for these targets had been identified in the evaluation of ANSP 2018–22, which 'revealed some key lessons and identified opportunities for greater collaboration' and recommended that 'going forward, a clearer articulation of the roles and

²¹ These 3 reports are available on the ASEA website. See [National benchmark survey of awareness and attitudes to asbestos](#).

²² [An Australian Stocks and flows model for asbestos](#) undertaken by Dr Sally Donovan and Dr Joe Pickin, 2015. This model was updated in 2021.

²³ The Centre for International Economics, [The economic burden of asbestos-related disease](#), prepared for ASEA, 16 May 2018.

²⁴ Quezada G, Devaraj D, McLaughlin J and Hanson R (2018) [Asbestos Safety Futures Managing risks and embracing opportunities for Australia's asbestos legacy in the digital age](#), CSIRO, Canberra.

responsibilities involved, and more targeted actions to demonstrate commitment and accountability will enhance the progress made towards eliminating ARDs in Australia'.²⁵

As a result, this second phase ANSP has the following 9 national stretch targets²⁶ to help maintain focus and measure progress over the life of the plan. The 2023 targets are:

1. increased awareness of the health risks of ACMs and where to source information: all tradespersons whose work brings them into contact with ACMs; all workers in workplaces with ACMs; 80 per cent of homeowners and occupiers; 80 per cent of property managers and real estate agents
2. all governments have identified and assessed the risks associated with ACMs in publicly owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure
3. all jurisdictions have schedules and processes for the prioritised safe removal according to the risk of ACMs from public buildings and infrastructure, and safe disposal of that material
4. all regulators have in place and have implemented asbestos compliance programs
5. all commercial buildings which are required by law to maintain asbestos registers, have up-to-date registers and management plans that are actively being implemented
6. all regulators are investigating, prosecuting and penalising serious known breaches of asbestos-related laws including illegal waste disposal and importation
7. easier and cheaper disposal of asbestos waste
8. bans of asbestos production and use in South-East Asia and the Pacific have been influenced and progressed
9. develop an evidence-based national picture that assesses the likelihood of ACMs being present in the residential environment.

All signatories have committed to develop jurisdictional action plans aligned with the 4 national priorities²⁷ and to report progress against the national targets.

Most governments have established their own jurisdictional interagency coordination group to do this, consisting of representatives from all government agencies that have asbestos-related responsibilities. Each jurisdiction is required to monitor, evaluate and report against their own action plans. This forms the basis of an annual progress report on ANSP implementation, developed by ASEA, which is published and provided to all relevant ministers to keep progress on track.

As part of its monitoring and evaluation processes, ANSP 2019–23 specified a midpoint review to provide an opportunity to amend national priorities, strategic actions

²⁵ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–2018 Final Report](#), p 6.

²⁶ A 'stretch target' is intentionally designed to be highly challenging to encourage maximal effort.

²⁷ These are noted above.

or targets if needed. This review found that this ANSP's 'national priorities and their strategic actions remained important and relevant, without any significant gaps'.²⁸

Development of the third phase of the ANSP commenced in mid-2023 and will involve focused consideration of prioritised removal. This reflects ANSP 2014–18, which stated that by phase 3 of the ANSP, 'a practical approach will be identified to address the ongoing risks posed by the remaining ACM in the built environment, and to support the removal of all remaining asbestos in poor condition or likely to pose a risk so far as reasonably practicable'.²⁹

In developing this next ANSP, the findings of the Mid-term Review of ANSP 2019–23 will be considered³⁰, including that:

- targets should be designed to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time based
- in setting targets a range of short-, medium- and long-term goals may be more appropriate acknowledging the long-term nature of dealing with Australia's asbestos legacy.³¹

Recommendations 1 & 2: A National Strategic Plan, including aim and priority areas

Fully
implemented



- ▶ The National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management (ANSP) reflects the Asbestos Management Review (AMR) recommendations and has been endorsed by all jurisdictions.

²⁸ [Mid-term Review of the Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2019/23](#), p 2.

²⁹ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 8.

³⁰ The areas of future work identified in this review of AMR recommendations will also be considered in the formulation of the next iteration of the NSP.

³¹ [Mid-term Review of the Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2019/23](#), p 3.

Recommendation 3: Improving asbestos identification

3. The review recommends that the National Strategic Plan provide for:
- (a) The establishment of centrally operated processes and systems to identify the location, and assess the condition, of asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in government and commercial property constructed prior to 31 December 2003, and at disposal sites.
 - (b) A requirement that an asbestos content report (ACR) be undertaken by a competent assessor to determine and disclose the existence of ACMs in residential properties constructed prior to 1987 at the point of sale or lease, and prior to renovation, together with a property labelling system to alert workers and potential purchasers and tenants to the presence of asbestos.
 - (c) The asbestos identification measures above should be administered by the relevant local council (or its equivalent), with each municipality being responsible for maintaining a database for their area or locality.

Context

Australia imposed a total ban on the mining, manufacture and use of asbestos on 31 December 2003. However, the past use of asbestos has left us with a harmful legacy. Australia has one of the highest rates of ARD of any country in the world and many public and commercial buildings, homes and infrastructure still contain large amounts of ageing ACMs. If this is not managed safely, it poses a significant public health threat.

Government and commercial properties and disposal sites

The AMR Report noted that the identification of ACMs in workplaces is an established requirement in WHS laws. Under model WHS laws³², a person with management or control of a workplace must ensure an asbestos register is prepared and kept at the workplace. It must be maintained so that the information it contains is kept up to date. An asbestos register is not required if the workplace is in a building that was constructed after 31 December 2001 and no asbestos has been identified at the workplace and is not likely to be. An asbestos register must list all identified asbestos and is intended to make sure that workers and others in the workplace do not accidentally disturb the asbestos.

The AMR Report observed that differing views had been expressed ‘regarding the accuracy and currency of some currently available information – including the content

³² The term ‘work health and safety laws’, refers to workplace safety laws however they are described in a jurisdiction and includes the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Victoria) as distinct from the ‘model WHS laws’ developed by Safe Work Australia that have been adopted by all Australian jurisdictions except for Victoria.

of some workplace asbestos registers'³³ but that register requirements were generally supported by stakeholders. The report envisaged that it would be useful for this data to be collected in a centralised place with quality assurance measures applied and that the data should be published.

The AMR Report also considered the same measures should apply for asbestos disposal sites, noting that this should be the responsibility of local councils. It noted that requirements placed on waste disposal facilities varied by jurisdiction.³⁴

Domestic premises

The AMR Report noted that although there is widespread asbestos present in private homes throughout the nation, there was a lack of complete or reliable data on the level of ACMs in Australian residential properties.³⁵ There was some discussion of limited disclosure and information provision requirements in the ACT and South Australia and an acknowledgement that cost was a consideration for this issue.

There was significant stakeholder support for private property and homeowners to identify the presence of asbestos on their property. However, some submissions raised concerns about the potential regulatory burden of imposing this requirement and the costs if this were to be coupled with removal requirements.

The review concluded that given the significant health hazard posed by ACMs, owners of domestic premises built before 1987 should be required to identify the location and condition of any known ACMs before sale or lease of the property or when the property is subject to renovation of sufficient scale that would need local government approval. Disclosure requirements by owners/occupiers to any potential purchasers, lessees and relevant workers were proposed as well as a labelling system which would show the location of ACMs. The review also suggested that 'consideration could also be given to including a code on the label that would enable access to more detailed information on a smart phone or similar device'.³⁶

Proposed local government role

The AMR report proposed that 'domestic residential and workplace, government and commercial property and dump site ACM identification measures should be administered by the relevant local council (or equivalent)', with each council being responsible for maintaining a database for their area.³⁷ This part of the report also foreshadowed a later recommendation that these databases' maintenance could ultimately feed into a national database to be maintained by the new asbestos agency.³⁸

³³ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 23.

³⁴ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 23.

³⁵ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 23.

³⁶ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 25.

³⁷ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 25.

³⁸ See discussion of recommendation 8.

Action taken

A general note: Recommendation 3 includes sub recommendations on identification of ACMs in the built environment, including residential property and workplaces such as government and commercial property. In discussions about national registers, care needs to be taken to distinguish proposed registers' scope. For example, the Victorian Asbestos Eradication Agency (VAEA)'s consolidated ACM register work discussed below is confined to identified ACMs in the state's government buildings. This reflects target 2 of ANSP 2019–23 that 'all governments have identified and assessed the risks associated with ACMs in publicly owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure'. This is clearly very different from contemplating a national register encapsulating all ACMs in the built environment, which would include all workplaces (government and commercial) and non-workplaces.

Also, some of the discussion below concerns identification at 2 distinct levels:

1. identification at the individual property level (the 'micro level'); for example, workplace asbestos register requirements and the assessment and disclosure of ACMs within residential properties
2. identification of ACMs at a national level (the 'macro level'); for example, having a national database for ACMs and the heatmap work which provides a national picture of the likelihood of ACMs being present in the residential environment.

Recommendation 3(a): Government and commercial properties and disposal sites

ANSP 2014–18 included the goals to 'improve the identification and grading of asbestos and sharing of information regarding the location of ACMs' and to 'identify priority areas where ACMs present a risk, identify the barriers to the safe removal of asbestos, and review management and removal infrastructure to estimate the capacity and rate for the safe removal of asbestos'.³⁹

The Final Report on ANSP 2014–18 noted various awareness activities had been delivered including developing guidelines for identification and grading of in-situ asbestos and identifying priority areas where ACMs may present a risk to the Australian community. In 2018 ASEA published *Information for those undertaking asbestos assessments* which was jointly developed by the VAEA⁴⁰ and ASEA. The aim of this information was to improve the consistency of asbestos assessments (also known as 'inspections', 'audits' and 'surveys'). It included information for grading the condition of ACMs using a set of standard condition descriptions. This final report noted the work of the VAEA in developing a long-term plan for removing asbestos in government buildings and a model for grading in-situ asbestos as well as compiling an aggregated

³⁹ Strategies three and four respectively.

⁴⁰ The VAEA is an independent body reporting to the Victorian Minister for Workplace Safety and is a subsidiary of WorkSafe Victoria, the WHS regulator. It was established in 2016 specifically to prioritise and plan for the removal of asbestos from government-owned buildings, to develop a risk-based schedule for that removal and to report on the ongoing progress of this work.

and standardised register for ACMs in these buildings.⁴¹ This work is ongoing, with the VAEA reporting annually to the Minister for Workplace Safety on the progress of removal of identified asbestos from government-owned buildings in Victoria.

In terms of identifying ACMs at disposal sites, the final report for ANSP 2014–18 noted data gathered by state and territory governments on asbestos-contaminated waste captured from their tracking systems for hazardous wastes and/or reports from landfill operators. It noted that most governments were able to provide this data for each year of this ANSP. During this period the quantities of recorded asbestos-contaminated waste doubled to about 1.6 million tonnes.⁴²

A specific target was introduced in ANSP 2019–23, target 2, that ‘all governments have identified and assessed the risks associated with ACMs in publicly owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure’. This target is measured by 3 key mechanisms:

- the format of asbestos registers (hard copy or data base systems)
- the extent to which these registers are centralised and accessible
- the extent of consistency in asbestos risk levels.

The mid-term progress report for ANSP 2019–23 found: ‘All governments are identifying and assessing the risks associated with ACMs in their assets, but this process is mostly decentralised and managed at agency/departmental level.’⁴³ This report identified Victoria as the only jurisdiction which meets all 3 criteria with a consolidated asbestos register for buildings owned by the Victorian government, as well as a consistent risk assessment model to support prioritised removal of asbestos. The Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia have partly centralised systems where asbestos registers for many, but not all, agencies are accessible from a single online portal. In the Commonwealth, NSW, ACT and Tasmanian governments registers are kept centrally at a department/agency level.

The mid-term review of ANSP 2019-2023 acknowledged that ‘although target 2 can be achieved without a centralised system, having one allows better planning and prioritisation of asbestos removal at a whole-of-government level’.⁴⁴

In terms of commercial buildings, the extent to which commercial building registers are centralised is not clear, although some large companies do have centralised registers.

Target 5 of ANSP 2019-2023 provides ‘all commercial buildings which are required by law to maintain asbestos registers, have up-to-date registers and management plans that are actively being implemented’. However, no information on the extent of compliance with asbestos registers and management plans in commercial buildings was submitted by governments reporting against this target for ANSP 2019-2023 mid-

⁴¹ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 14.

⁴² [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 25.

⁴³ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 3.

⁴⁴ [Mid-term review of the Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2019/23](#), p 14.

term progress report⁴⁵. While noting that the extent of compliance could be measured by WHS regulators as part of their compliance and enforcement activities, this report concluded that the suitability of Target 5 should be reconsidered given that it merely reiterates an existing legal requirement. The mid-term review for ANSP 2019-2023 also recommended more generally that ‘targets for regulatory activities should be more meaningful’⁴⁶.

In terms of systems to assess the condition of ACMs, ASEA has been undertaking further work as, despite the guidelines developed in 2018, there continues to be a lack of consistency in how various asbestos professionals assess and describe asbestos risks and the condition of ACMs. ASEA is developing a national guide for asbestos surveys with expert advice being provided by a technical working group including representatives from industry associations, local government, unions, state and territory WHS regulators, the VAEA and Safe Work Australia. This survey guide will provide practical guidance on how to identify and assess asbestos to promote the quality of asbestos survey. Currently the UK’s Health and Safety Executive (HSE) asbestos survey guide⁴⁷ is widely used by asbestos surveyors in Australia because there is no effective Australian guide.

The aim of developing these guidelines is to provide a nationally recommended, robust and standardised process for conducting asbestos surveys across both workplace and non-workplace sectors. Consistency in risk assessments will support consistent prioritised removal based on risk. A consultation draft of the national guidelines is expected to be released later in 2023.

Establishing consistency in how ACMs are assessed is an important foundation for establishing central databases. Once there are standardised guidelines for assessments, these could be used to improve consistency for software to capture and upload asbestos survey data. This is a potential area for future work by ASEA, as discussed below.

Recommendation 3(a) also refers to centrally operated processes and systems to identify the location of ACMs at disposal sites. The ANSP 2014–18 Final Report found that most governments were able to provide data on asbestos-contaminated waste captured from their tracking systems for hazardous wastes and/or reports from landfill operators. ANSP 2019–23, includes priority 3, which aims to improve the framework for managing asbestos waste, and the ANSP 2019–23 mid-term review noted that state and territory governments continued to capture asbestos waste disposal data from their tracking systems and/or reports from licensed landfill operators.

⁴⁵ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 38.

⁴⁶ [Mid-term Review of the Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2019/23](#), p 15.

⁴⁷ Health and Safety Executive: [Asbestos: The Survey Guide](#) [HSG264].

Recommendation 3(b): Domestic premises

Currently, asbestos registers only provide information on commercial or public buildings, meaning that different approaches need to be taken in the residential setting.⁴⁸

To date, the property labelling system suggested in recommendation 3(b) of the AMR Report has not been adopted, although during consultations on the ANSP 2019–23 mid-term review, compulsory labelling of identified ACM in residential properties was raised.⁴⁹ This is an area where more work could be done by ASEA to determine if this would be an effective and practical strategy to adopt, including in the context of considering work on consistency in asbestos surveys. Technological advances, including the potential of readily accessible information on mobile devices via QR codes, could be examined in this respect.⁵⁰

The recommendation that there be assessment and disclosure requirements at the point of sale or lease of residential premises was reflected in ANSP 2014–18’s identification strategy which included the goal to ‘improve the identification and ... sharing of information regarding the location of ACMs’. The final report on ANSP 2014–18 set out awareness activities in the residential context, including developing practical, evidence-based awareness information and information targeted at people likely to encounter ACMs in a residential setting. ANSP 2019–23 built on this by including the strategic action under priority 2 which included ‘ensuring the provision of information about ACMs at the point of sale for all homes’.

ASEA researched the current laws applying to vendor and agent disclosure for residential properties that may contain asbestos as well as the awareness and practices of agents and property managers about disclosure. The report prepared on this research, *Asbestos Disclosure Requirements for Residential Properties*, included options to improve disclosure at the point of sale or lease. This research was presented to governments at the 2021 Asbestos Safety Summit.

ASEA sought to improve awareness more generally by launching a paid national campaign in 2022 including developing the following new resources:

- fact sheets on the rights and obligations of buyers and sellers and renters and landlords around asbestos disclosure, including an overview of rules for each state and territory, as well as a fact sheet on arranging a residential asbestos assessment
- a property disclosure tool that real estate agents and conveyancers can include in their sale contracts to alert buyers about the potential presence of asbestos where it is commonly found

⁴⁸ Although apartment buildings may need a register in some circumstances, for example where the relevant body corporate employs workers, or where there is a mix of residential and commercial letting.

⁴⁹ [Mid-term Review of the Asbestos National Strategic Plan 2019/23](#), p 8.

⁵⁰ For example, the United Kingdom National Asbestos Register work involving QR code access discussed later in this chapter.

- informational videos providing a quick overview of asbestos property disclosure.

This material encourages sellers to disclose the presence of asbestos in their properties (noting that in some states and territories they may be obliged to do this). Landlords are also encouraged to identify, disclose and manage the presence of asbestos in their properties.

In terms of proposed assessment and disclosure obligations before renovations occur, this would be covered by WHS laws where renovations are being undertaken by tradespeople because the property would be considered a workplace in that context. In do-it-yourself (DIY) situations there are generally no assessment or disclosure obligations apart from where general common law and public health law requirements apply.

At the macro level, priority 2 of ANSP 2019–23 also has the strategic action of collaborating to develop a national picture of ACM locations, including locations in homes. Target 9 under ANSP 2019–23 specifically deals with residential properties to ‘develop an evidence-based national picture that assesses the likelihood of ACMs being present in the residential environment’. This target has been achieved with the completion of the first version of the National Residential Asbestos Heatmap, with artificial intelligence (AI) having proved to be an effective means of centralising disparate and dispersed data.

AI has been used for the first time to develop a residential asbestos ‘heatmap’ estimating the concentration of residential buildings thought to contain asbestos within geographic regions in Australia, based on predictive modelling. The National Residential Asbestos Heatmap project aims to create detailed knowledge of Australia’s residential asbestos legacy. This will be part of an evidence-based national picture that assesses the likelihood of ACMs being present in the residential environment.

This work began with a smaller-scale study completed in 2021, the *Residential asbestos cement roof hotspots study*, which was a small-scale proof-of-concept study applying AI to quantify the density and location of the asbestos cement roofing legacy in the residential environment. This project tested a high-resolution satellite processing method for asbestos roofing used in Europe. The project then adapted and expanded this method and went on to test and validate a mixed-methods approach, combining urban analytics, high-resolution satellite or aerial imagery and machine learning to detect asbestos roofing in the residential environment by predictive modelling. More than 13,300 residential cement roofs were identified across the study localities which covered 5 jurisdictions and 44 local government areas.

The data set from the roof hotspots study, along with other residential asbestos datasets collected from government and non-government sources, has been combined to form the national heatmap which is the first ever national picture of asbestos in the Australian residential environment.

ASEA is also examining the scope for using AI to identify legacy asbestos in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities classified as being remote to inform future work in this area. The use of Google Street View is being scoped to detect ACM external wall cladding in structures, where available; aerial and satellite imagery to detect ACM illegal dumping and ACM roofing. This information could help support proactive prioritised removal and management and would be provided to jurisdictions for planning purposes.

Also, individual jurisdictions have progressed work towards estimating remaining volumes of residential asbestos. For example, the Latrobe Valley Taskforce initiated a project to determine if a model could be developed to estimate the volume of legacy asbestos remaining in the residential built environment. This study developed such a model in 2020 which revealed there were marked differences in the volumes and types of ACMs in different localities, providing a more granular assessment of risk based on location. It estimated that 74% of residential properties in the regional municipalities investigated have ACMs.⁵¹

Another macro level initiative seeking to build a national picture of ACMs is a UK data analysis report into asbestos in UK buildings which summarised analysis of anonymised asbestos surveys between October 2021 and March 2022.⁵² This industry-produced report was compiled in response to the 2022 UK parliamentary inquiry because it appeared that little evidence existed about the extent and condition of asbestos in UK buildings. It sought to collate a sample of accredited asbestos survey data and found that a significant percentage of sites had asbestos with varying levels of damage. The report found that ‘this demonstrated that data was available that could inform an analysis of the UK’s asbestos legacy in buildings’ but noted some limitations and suggested that ‘before any work is undertaken to develop a national asbestos database, an effort is made to standardise the data collection and reporting terminology between the existing database systems’.⁵³ Similar inconsistencies have been found in the identification and grading of ACMs in Australian asbestos survey work, and as noted earlier, ASEA is developing national guidelines to address this. This suggests that any future investigations ASEA undertakes into the efficacy of a national register may best be delayed until this work is complete.

Recommendation 3(b) also refers to ACRs being undertaken by a ‘competent assessor’. As noted above, ASEA is developing a national guide for asbestos surveys to improve consistency and encourage best practice. One important issue that has

⁵¹ Carmicheal, K and Ockerse R, [*Estimating the Volume of Residential Asbestos Remaining in the Latrobe Valley – A Model*](#), Latrobe Valley Taskforce, 2020, p 3.

⁵² Richards J, Francis J, Grant J and Angel-James, B, [*First Annual Data Analysis Report into Asbestos in UK Buildings*](#), November 2022.

⁵³ Richards J, Francis J, Grant J and Angel-James, B, *First Annual Data Analysis Report into Asbestos in UK Buildings*, November 2022, p 19.

been identified is that there is no fit-for-purpose Australian training for people who conduct asbestos surveys and that many are using British training.⁵⁴

ASEA's asbestos survey work is being done in parallel with Safe Work Australia's implementation of the Boland Review⁵⁵ recommendation about the definition of 'competent person' for asbestos-related work. The Boland Review found some stakeholders (including ASEA) consider the term 'competent person' too broad and lacking specification on exactly what skills and experience such a person should hold. The Boland Review Report recommended 'consideration of amendments to the model WHS Regulations to provide specific competencies for asbestos related tasks or requirements for further guidance on the skills and experience required for all asbestos-related tasks'.⁵⁶ Safe Work Australia has carriage of this work and has been consulting with ASEA on the issue, including on the training issues noted above.

Recommendation 3(c): Local council responsibility to maintain a database

This part of recommendation 3 was not ultimately pursued. While the reasons for this are not entirely clear, it seems likely that it was not deemed to be practical and therefore could not have garnered the necessary support of all jurisdictions for inclusion in the ANSP. Maintaining such a database would be complex and very resource intensive, particularly given the myriad responsibilities already placed on local governments. Further, given that asbestos register requirements in WHS laws already mandate all workplaces to identify the location and assess the condition of ACMs, having local government also keep records would amount to double handling.

In terms of establishing a centralised register to identify the location and condition of asbestos, the VAEA has developed a consolidated electronic register of government-owned buildings in Victoria and their asbestos profile to inform consistent risk assessment. The Asbestos Identification and Rating System (AIRSystem) is a consolidated live database of ACMs in buildings owned by the Victorian government which can also be used to access workplace registers. This allows QR code access to be provided to contractors working on the building and to health and safety representatives.

The AIRSystem was developed to inform and coordinate removal of asbestos from these buildings and to assist agencies to safely manage their asbestos legacy before removal. Each building has a unique number and QR code, allowing the user to scan the QR code and access AIRSystem. AIRTracker, an extension of AIRSystem, allows an occupational hygienist or other competent person to input information on ACMs to a workplace building register held on the AIRSystem. This allows live record keeping so

⁵⁴ A course developed by the British Occupational Hygiene Society.

⁵⁵ In 2018, WHS ministers requested Safe Work Australia to review the content and operation of the model WHS laws. The resulting report was prepared by an independent reviewer, Marie Boland.

⁵⁶ Recommendation 34(b) of the [Review of the Model Work Health and Safety laws Final Report](#), December 2018.

that ACM data can be edited and new data on ACMs can be added in real time. This means that agencies can view their up-to-date data live all in one place.⁵⁷

While these mechanisms are confined to Victoria, there has been some consideration of a national asbestos register since the AMR made its recommendations in 2012. The Senate Economics References Committee held an inquiry into non-conforming building products which included consideration of the unlawful importation of products containing asbestos. The committee prepared an interim report on asbestos⁵⁸ in 2017 which included recommendation 25, that ‘the Australian Government establish a national public asbestos register’. The government response in 2018 was to note the recommendation. Its comments included that ‘developing and maintaining a national register would be costly and time consuming, and make a questionable contribution to the management of asbestos given the range of measures already in place’. It noted that the Australian Government would ‘consider any benefits that arise from the work of the Victorian Government in developing a comprehensive register of asbestos in government buildings’ and that ‘this test case would inform discussions by jurisdictions on the feasibility of collaborating to develop a national register’.⁵⁹

The United Kingdom has also considered utilising QR codes for easy electronic access to asbestos registers.

A UK parliamentary report in 2022 suggested that having a central register of information on asbestos in buildings could improve the asbestos-related enforcement, making it more risk based and targeted. This report recommended the development of a ‘central digital register of asbestos in all non-domestic buildings’.⁶⁰ The government response to that report did not support the recommendation and noted that the HSE had provided evidence that a new central register would require significant resources from duty holders and government and would duplicate existing information ‘with no clear indicator that asbestos exposure risks would be improved’.⁶¹

The 2022 report noted the work of the UK National Asbestos Register, a community interest company established in 2022, in developing a national database, Asbestos SMART, which allows existing asbestos registers to be uploaded and linked. Duty holders can then share this information with those who need it. Every building enrolled in the system is issued with a unique QR code which can be displayed on site. When this code is scanned a copy of the relevant asbestos register will be automatically downloaded. Once the register is accessed it can be carried through the building on a mobile phone or tablet. This would allow tradespeople such as plumbers or electricians for instance to quickly find out the location and listed condition of any previously

⁵⁷ See the [VAEA website](#) for more information on AIRSystem and AIRTracker.

⁵⁸ [Interim report: protecting Australians from the threat of asbestos – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](#).

⁵⁹ See p 18 of the [Government Response](#).

⁶⁰ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, [The Health and Safety Executive’s approach to asbestos management](#), 21 April 2022, p 5.

⁶¹ House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, [The Health and Safety Executive’s approach to asbestos management: Government Response to the Committee’s Sixth Report of Session 2021-22](#), 21 July 2022, p 3.

identified asbestos in the building. It is not clear whether this could be easily translated to the Australian context noting that in the UK almost all UK asbestos registers are sitting in a small number of software packages. However, exploring overseas experiences and approaches to developing national asbestos registers further could be useful, including whether this approach has overall merit.

Recommendation 3: Improving asbestos identification

**Partially
implemented:**
future work required



- ▶ The residential heatmap has created an evidence-based national picture assessing the likelihood of asbestos in the residential environment.
- ▶ Work health and safety (WHS) asbestos register requirements apply for all workplaces (including government and commercial) but there are varying degrees of centralisation of registers.
- ▶ Asbestos assessments are not mandatory for non-workplaces. Residential property disclosure requirements for asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) exist in some form in all jurisdictions but these vary and could be improved.
- ▶ All state and territory governments capture data on asbestos waste disposal from their tracking systems, and asbestos waste data estimates for Australia are updated as part of national hazardous waste reporting.

Future work

- ▶ Exploring options for centralised asbestos registers and a national database.
- ▶ Promoting asbestos survey consistency, including for guidelines and training for assessors, consistent software and 'competent person' requirements.
- ▶ Improving incentives for asbestos identification in residential properties and considering introducing labelling requirements.
- ▶ Examining using artificial intelligence (AI) to identify legacy asbestos in First Nations communities classified as remote to inform asbestos management.

Recommendation 4: Improving asbestos management

4. The review recommends that the National Strategic Plan provide for:
- (a) The development of systems and processes which would result in the staged removal of all ACMs from government and commercial buildings and structures by a target date of 2030, with:
 - (i) Limited ability for a renewable certificate of exemption where the ACM is not deemed to be a health hazard and where its removal by 2030 is regarded to be impractical.
 - (b) An investigation to inform the development and implementation of a systematic and staged prioritised asbestos removal program that will:
 - (i) Develop systems and guidelines for application by government and commercial building owners in order to assist with removal of ACM from their properties by 2030; and
 - (ii) Examine the feasibility of a future prioritised removal program for residential properties.
 - (c) The development of nationally consistent asbestos management laws, policies, licensing regimes and procedures, with:
 - (i) Standards that mandate that only licensed operators undertake handling, removal, storage, transport and disposal of asbestos – such standards to allow an exemption for specified occupations to undertake removal of ACM where these activities are incidental to their primary work and are undertaken in accordance with the relevant safety requirements; and
 - (ii) The provision of appropriate incentives to property owners to enable and encourage safe asbestos removal and disposal in compliance with the new requirements.

Context

The AMR distinguished between a risk management approach to asbestos management and a prioritised removal approach.

The risk management approach involves assessing the risk to health and safety and then selecting a suitable action (or control) based on the severity of the risk and the practicability of the actions. This is governed by the hierarchy of control model which underlies the principles of WHS legislation. The AMR Report noted that ‘while the ideal action in all cases is to eliminate risk, in the case of asbestos, depending on the balance of risk and other factors, this approach may also encompass options such as

encapsulation, or the use of personal protective equipment'.⁶² Opportunistic removal is also encouraged under this approach (for example, the removal of ACM during renovation or other building works). Under this approach it was envisaged that ACM will remain in the built environment for the short to medium term; however, all would ultimately be removed as it becomes unsafe or through opportunistic removal.

A prioritised removal approach was considered part of the same risk management continuum. This approach is based on the principle that as all ACMs eventually degrade, they all pose a health risk and should be removed in an orderly, prioritised way according to the severity of the risk posed within agreed timeframes. Ongoing opportunistic removal of ACMs could be encouraged and supported under this approach also.

The review suggested that the ANSP should 'include an activity to investigate, assess and evaluate the costs and benefits of extending current asbestos risk management principles and practices to require the staged, systematic safe removal of ACMs that are deemed to pose a risk within defined timeframes' and that this could 'be used to inform the approach to be taken for removal of ACMs in government and commercial structures'. It concluded, 'prioritised removal and risk management are not mutually exclusive ... depending on the level of risk it poses, all in-situ ACMs should be progressively removed within defined periods'.⁶³

The review considered 'it is not practically achievable to remove all ACMs from all Australian properties and structures by 2030' but that 'there would be value in extending the current risk management approach by setting a target date for removing ACMs from all government and commercial buildings and structures ... by no later than 2030'. Concern was expressed that if a target date was not set, there could be 'a temptation to postpone asbestos removal indefinitely'.⁶⁴

In terms of domestic premises, the AMR found that 'a wholesale systematic removal program from domestic premises is not feasible within the foreseeable future'. It considered that 'only licensed operators should undertake handling, removal, storage, transport and disposal of asbestos' having concluded that the provision of information and protective equipment was not sufficient to protect DIY home renovators and their families from being exposed to asbestos fibres. It found that consideration should be given to providing incentives to homeowners to encourage safe and legally compliant asbestos removal and disposal.⁶⁵

Asbestos regulation was also considered in this part of the AMR Report. More nationally consistent asbestos management laws, policies, licensing regimes and procedures were recommended. This included discussion about the 10m² rule which refers to WHS laws generally requiring a licence for removal of ACMs, except for

⁶² [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 27.

⁶³ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), pp 27 and 28.

⁶⁴ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 30.

⁶⁵ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 31.

removal of up to 10m² of non-friable asbestos.⁶⁶ Requirements for non-workplace removal were also discussed.

Action taken

Recommendations 4(a) and (b)

Recommendation 4(a) recommended the target date of 2030 but this was not implemented because it was not considered feasible. This was explicitly acknowledged in ANSP 2014–18, which stated that the recommended target date of 2030 was ‘intended to be aspirational’ and that it would ‘not be used as a final deadline’.⁶⁷

In Commonwealth consultations with state and territory governments to achieve endorsement of ANSP 2014–18, a significant focus was on ensuring that the plan was both practical and implementable, and set realistic and achievable targets. The Australian Government Department of Employment commissioned research before ANSP 2014–18 was finalised into the costs and benefits of moving from a risk management approach to a prioritised removal approach for the staged systematic and safe removal of all ACM from workplaces in Australia by 2030. The consultant sought the views of governments, industry associations and unions in preparing the draft report in 2013.⁶⁸ The overall finding of this analysis was that the costs (\$114 billion) would significantly outweigh the benefits (\$2.7 billion). However, the study was never finalised given that, as the study itself noted, not all costs and benefits were quantifiable, including because of the lack of actual or suitable data in some areas.⁶⁹ In the end, this study was never progressed from the draft stage due to doubts about whether there was enough available information to support firm conclusions. The evidence base which has since been established means we now are better placed to more accurately quantify projected costs and benefits, and ASEA is now undertaking a new socio-economic analysis to do this, as discussed below.

Concerns were also raised that an accelerated removal program involving removal non-friable and undisturbed asbestos could increase the risk of exposure to workers and others in the community.⁷⁰ A now outdated view was held in some sectors that, unlike other hazards, removal of bonded or encapsulated ACM where it is otherwise unlikely to be damaged or disturbed may create more danger than leaving it undisturbed. This meant elimination or removal of ACM was often considered only after other lower options in the hierarchy had been exhausted. In practice, building works such as repair or renovation were the main catalyst for removal of ACM (known as opportunistic removal), rather than in response to an identified risk. However, this view does not take into account the increasing age and deterioration of ACMs in the Australian built

⁶⁶ Except for the ACT where all asbestos removal must be licensed except for minor routine maintenance work.

⁶⁷ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 8.

⁶⁸ The Department of Employment gave the Chair of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee a copy of the [draft report](#) by Allen Consulting in December 2013. The report was never finalised on instruction by the department.

⁶⁹ The Allen Consulting Group, *Analysis of risk management approaches to ACM in workplaces*, draft report to the Office of Asbestos Safety, 2013, p vii and p 5.

⁷⁰ [The Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Bill 2013 Report](#), p 7 citing the Queensland Government’s submission.

environment and the consequent risks of accidental or unexpected damage of these ACMs. This was acknowledged by the Senate Committee inquiry into the ASEA legislation during its passage, which noted ‘evidence from witnesses that bonded and undisturbed asbestos poses a risk of exposure in the future, if inadvertently disturbed during renovations or removed during natural disasters’.⁷¹ Since this report the risk of asbestos contamination and exposure have only increased with the increase in extreme weather events.

In April 2014, the Council of Australian Governments’ Select Council on Workplace Relations noted meetings had been held with ASEA to discuss the draft ANSP. Ministers sought further consultation on the cost and feasibility of removal and identification strategies noting ‘it would be difficult to achieve in the timeframes provided’.⁷²

The version of ANSP 2014–18 as endorsed in 2015 initiated the first part of the phased approach which aimed to deliver the preparatory work to inform the work of later phases of the ANSP, including a greater focus on identifying evidence and information to reduce risks, and did not commit to the AMR’s recommended removal targets.

Consistent with this approach, strategy four of ANSP 2014–18, ‘Removal’, included a deliverable to ‘review the potential risks and benefits of a prioritised removal programme to safely remove ACMs in government occupied and controlled buildings and commercial premises’.

In ANSP 2019–23 a stronger focus is placed on risk-based asbestos removal with the inclusion of target 3 requiring all jurisdictions to have schedules and processes for the prioritised safe removal and safe disposal of ACMs from public buildings and infrastructure. As noted above, ‘prioritised’ removal involves the planned, staged removal of ACMs based on the level of risk that the material poses, as opposed to only removing the ACM once it has become damaged or when a property is refurbished or renovated. This was reflected in the foreword to ANSP 2019–23, which includes: ‘to increase awareness and support more effective management and removal of ACMs, we need to coordinate practical, targeted and ongoing actions across Australia. We need to manage both the risks of in-situ ACMs, as well as those that may arise when we undertake removal. Asbestos management and removal approaches are part of the same risk management continuum.’

Development of the third phase of the ANSP commenced in mid-2023 and will involve focused consideration of prioritised removal. This reflects ANSP 2014–18, which stated that by phase 3 of the ANSP, ‘a practical approach will be identified to address the ongoing risks posed by the remaining ACM in the built environment, and to support the

⁷¹ [The Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Bill 2013 Report](#), p 9.

⁷² See the final communique at [the former Select Council on Workplace Relations – Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](#).

removal of all remaining asbestos in poor condition or likely to pose a risk so far as reasonably practicable'.⁷³

About 13 million tonnes of asbestos products were used in Australia's built environment and about 6.4 million tonnes are still in place today. Without significant intervention and removal, ACM stocks will decline to about 1 million tonnes by 2060 and persist in the built environment beyond 2100. Continued in-situ management of ACMs is no longer considered a sustainable option as these materials have either passed or are approaching the end of their usable life and are more likely to release asbestos fibres. The increasing frequency and intensity of natural hazards in Australia (for example, hail, fire, floods, cyclones) is also increasing the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres as ACMs become damaged during these events.

Waiting for ACMs to deteriorate or be disturbed before removing them increases the risk of exposure and increases the cost of removal. Work to develop the third phase of the ANSP will consider how, and to what extent, it should address proactive removal of ACMs – not only in government buildings and infrastructure, but also in the commercial and residential sectors.

To inform this third phase of the ANSP, ASEA has engaged consultants to conduct a socio-economic evaluation of asbestos management and removal options. The evaluation will consider the costs and benefits of 3 scenarios:

- Maintaining the status quo of existing regulatory framework, including for the management, removal and disposal of ACMs
- A revised regulatory framework which would accelerate the removal of ACMs from the built environment
- Implementation of the above revised regulatory framework plus incentives for and government commitment to proactive asbestos removal.

This evaluation will include targeted consultation to ensure costs, benefits and any underlying assumptions are sound, and will include a literature review and gap analysis. This review will implement recommendation 4(b) as it includes government, commercial and residential properties.

A target date will be one of the options considered in undertaking this socio-economic assessment but it will be based on ACM stocks and flows⁷⁴ and asbestos removal options developed in the third phase of the ANSP.

Given the recommended target date of 2030 was not considered feasible and an evidence-based rather than aspirational date is being considered, recommendation 4(a)(i), which discussed issuing certificates of exemption where removal by 2030 was regarded as impractical, has not been relevant.

⁷³ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 8.

⁷⁴ 'Stocks' is an estimate (based on modelling) of the volume (in tonnes) of ACMs remaining in the built environment; 'flows' is an estimate (based on modelling) of the volume of ACMs reaching end of product life that will go into waste or disuse.

Although the target date was not pursued, removal of ACMs has been a significant focus for improving asbestos management. ANSP 2014–18 included removal as a specific strategy. In line with ANSP 2014–18’s focus on developing an evidence base to inform future actions, this strategy included the goal of identifying priority areas where ACMs present a risk, identifying the barriers to the safe removal of asbestos, and reviewing management and removal infrastructure. The ANSP 2014–18 Final Report noted the work of the loose-fill asbestos eradication scheme (‘Mr Fluffy’ insulation) in the ACT during the life of that ANSP. It also noted Victoria had completed its development of a schedule for prioritised asbestos removal from buildings owned by Victorian public sector bodies.

ANSP 2019–23 includes:

- priority 2 – identification and effective legacy management – which states that ACMs in residential, public and commercial buildings which are at or nearing the end of their product life need to be accurately identified and maintained in a safe state until they can be removed.
- priority 3 – safe prioritised removal – including the need for the development of schedules and processes for prioritised removal of ACMs according to risk, and a specific strategic action of ‘developing and sharing jurisdictional policies on prioritised removal of ACMs from government-owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure’ and ‘prioritising the removal of ACMs by commercial premises owners’.

There are also relevant specific targets in ANSP 2019–23. Target 2 provides that ‘all governments have identified and assessed the risks associated with ACM’s in publicly owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure’ and Target 3 that ‘all jurisdictions have schedules and processes for the prioritised safe removal according to the risk of ACMs from public buildings and infrastructure and safe disposal of that material’.

The ANSP 2019–23 mid-term progress report found that in terms of asbestos removal in public buildings, particular focus has been given to management of ACMs in schools, including large-scale removal programs for most governments.⁷⁵ The responsibility of managing ACMs in schools generally lies within state and territory education departments.

This mid-term progress report found that governments are at different stages of maturity in relation to a systematic approach to asbestos removal and only a few have planned, prioritised removal schedules.⁷⁶

Only Victoria has a statewide schedule for the prioritised removal of asbestos from government-owned buildings based on risk. This schedule establishes a coordinated, whole-of-government plan for the ongoing removal of asbestos from its buildings. This is facilitated through the VAEA, which reports annually to the Victorian minister on the progress of prioritised asbestos removal.

⁷⁵ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 36.

⁷⁶ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 42.

The VAEA is an independent statutory body reporting to the Victorian Minister for Workplace Safety and is a subsidiary of WorkSafe Victoria, the state's WHS regulator. It was established in 2016 specifically to prioritise and plan for the removal of asbestos from government-owned buildings, to develop a risk-based schedule for that removal and to report on the ongoing progress of this work. To achieve this the VAEA developed:

- a consolidated register of identified ACMs in government-owned buildings
- the AIRSystem, a risk assessment model to assess asbestos hazards
- a schedule for the prioritised removal of asbestos from government-owned buildings, which was submitted to the Victorian government.

Recommendation 4(c)(i)

ANSP 2014–18's strategy two, 'Best practice' included the goal to 'identify and share best practice in asbestos management, education, transport, storage and disposal'⁷⁷.

National priority 2 of ANSP 2019–23 includes the strategic action of 'improving and aligning asbestos-related legal frameworks'.

Consistent with this recommendation, ASEA prepared an options paper, *Unlicensed Asbestos Removal*, which examines the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining or removing the 10m² exception in the workplace context. In most circumstances, WHS laws require asbestos to be removed from workplaces by a licensed asbestos removalist. The '10m² exception' describes the situation where WHS laws do not require licensing for the removal of 10m² or less of non-friable asbestos. This applies throughout Australia except in the ACT where all asbestos removal must be licensed except for minor routine maintenance work.

The paper outlined a number of policy options with varying regulatory impacts available to decision-makers around unlicensed asbestos removal in workplaces, including their advantages and disadvantages. It concludes that although each jurisdiction has licensing regimes in place to control workplace asbestos exposure risks, policymakers have identified a need to allow tradespeople to remove small amounts of incidental asbestos in a timely, efficient and cost-effective way. Even in the ACT it is recognised that some exception was needed for workers who are not licensed asbestos removalists, as noted above.⁷⁸ The paper noted that mandatory asbestos awareness training was supported by many stakeholders to address concerns about unlicensed asbestos removal in workplaces.

The degree of regulation for asbestos removal in non-workplaces is currently markedly less than for workplaces. Generally, subject to limited regulation in public health and environment protection and planning laws, DIY homeowners can remove any amount of asbestos without a licence.⁷⁹ Two notable exceptions to this are the ACT where non-

⁷⁷ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014-18](#), p11.

⁷⁸ Noting that mandatory training requirements apply in the ACT for workers under this limited exception.

⁷⁹ For further discussion see the ASEA publication: [Unlicensed Asbestos Removal: options to address concerns about allowing unlicensed persons to remove unlimited amounts of asbestos](#).

workplace unlicensed removal is prohibited⁸⁰ and Queensland, which has banned non-licensed asbestos removal of friable asbestos in non-workplaces and restricted removal more than 10m² of non-friable asbestos to homeowners who have completed requisite training.⁸¹

The paper also outlined policy options in this non-workplace context ranging from awareness raising, training, prescribing control measures, requiring permits for asbestos removal and disposal and notification schemes, to the prohibition of unlicensed removal altogether.

The paper also noted that ASEA's guidance and awareness materials for tradespeople, as well as homeowners, consistently recommend engaging licensed professionals for all removal work because they are fully trained, insured and better equipped to prevent or minimise asbestos exposure.

Recommendation 4(c)(ii)

ANSP 2014–18 included strategy four: 'Removal' with a goal which included to 'identify priority areas where ACMs present a risk' and 'identify the barriers to the safe removal of asbestos'. The activities reported against this goal included the loose-fill asbestos eradication schemes in the ACT and NSW and a pilot scheme in Queensland on disposal options for homeowners needing to dispose of small quantities of waste.

ANSP 2019–23 includes national priority 3, 'Safe prioritised removal and effective waste management' which includes the strategic action of 'developing incentives to encourage the safe removal and disposal of ACMs from homes'.

The only existing incentive is a taxation ruling issued in July 2020 allowing income tax deductions for expenditure on 'environmental protection activities'.⁸² This means that if you own a property that provides you with an income (for example, you are a landlord of residential property), some asbestos activities may be claimed as a tax-deductible expense, including the costs of testing suspected asbestos and of engaging a licensed asbestos removalist. ASEA has developed an online fact sheet on this ruling.

Further strategies, including incentives, to encourage prioritised removal of asbestos cement roofing were considered in conjunction with ASEA's roof hotspot work. Although asbestos cement roofing represents a smaller share of the overall residential asbestos legacy, it poses a disproportionately higher public health risk due to issues such as age-related deterioration and the impact of disaster events. ASEA devised a systematic approach for prioritised removal of this material, proposing strategies that governments could take in the short term or longer term to encourage asbestos cement roof removal by homeowners. It noted that the smaller proportion of this roofing in the overall asbestos legacy could make this a more manageable exercise within the existing capacity of the asbestos management system, including ensuring appropriate

⁸⁰ *Dangerous Substances Regulations 2004* (ACT).

⁸¹ *Public Health Regulation 2018* (Qld).

⁸² ATO [TR 2020/2](https://www.ato.gov.au/ATO/your-tax-information/tr/2020/2).

regulatory oversight.⁸³ The approach outlined could be a foundation for future work to promote prioritised removal more generally.

Due to the nature of this part of the recommendation, implementation will be ongoing for as long as ACMs remain in the built environment.

Recommendations 4: Improving asbestos management

Partially
implemented:
future work required



- ▶ A comprehensive socio-economic evaluation of asbestos management and removal options in the built environment will inform the next (third) phase of the ANSP with timing for removal options based on ACM stocks and flows and asbestos removal options developed in that phase of the ANSP.
- ▶ Nationally consistent asbestos management laws, policies, licensing regimes and procedures largely exist under WHS law although unlicensed removal requirements vary, particularly in the residential sector.

Future work

- ▶ The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) will continue to explore incentives to encourage safe removal of ACMs from homes.

⁸³ See [The residential asbestos cement roofing legacy](#), ASEA report, October 2021.

Recommendation 5: Improving transport, storage and disposal

5. The review recommends that the National Strategic Plan provide for development of guidelines and principles to improve transport, storage and disposal of asbestos, including:
- (a) Reviewing the adequacy of existing infrastructure and systems to cater for existing and future demand;
 - (b) Initiatives to encourage safe storage and disposal at licensed facilities; and
 - (c) Support and incentives for reporting of illegal disposal sites.

Context

The AMR Report noted that the cost of removal and disposal of asbestos needed to be modelled as part of the development of the ANSP. It observed that the demand for asbestos removal infrastructure would continue to grow nationally as more ACMs deteriorated and became unsafe and demand would also increase with the implementation of proposed prioritised removal programs. It found that ‘failure to provide for the potential increase in demand for asbestos-related services may hamper the implementation of the plan and potentially create new exposure risks’.⁸⁴

The report stated that waste disposal facility licensing is managed by individual jurisdictions and the cost of disposal could vary significantly between disposal facilities. It also noted that conveniently located licensed disposal facilities are often lacking, especially for locations that are described as regional and remote, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities particularly faced challenges because of this. It also discussed safe storage for ACMs where prompt disposal is not viable, noting that ‘in some areas, there are only a handful of disposal sites that were able to accept asbestos-containing waste; sometimes these were a great distance from source locations and premium fees are being levied’.⁸⁵

It found that the costs and inconvenience of disposal lead to illegal dumping and that measures to address this need particular focus as many of the activities proposed in the ANSP will require available and accessible disposal infrastructure.

Action taken

ANSP 2014–18 included strategy two: ‘Best practice’, which included the deliverable to ‘identify and promote best practice transport, storage and disposal practices’ for ACMs. This included the deliverable of support for initiatives for the reporting of illegal disposal sites. Also, under strategy four, ‘Removal’, a deliverable included to ‘conduct a review into asbestos removal infrastructure (transport, storage and disposal facilities) across Australia focusing on capacity and future risks’.

⁸⁴ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#) p 32.

⁸⁵ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 34.

The final report for ANSP 2014–18 noted a number initiatives relating to disposal of ACMs which tied into broader actions to combat illegal dumping more generally. This report also presented data on asbestos removal and disposal over the life of the plan.

ANSP 2019–23 includes national priority 3 of ‘Safe prioritised removal and effective waste management’ and includes the strategic action of ‘improving the accessibility and availability of waste disposal facilities for ACMs’. It also includes target 6, ‘all regulators are investigating, prosecuting and penalising serious known breaches of asbestos-related laws including illegal waste disposal and importation’ and target 7, ‘easier and cheaper disposal of asbestos waste’.

Recommendation 5(a)

To review the adequacy of existing infrastructure and systems to cater for existing and future demand, those demands needed to be quantified.

In June 2015, ASEA commissioned Blue Environment to construct a model estimating the amount of legacy asbestos remaining in the built environment (stocks) and the quantities of ACMs reaching the end of their productive life and becoming waste or in disuse (flows).

The researchers collated available consumption data in Australia to determine the most common ACMs in the built environment. They worked out the proportion of asbestos in each ACM and estimated the life span of the ACMs to develop the model which projects the stocks and flows of asbestos products in Australia until 2100.⁸⁶

It was intended that as better data became available the parameters of the model could be varied. In 2021, the 2015 Australian Stocks and Flows Model for Asbestos was updated to reflect new information from literature and industry experts.⁸⁷ This update allows for updated annual estimates on stocks and flows, allowing estimations into the future. This model’s estimated flows to waste do not include soil and rubble contaminated with ACMs, and so may differ from other waste reporting tools.

This updated model found that after peaking in 1980 at about 11 million tonnes, ACM stocks are predicted to decline at just above 10% per decade. This means that, without significant intervention, ACM stocks will decline to about 1 million tonnes by 2060. ACM flows are forecast to peak in 2030 at about 167,000 tonnes. This suggests an ongoing need for infrastructure for asbestos disposal well into the future.

The ACM stocks estimate for 2021 was 6.4 million tonnes, with 95% of this comprising:

- 3.4 million tonnes of asbestos cement pipes
- 1.7 million tonnes of asbestos cement sheeting (domestic)
- 1 million tonnes of asbestos cement sheeting (commercial).

In terms of national waste and data collection, state and territory governments capture asbestos waste disposal data which has been provided annually since 2006–07 to 2020–21 with a total of about 12.5 million tonnes of asbestos containing waste

⁸⁶ [An Australian stocks and flows model for asbestos](#) undertaken by Dr Sally Donovan and Dr Joe Pickin, 2015.

⁸⁷ [Asbestos stocks and flows estimates in Australia – Infographic](#), undertaken by Blue Environment, 2021.

disposed of nationally in that time period. This asbestos waste increased from about 315,000 tonnes in 2006–07 to 1.42 million tonnes in 2020–21.

The Mid-term Review Report for ANSP 2019–23 found that: ‘in relation to asbestos waste, ASEA’s research indicates that infrastructure for asbestos disposal is required for many decades to come. Although most jurisdictions have removed the waste levy for domestic loads of separated and wrapped asbestos waste and are implementing strategies to address illegal dumping, more focus is needed on what can be done to make asbestos waste disposal easier and cheaper, and effectively manage rising quantities of asbestos waste’.⁸⁸

ASEA has also reviewed the adequacy of existing infrastructure by examining the location and accessibility of asbestos waste disposal facilities. A distinction was made between ‘small’ (under 10m²) and ‘large’ loads for designating ‘convenient’ travel times to an asbestos waste facility.⁸⁹ It found that nearly all Australians live within a 40-minute travel distance to a facility that accepts domestic asbestos waste and a 2-hour travel time to a facility that accepts commercial asbestos waste. Using this evidence base, it also updated its jurisdictional maps showing licensed asbestos disposal facilities within convenient travel times for areas with populations greater than 1,000 people.

Recommendation 5(b)

In 2016 ASEA commissioned a review to identify issues relating to illegal dumping of ACMs in Australia and initiatives being implemented by all levels of government to address this.⁹⁰ The review attempted to estimate the amount of illegally dumped waste containing ACMs. While noting reliance on a number of significant assumptions based on existing limited data, it found that about 6,300 tonnes of ACMs were illegally dumped annually in Australia, resulting in a clean-up cost of about \$11.2 million a year. The review found that the primary motivations for illegal dumping appeared to be cost and difficulties accessing legal disposal options and made a range of suggestions to minimise this dumping.⁹¹

In 2018 ASEA commissioned further research to understand the barriers and motivations for asbestos removal in the residential and commercial sectors in Australia. This research found that cost was the main barrier to removal and that government initiatives which reduce the combined cost of removal and disposal for homeowners are effective.⁹²

Following on from this evidence base, ANSP 2019–23 included target 7: ‘easier and cheaper disposal of asbestos waste’.

The ANSP 2019–23 mid-term review report noted strategies in NSW and Victoria to identify illegal dumping and to improve asbestos waste disposal. Easier asbestos waste disposal is particularly important given evidence of increasing asbestos flows. As noted

⁸⁸ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2019–23 Mid-term Review Report](#), p 10.

⁸⁹ This is also being reviewed and updated in 2023.

⁹⁰ [Illegal asbestos dumping: Review of issues and initiatives](#), March 2016, undertaken by ACIL Allen Consulting.

⁹¹ [Illegal asbestos dumping: Review of issues and initiatives](#), p 2.

⁹² [Barriers, motivations and options for increasing asbestos removal in the residential and commercial sectors](#), ASEA Report 2018.

above, in 2021 ASEA updated its national list of asbestos disposal facilities and its web search tool for those facilities, providing easily accessible information to the public to make safe asbestos disposal easier.

ASEA also provides information on its website about safe storage and disposal of asbestos, including targeted information for householders, home renovators and tradespeople.

Reducing the costs of asbestos disposal was also examined in that mid-term review report. Pricing for asbestos waste disposal can include both a gate and a levy fee. The report noted that while most jurisdictions had removed levy fees for domestic asbestos waste, gate fees still apply and these vary significantly within jurisdictions as they are set by individual facilities. It found that more focus is needed on initiatives to make asbestos waste disposal easier and cheaper to effectively manage rising quantities of asbestos waste.

In response to this, ASEA, in collaboration with a consultant, conducted a survey in 2022 about local government initiatives to reduce the illegal dumping and improper disposal of ACMs. Key findings of this research included that:

- 71% of local government bodies across Australia considered asbestos to be a significant issue
- 20% had no active illegal asbestos disposal-related interventions in place
- the interventions that were in place focused on surveillance, enforcement and clean up, leaving a missed opportunity to intervene earlier to prevent illegal dumping in the first place.

This research informed the development of a *Guide for Local Government to combat illegal dumping and improper disposal of asbestos* for use by local government staff with responsibility for developing and implementing waste management strategies. The guide provides advice to councils on ways to change community behaviour throughout the asbestos waste journey, from awareness through to removal and finally to the disposal stage. It encourages preventative strategies, such as asbestos awareness and education programs, along with existing interventions. For ready reference, the guide was also condensed into a 2 page ‘quick reference guide’ for councils’ use.

Recommendation 5(c)

The 2016 illegal dumping review discussed above found that the lack of useful data regarding the illegal dumping of ACMs reflects the lack of data collection at the state and territory level of government. It found that there was not a clear picture of the size of the problem for policymakers due to the lack of centralised data. It suggested that ‘if it is considered worthwhile to have data at the state and territory and national level, changes are needed to collect and collate data at those levels’.⁹³

The mid-term progress report on ANSP 2019–23 noted that surveys on asbestos awareness and behaviour show that about one in 3 respondents reported disposing of asbestos in unsafe or illegal ways and reiterated that cost and convenience are

⁹³ [*Illegal asbestos dumping: Review of issues and initiatives: final discussion paper, March 2016*](#), undertaken by ACIL Allen Consulting, p 35.

significant barriers. To date there appears to have been little coordinated or comprehensive action taken in terms of support and incentives for reporting of illegal disposal sites, although jurisdictions do provide a mechanism for reports. However, NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) conducts the 'Illegal Dumping Prevention Program Grants' program, which has an option for councils and land managers to receive up to \$20,000 to establish illegal dumping baseline data to identify illegal dumping trends. This is an incentive to develop systems and processes to collect data but is not coordinated or comprehensive. Perhaps best-practice models could be shared to reduce or avoid duplication and improve data collection.

The NSW EPA RIDonline program allows specific reporting of asbestos dumping and has a dedicated website for reports which are sent to the relevant local council so they can respond. RIDonline is a voluntary system of reporting which is estimated to capture about 60% of illegal dumping incidents dealt with by councils and public land managers.

Table 2 gives an overview of the reporting mechanisms in place in each jurisdiction. The ideal would be to have a national digital reporting system to enable data to be collected on locations, volumes and categories of waste so that trends could be analysed and more effective data-driven strategies could be put in place. It would be worth researching each jurisdiction's mechanism to find the one most suitable for national scale.

For example, RIDonline in NSW is an effective model and is not only a reporting mechanism but has associated RID Squads dealing with illegally dumped waste, following up on perpetrators and implementing prevention strategies. It also enables the reporter to 'tick a box' for asbestos presence if it is suspected. We have been provided with data from EPA NSW which can be filtered just to show the location of asbestos dumps where this has been able to be identified. This mechanism would be a good candidate for national use.

One of the difficulties with ascertaining the volume of dumped asbestos is that an illegal dump often has a variety of waste types and it is difficult to be certain of the presence of asbestos, although in most cases any suspicion of asbestos is treated as a 'presence' so the necessary precautions are taken to keep workers and the community safe.

Table 2: Illegal dumping reporting mechanisms by jurisdiction

State/territory	Agency	Link	Details
NSW	EPA NSW	Report illegal dumping - RIDonline (nsw.gov.au) RID Online Public (nsw.gov.au)	Sends reports of illegal dumping to relevant council (can report asbestos). Asbestos waste is seen as a threat to human health/environment so people are urged to treat as an emergency and call EPA Environment Line on 131 555. 48/128 NSW councils link to

			RIDonline and 35 councils have RID Squads.
ACT	Access Canberra	Fix my street (act.gov.au)	Fix My Street is an online tool that lets you report an issue and track the progress of your request. Citizens may submit feedback anonymously or create an account to track the progress of their service requests. Residents can submit feedback and service requests relating to a variety of issues of which dumping is one.
Vic	EPA Victoria	Report illegal waste disposal Environment Protection Authority Victoria (epa.vic.gov.au) Illegal Waste Disposal Program Environment Protection Authority Victoria (epa.vic.gov.au)	<i>Report illegal waste disposal to EPA</i> Call our pollution hotline on 1300 372 842. We're here 24 hours. <u>Register</u> for and use the <u>EPA Interaction Portal</u> to report illegal waste disposal. Report illegal waste disposal to your local council You can report illegal waste disposal to your <u>local council</u>. Our <u>Officers for the Protection of the Local Environment</u> (OPLEs) are based in some local councils across Victoria. They can help with illegal waste disposal reports. EPA's Illegal Waste Disposal Program aims to disrupt systematic illegal waste disposal. It focuses on illegal large-scale industrial and hazardous waste disposal. <u>Local councils</u> and EPA's <u>Officers for the Protection of the Local Environment</u> (OPLE) program manage municipal and small-scale illegal waste disposal.
Qld	Dept of Environment, Land and Water	Illegal dumping Environment, land and water Queensland Government (www.qld.gov.au) Report it Environment, land and water 	The <u>Litter and Illegal Dumping Management Framework</u> examines the many sources of waste pollution, the pathways that waste moves through the environment and the impacts on human health, animals, and the environment. As

		Queensland Government (www.qld.gov.au)	a holistic biophysical management framework, it provides practical actions that can assist land managers in reducing and managing waste pollution, based on scientific information and research. Report it if you see someone littering or illegal dumping from a vehicle, vessel or trailer, or if you find piles of dumped waste, you can report it using the Littering and Illegal Dumping Reporting Form. Of the littering reports received by the department almost 75% result in the registered owner of the vehicle or boat receiving a penalty infringement notice.
WA	EPA Western Australia	EPA WA EPA Western Australia Illegal dumping Western Australian Government (www.wa.gov.au)	Search of 'Illegal Dumping' directs you to contact local council/shire, or to Dept of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) Some councils have their own reporting system, for example, LitterBusters – City of Rockingham.
SA	EPA South Australia	Reporting pollution EPA Fines now in place – Dob in a Litterer EPA	<i>Report these incidents to the EPA</i> • All pollution incidents relating to an EPA-licensed site • Major environmental incidents requiring an emergency response • Illegal dumping of commercial and industrial quantities • Radiation incidents Note: Minor neighbourhood nuisance issues, kerbside rubbish and litter remains the responsibility of local government and should be reported to the council. It is always best to report an environmental concern to someone. If you are unsure who is best to investigate your concern, call the EPA or

			your council , and they will be able to direct you to the appropriate authority. You can also check for the relevant organisation to contact .
Tas	EPA Tasmania	Managing Litter and Dumping EPA Tasmania Litter Hotline and online reporting Report Rubbish Litter and Dumping Management System (LaDMS)	<i>The role of the EPA</i> The EPA has the responsibility for implementation of the Litter Act 2007 which: prohibits the deposit of litter in the environment, regulates the distribution of materials that may become litter, protects and enhances the quality of the natural and urban Tasmanian environments. The litter laws also provide a legal basis for the Litter Hotline and online reporting, where littering from a motor vehicle or vessel can be reported. Report Rubbish can be used to report an area that needs to be cleaned up. This simple web application requests information about the type, quantity and location of litter and forwards the report automatically to the relevant land manager. A second, parallel, system called the Litter and Dumping Management System (LaDMS) provides land managers with a tool for managing reports made through Report Rubbish.
NT	Asbestos NT	Important information about disposal and illegal dumping – Asbestos	To report the illegal disposal or dumping of asbestos, call the NT EPA Pollution Hotline on 1800 064 567.
Australia	Snap, Send, Solve	Home – Snap Send Solve	<i>Free app for reporting local issues</i> The easy and efficient way to notify local councils, utilities or other authorities of issues that need addressing in your community; for example, City of Greater Dandenong.

Recommendation 5: Improving transport, storage and disposal

Partially
implemented:
future work required



- ▶ Infrastructure for asbestos disposal will be needed for many decades to come with ongoing stocks and flows research informing demand.
- ▶ ASEA has established a searchable online map for asbestos disposal facilities nationwide, including travel times to facilities.
- ▶ ASEA developed an evidence-based guide for local government providing advice to change community behaviour regarding illegal dumping and improper disposal of asbestos.

Future work

- ▶ More coordinated and comprehensive data to identify illegal dumping – work towards a national digital reporting system.

Recommendation 6: Improving asbestos awareness

6. The review recommends that the National Strategic Plan provide for a program to improve asbestos awareness, which will include:
 - (a) A comprehensive study into community awareness of, and attitudes towards, the hazards of asbestos;
 - (b) The development and implementation of multi-tiered, targeted and sustained asbestos awareness campaigns;
 - (c) Systematic, impartial and timely evaluation of awareness campaigns;
 - (d) The development of specialised asbestos awareness materials for use in situations such as natural disaster recovery operations; and
 - (e) The consolidation of and enhancement of the provision of information to the public in relation to asbestos and safe asbestos removal.

Context

The AMR Report identified that asbestos awareness should be a key priority under the ANSP as stakeholders had consistently raised it as a significant area that needed urgent attention. Home renovators and tradespeople in particular were identified as high-risk groups. A distinction was made between awareness and formalised education and training, which is discussed in the next recommendation. ‘Awareness’ was described as a person’s knowledge and understanding of materials likely to contain asbestos, the risks of asbestos exposure and the steps to take to safely address those risks.

A study into awareness and attitudes about asbestos hazards was recommended to form the basis of appropriately targeted campaigns designed to change behaviour. The AMR identified the importance of reliable resources in the natural disaster context. It also raised the importance of having a reliable, consolidated source of information on asbestos issues given the plethora of online material available which was of varying quality, saying this could include an initial public helpline and a central website for publishing advice.

Action taken

ANSP 2014–18 included ‘Awareness’ as its first strategy with the goal: ‘increase public awareness of the health risks posed by working with or being exposed to asbestos’. One of the major research activities which began under this ANSP was conducting a national survey in 2014, 2016 and 2018 to identify shifts in community awareness about the risks of asbestos. It gathered and measured responses from the general public, tradespeople, DIY home renovators and real estate agents and provided a benchmark for the surveys conducted under ANSP 2019–23.

Priority 1 of ANSP 2019–23 is ‘improve asbestos awareness to influence behavioural change’. It aims to improve asbestos awareness with governments and community bodies collaborating to provide trusted, practical, easily understood and accessible information about asbestos risks in homes workplaces and the environment. ANSP 2019–23 also includes a specific awareness target, target 1: ‘increased awareness of the health risks of ACMs and where to source information: all tradespersons whose work brings them into contact with ACMs; all workers in workplaces with ACMs; 80 per cent of homeowners and occupiers, 80 per cent of property managers and real estate managers’.

In April 2022, the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Rule was made to clarify that ASEA’s functions include raising awareness of asbestos safety, analysing and collecting data to measure progress and promoting consistent messages, policies and practices in relation to asbestos safety. This implemented a recommendation of the 2019 review of ASEA’s roles and functions and allows ASEA to maintain momentum in increasing asbestos awareness and influencing safe behaviours and practices.

Recommendation 6(a) – community awareness/attitudes about asbestos hazards

During ANSP 2014–18, ASEA’s national benchmark surveys of awareness and attitudes to asbestos of 2014, 2016 and 2018 went some way to addressing recommendation 6(a) by providing a ‘comprehensive study into community awareness of, and attitudes towards, the hazards of asbestos’.

These surveys provided a benchmark for subsequent surveys conducted under ANSP 2019–23, which focused on the 4 cohort groups under target 1.

In 2020 ASEA commissioned a nationally representative online survey on asbestos and DIY activities (home maintenance, repairs and improvements) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the survey was to examine the anecdotal evidence that there had been a significant increase in the amount of DIY home renovation projects while people were working or isolated at home. More than 1,000 DIYers were surveyed, and the findings included that:

- 40% had worked on a risky property⁹⁴ within the past 5 years
- 35% had acted inappropriately⁹⁵ when disposing of asbestos as it was seen as easier than finding a licensed removalist or disposal centre
- Only 5% cited asbestos when considering DIY dangers, though it topped the list of potential DIY risks when prompted
- Only half were confident⁹⁶ they could identify or manage asbestos
- 29% cited COVID-related motivations for considering DIY home improvement.

These findings informed awareness messages aimed at homeowners and DIY activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁹⁴ One built between 1940 and 1990, the decades of greatest concern for asbestos presence.

⁹⁵ For example, binning, burying or burning asbestos.

⁹⁶ Using a rating scale of 7 or more out of 10.

However, homeowners and occupiers are not a homogenous group. A follow-up survey conducted in 2021 provided a more nuanced understanding of different home-improver groups and how demographic differences impact attitudes and behaviours towards asbestos safety. A latent class analysis yielded 5 distinct segments based on clustering similar demographic, socio-economic, behavioural and attitudinal traits. This revealed differing levels of awareness among the segments, with the financially vulnerable DIYers and multicultural young urbanites having a low level of awareness; well-heeled DIY enthusiasts and financially comfortable families having a medium awareness level and cautious older outsourcers having a high awareness level and primarily outsourcing asbestos-related work to professionals.

This research facilitated targeted awareness campaigns and increased reach of ASEA communications; for example, delivery of awareness materials through national hardware chain stores and translating awareness material into the 4 most common non-English languages using social media channels.

At the end of 2020 ASEA completed a national survey of real estate agents and property managers to assess awareness levels and attitudes in managing asbestos risks. It found real estate agents are generally aware of asbestos risks; however, most property managers and real estate agents were found to mistakenly believe that a pre-sale inspection covers the presence of asbestos. This research informed ASEA's residential property disclosure work discussed under recommendation 3, including raising awareness of disclosure obligations at point of sale or lease.⁹⁷

More recently, quantitative national research has been undertaken to evaluate the asbestos knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and opportunities for intervention with:

- workers in buildings with ACMs
- homeowners and occupiers
- tradespersons whose work brings them into contact with ACMs.

Findings from this survey are available at the [National Asbestos Awareness Survey 2022](#).

In addition, the mid-term progress report of ANSP 2019–23 noted jurisdictional surveys into asbestos issues. The Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce has undertaken repeated surveys to benchmark changes in the level of awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards asbestos in Victoria. In New South Wales the EPA conducted social research to improve asbestos management, providing baseline information on behaviours relating to home maintenance, renovation and asbestos waste. The Queensland Building and Construction Commission commissioned market research into owner-builders' asbestos awareness, finding that although they mostly knew it was dangerous there were significant issues with identifying where it could be found.

All of this research shows an increased awareness and knowledge of the health risks of ACMs and where to source information. There is also an improving level of awareness that asbestos is common in Australian buildings. However, homeowners and occupiers show differing levels of awareness across different segments.

⁹⁷ [Real Estate Agents & Property Managers Research](#), 2020, undertaken by Faster Horses and ASEA.

It is evident from the quantitative and qualitative 2021 Asbestos Safety and Home Improvement Research that a one-size-fits-all messaging model is not effective in raising awareness and changing behaviour. The format, delivery and timing of the message needs to make sure they are seen by the intended audience through their preferred information source.

Recommendations 6(b) and (c) – multi-tiered, targeted and sustained asbestos awareness campaigns and evaluation of those campaigns

The first year that ASEA coordinated centralised campaign materials for National Asbestos Awareness Week (NAAW), held in November each year, was 2019. The 2019 NAAW campaign message, ‘Asbestos lurks in more places than you’d think’, was targeted at people renovating or improving their homes, as well as tradespeople who work in the residential environment. In 2020, a nationally consistent date was achieved for the first time with 110 different government and non-government organisations adopting ASEA’s resources during NAAW.

In 2021 the NAAW campaign asked Australians to ‘Think twice about asbestos’. The aim of this campaign was to raise awareness among the public and key trades of the health risks associated with exposure to asbestos fibres, where asbestos products can be found and why they should use qualified asbestos professionals. Campaign messaging was translated for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities into 6 languages. The campaign met key deliverables and metrics including:

- a 300% increase on 2020 local council engagement with the campaign
- more than 4 million broadcast audience reached through publicity and promotion
- more than 1 million reached through paid social media
- 2,746 CALD organisations being sent the social media pack.⁹⁸

ASEA also engaged with producers of a high-rating home DIY renovation television program and provided asbestos safety awareness material, as well as advertising asbestos safety material in a popular hardware chain store’s magazine.

In June 2022, ASEA ran a digital media campaign targeting residential property buyers, sellers, renters and landlords to promote the disclosure of asbestos at point of sale or lease. An evaluation of this campaign showed traffic to ASEA’s website increased by 68%.

During 2022–23, ASEA launched its National Asbestos Awareness Campaign (NAAC) using the ‘think twice’ message. This was the first paid advertising campaign of this scale to be delivered in Australia. The campaign targeted DIY home improvers and tradespeople at 2 phases of peak periods for undertaking home improvement projects and renovations⁹⁹ and primarily ran online across digital display, video and social media channels, as well as in a major hardware chain store’s magazine.

Campaign evaluation showed that materials were displayed more than 65 million times: across social media (11 million), video (3 million) and digital display (51 million). Universal McCann, the Australian Government’s media buyer, reported that the

⁹⁸ [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Annual Report 2021-22](#), p 28.

⁹⁹ These peak periods are November/December and March/April.

campaign exceeded Australian Government advertising benchmarks across all measures.

CALD audiences targeted with translated advertising were highly engaged with the campaign. The webpage containing translated fact sheets was listed as the top-viewed webpage during both phases, with 9,000 unique page views in phase 1 and 11,000 unique page views in phase 2.

Outside of paid media, the stakeholder engagement was highly successful, with campaign packs distributed to 865 contacts, and a further 528 packs downloaded from the website.

The progress reports for ANSP 2019–23 also noted targeted awareness campaigns on specific asbestos issues run by WHS and environment protection regulators in various jurisdictions, including evaluation of some on those campaigns.

The mid-term review for ANSP 2019–23 warned that ‘there is a risk that because awareness activities are often easier to undertake than dealing with the asbestos materials themselves, awareness raising becomes the only action that is taken’ and that ‘awareness raising alone will not prevent exposure to asbestos fibres’. This review suggested that ASEA is best-placed to ‘conduct highly targeted and tailored awareness campaigns’ and that this would ‘avoid duplication of effort and reduce the risk of inconsistent messages’.¹⁰⁰

ASEA will continue running the NAAC and build on the success and reach achieved during the 2022–23 NAAC. It will continue to challenge complacency within the Australian community by reminding them that the danger from asbestos is far from over.

Recommendation 6(d) – specialised awareness-raising materials for use in situations such as national disasters

ASEA commissioned research in 2017 to undertake a preliminary national review of disaster planning issues, protocols and practices relating to asbestos, which informed future work in this area. ASEA has supported best practice in emergency and natural disaster planning, response and recovery, including by:

- raising awareness about what to do before, during and after a disaster event; for example, ASEA published a fact sheet on managing asbestos during and after a bushfire, as well as guidance about ensuring insurance policies cover asbestos-related incidents
- reviewing state and territory disaster communications
- sharing data to improve emergency response and recovery operations
- encouraging a transition from ad hoc or emergency removal of ACMs towards staged, prioritised, risk-based programs.

The National Residential Asbestos Heatmap can potentially be used to improve asbestos management in disaster events by aiding strategic planning and decision-

¹⁰⁰ See [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2019–23 Mid-term Review Report](#), p 7.

making. It contains separate layers to provide additional context to the asbestos predictions, including the Australian Disaster Resilience Index.¹⁰¹

ASEA has developed a range of specialised awareness materials to assist in the broader management, removal and disposal of asbestos, including:

- *Guidelines for communicating about asbestos risk* and *Communicating asbestos facts and figures* to support effective communication when dealing with the public about potential exposure events, including those associated with natural disasters
- guidance for local governments on how to reduce illegal disposal of asbestos waste
- guidelines to assist water and/or sewerage service providers eliminate or minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres released from AC pipes.

Recommendation 6(e) consolidation/enhancement of information provided to the public about asbestos and its safe removal

All states and territories have established dedicated asbestos safety websites to consolidate asbestos safety information for their jurisdiction.

ASEA has consolidated and updated information on its website about asbestos safety in the home, workplace and environment. The materials are designed to be readily accessible and easy to read. For example, ASEA created webpages that could be easily viewed from mobile devices with guidance for construction trades, electricians, plumbers and homeowners and home renovators.

ASEA continues to review its information to make sure information given to the public is consistent, targeted, up-to-date and can be easily adopted by governments and other stakeholders. *Guidelines for communicating about asbestos risk* and *Communicating asbestos facts and figures* are useful tools to support this work.

In late 2018, ASEA launched an enhanced website and enquiry telephone line (the Asbestos Safety Hotline). Australians can call ASEA for immediate and accurate referral advice about dealing with asbestos in the home, workplace or environment, reducing the number of calls it takes for enquirers to get the right advice and information regarding asbestos. Where possible, ASEA seeks to reduce the need for telephone inquiries by providing comprehensive and readily accessible asbestos-related information online.

In the most recent quarter, 1 March 2023 – 30 June 2023, the Asbestos Safety Hotline recorded 72 calls. ASEA dealt directly with 40% of these calls, with the remaining 60% being referred on, most commonly to WHS regulators but also to other areas including local councils, asbestos assessors/removalists and asbestos support groups. The graph at Figure 1 shows the categories for calls we received during this period.

¹⁰¹ This depicts the capacity to prepare for, absorb and recover from disaster events like bushfires, cyclones or floods.

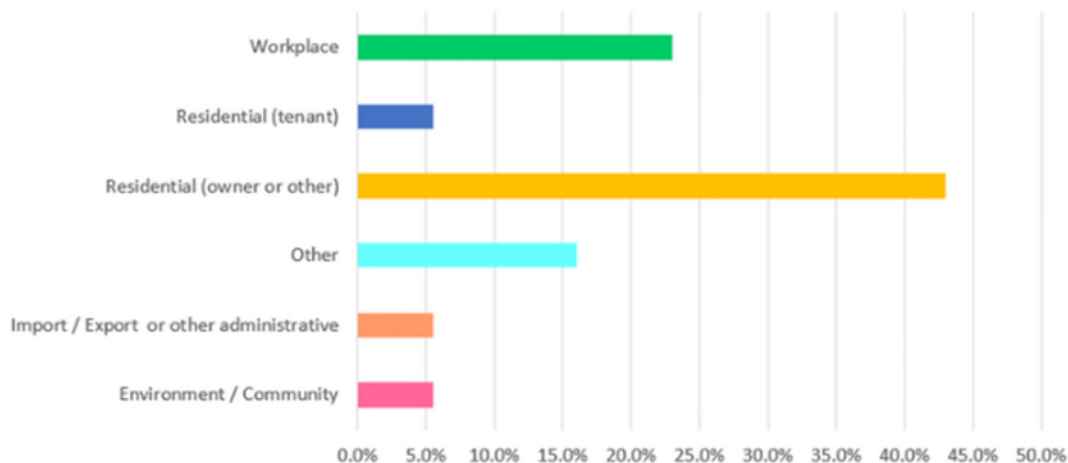


Figure 1: Calls to the Asbestos Safety Hotline, 1 March 2023 – 30 June 2023, by caller type (%)

The main reasons for calls across these categories were ‘health or exposure’ and ‘assessing and testing’. A significant proportion of calls (9.7%) were from people considering DIY removal.

It is also interesting that most calls were from residents. This may suggest that there is a gap in information provision to the residential sector in contrast with, for example, workplaces where there is clear regulation under WHS laws implemented by WHS regulators. This could signify a gap in support for asbestos issues in the non-workplace context, where overlapping, and sometimes blurred, regulation applies.

Recommendation 6: Improving asbestos awareness

Fully
implemented
and ongoing



- ▶ Nationally consistent awareness resources have been developed and disseminated: these will continue to be refined based on regular evaluation data and other research.

Recommendation 7: Improving asbestos education

7. The review recommends that the National Strategic Plan provide for a program of education campaigns to improve knowledge for those working with asbestos, which will include:
- (a) Identification of education needs for licensed operators as well as high-risk and specified exemption occupation workers referred to in recommendation 4(c)¹⁰²;
 - (b) Encouragement and support for the training of adequate numbers of qualified assessors and removalists;
 - (c) Mandatory asbestos education for new workers appropriate to their trade, including the development of industry-specific asbestos education modules for inclusion in trade training packages;
 - (d) Practical asbestos safety training for existing workers likely to come into contact with ACMs in the course of their ordinary duties;
 - (e) Education and information for those with responsibility to advise regarding the new requirements; and
 - (f) Systematic, impartial and timely evaluation of the education campaigns.

Context

The AMR distinguished ‘asbestos education’ from ‘awareness’ discussed above. It defined asbestos education as ‘the training necessary to attain the knowledge and skills to safely manage, remove, handle, store, transport and dispose of asbestos’. It considered that the only people who should be able to undertake these activities (and therefore require asbestos education) were: licensed removalists; tradespeople who deal with asbestos in the course of their ordinary duties and those required to advise on asbestos-related responsibilities. It recommended that the ANSP should provide for a program of education for these workers.

The review noted the basic level of general education required under the model WHS regulations aimed at ensuring that any workers who are likely to encounter asbestos are provided with training. It also discussed the ‘other end of the spectrum’ of licensed removal work with Class A licence holders (permitted to undertake removal of both friable and non-friable asbestos) and Class B holders (only permitted to undertake removal of non-friable asbestos) who are required to undertake specific VET courses. Concern was raised that numbers of these licence holders would need to be monitored to ensure they met demands resulting from implementation of the AMR recommendations.

¹⁰² This refers to the ‘10m² exception’ that WHS laws do not require licensing for the removal of 10m² or less of non-friable asbestos. This applies throughout Australia except in the ACT where all asbestos removal must be licensed except for minor routine maintenance work.

The review also noted that licensing regimes for some occupations, such as electricians and plumbers, seek to ensure WHS standards are maintained in particular industries by including mandatory competencies in licensing requirements.

Action taken

The ANSPs did not ultimately specifically provide for a program of education campaigns as understood in the AMR, although both the first and second phases of the ANSP include measures relating to education.

In strategy two of ANSP 2014–18, ‘Best practice’, a deliverable was included to ‘identify opportunities to share best practice for initiatives related to the safe management of asbestos such as licensing, education training and home renovations where ACMs may be present’.

In the final report of ANSP 2014–18, the assessment was that significant progress was underway on this deliverable, noting all jurisdictions had licensed work qualification requirements and that some WHS regulators had initiated specific compliance activities around these requirements.¹⁰³ This report also noted that ASEA had developed awareness training for workers in the utilities sector.¹⁰⁴

Under ANSP 2019–23, national priority 1 includes the strategic action of ‘improving education and training for those at risk of exposure to asbestos fibres or who make decisions about ACMs’. Also, under national priority 3, in relation to safe prioritised removal, there is the strategic action of ‘improving the quality of asbestos-related training and ensuring effective oversight of licensing regimes’. Target 1 of this ANSP includes that all tradespeople whose work brings them into contact with ACMs have increased awareness of the health risk of ACMs and where to source information.

The Mid-term Progress Report on ANSP 2019–23 noted compliance activities of WHS regulators relating to licensed removalists and in some cases the registered training organisations (RTOs) delivering their training.¹⁰⁵ It also noted that ASEA would ‘research the asbestos training options for workers entering trades to identify any improvements in education and training for this cohort’.¹⁰⁶

The Mid-term review of ANSP 2019–23 was informed by a targeted survey of ASEC members and key stakeholders responsible for implementing and reporting on progress against the ANSP. Survey responses included that ‘more work is needed to achieve nationally consistent, high-quality training’.¹⁰⁷

Recommendations 7(a) and (b): Licensed operators

The education needs of licensed asbestos workers are covered by WHS laws.

¹⁰³ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 34.

¹⁰⁴ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 13. This course was accredited in 2017 but this accreditation was cancelled at ASEA’s request in January 2020 following receipt of legal advice that ASEA’s functions did not include developing or managing the delivery of asbestos training.

¹⁰⁵ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 54.

¹⁰⁶ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 31.

¹⁰⁷ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2019–23 Mid-term Review Report](#), p 10.

All states and territories except Victoria have adopted model WHS laws, including the model WHS Act and Regulations. All model WHS jurisdictions require asbestos removalists to be licensed to remove more than 10m² of asbestos.¹⁰⁸ Licensed removalists and assessors are subject to conditions, including that they have completed specified VET courses.

Victoria's WHS system is regulated by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the Victorian Act) which requires licensing for all friable asbestos removal as well as for removal of more than 10m² of non-friable asbestos. Victoria does not have separate requirements for licensed assessors.

In terms of workers referred to in recommendation 4(c) – occupations where removal of ACM is incidental to their primary work, for example a tradesperson removing 10m² or less of ACM – the model WHS laws and Victorian Act require these workers to be adequately trained, although, except in the ACT where mandatory training requirements apply, there is no VET course specified.

Recent work on assessing the adequacy of asbestos training in relevant occupations has made findings that this is an area clearly needing improvement:

- The NSW EPA commissioned a social research report which reported in 2021 that:
 - o 32% of relevant professionals indicated they had never completed any asbestos-related training and of these, nearly half had been working for at least 20 years
 - o of the 68% who said they had completed some asbestos-related training, only 52% had completed formal training.¹⁰⁹
- The Latrobe Valley Taskforce made a recommendation in 2020 to 'alter the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations to mandate asbestos awareness training for all tradespeople (specified occupations) to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure, and thereby the incidence of asbestos-related disease and future impacts on the Victorian health system'.¹¹⁰
- Energy Skills Australia released a report in 2021 which found that 48% of the apprentices surveyed (about 1,200 from all states and territories, mostly electrical) indicated they have not been provided with or undertaken any training related to asbestos. Of the rest, 25% had done nationally accredited training and 27% had done in-house training.¹¹¹

In terms of ensuring support and encouragement for the training of adequate numbers of qualified assessors and removalists, WHS regulators in all jurisdictions provide lists of licensed asbestos operators for the public to access, as well as information about licensing requirements. The underlying concern about ensuring there would be enough licensed asbestos operators was likely to have been based on the implications of implementing recommendation 3 requiring removal of ACMs from all government and

¹⁰⁸ The ACT does not have the 10m² exception and requires all asbestos removal work to be undertaken by a licensed removalist.

¹⁰⁹ [Social Research Report, Asbestos Safety Part 1 – Household Renovations & Maintenance](#), undertaken by Heartward Strategic for the NSW EPA, p 76.

¹¹⁰ [Minimising risks of asbestos exposure and associated harm in Victoria](#), 2022, recommendations of the Latrobe Valley Taskforce, p 13.

¹¹¹ [Industry Survey Report 2021](#), Energy Skills Australia, p 13.

commercial buildings by the aspirational date of 2030, as well as requiring the location of ACMs to be assessed in certain residential properties. As discussed earlier in this report, this aspirational date was not ultimately pursued and so the expected demand for licensed assessors and removalists has perhaps not been as great as anticipated by the review. In moving to the third phase of the ANSP with its focus on addressing asbestos management and removal options, asbestos-related workforce capability generally will need to be considered more closely.

Recommendations 7(c) and (d): Training for new and existing workers at risk of exposure

The AMR Report noted that education was needed for workers in high-risk occupations who may be at risk of asbestos exposure and suggests ‘mandatory and nationally consistent asbestos education for new workers appropriate to their trade’ as well as ‘practical asbestos safety training for existing workers’.¹¹²

Consistent with ANSP 2019–23’s strategic action of ‘improving education and training for those at risk of exposure to asbestos fibres or who make decisions about ACMs’, ASEA undertook a public consultation process in 2022 which canvassed options to enhance current asbestos safety awareness training for workers entering trades where they are at risk of encountering asbestos. Based on the majority of views considered, the main results of that consultation were that:

- Current asbestos training requirements (outside the ACT) are generally not considered adequate, and workers are being put at risk of exposure to asbestos fibres.
- Workers need training *before* they are exposed to any risk.
- Training is needed for all workers (not only apprentices) in a wide range of occupations.
- Nationally recognised VET system training is clearly preferred over unaccredited training.
- The current ACT approach of mandatory training is the preferred model for reform.

In the ACT, VET system asbestos awareness training is mandatory for specified occupations (not just those who are new to those occupations) and can only be delivered by registered training providers who are approved by the ACT government. When the requirement to complete mandatory training was implemented in the ACT, it applied to *all* workers in the declared occupations, not just new workers.

The ACT approach of a mandatory awareness course was preferred over seeking to have asbestos safety included as a core unit of competency in trade training packages. The reasons for this included:

- that a core unit would only cover apprentices and there are many workers in construction-related trades at risk who do not undertake apprenticeships

¹¹² [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#) p 42.

- the unit would need to be replicated across training packages for different occupational groups and may not capture all occupations where asbestos exposure is a risk
- there could be difficulties in ensuring the unit would be accorded 'core' status across a range of training packages given that a recent attempt to include an asbestos safety unit as an elective unit in one trade training package was ultimately rejected
- risks to the quality of delivery by having only VET system regulation of training providers and not an additional requirement for jurisdictional approval.

While there was a clear message that the ACT's mandatory asbestos awareness training was the preferred model, it is not within ASEA's remit to be able to implement this across jurisdictions. Adoption of a scheme like this requires amendment to the model WHS laws and therefore can only be progressed through Safe Work Australia with the required agreement of its members. The Chair of ASEC therefore wrote to the Chair of Safe Work Australia asking that this occur.

While this reform would create a level playing field nationally in terms of workers' asbestos safety awareness, this course does not provide training in how to safely work with ACMs where unlicensed removal of up to 10m² of ACMs is permitted. While in the future training needs to go beyond 'awareness' to address this where relevant, incremental change to provide nationally accredited awareness training to all workers before they are put at risk of exposure to asbestos fibres is seen as a vital first step. Importantly, it may help workers identify asbestos in buildings that do not have asbestos registers, for example, homes, or where asbestos registers are non-compliant.

Recommendation 7(e): Education for those advising about new requirements

The Real Estate Institute of Australia emphasised the need for appropriate transitional education to inform agents of any new responsibilities arising from the recommendations of the review. This includes the sale or letting of premises, where there will be a need for professionals such as real estate agents to give accurate advice about these requirements.

ASEA facilitated research in 2020 to gain an understanding of real estate agents' and property managers' knowledge and engagement with buyers, sellers and tenants about asbestos. This found these groups are aware of asbestos exposure dangers and are managing asbestos presence in a generally transparent and open way. It identified the need for clearer content about pre-sale property inspections and disclosure requirements and this work was done with the 2022 national campaign discussed above.¹¹³

As part of ASEA's further research, we spoke to the Real Estate Institute of NSW which indicated it was open to exploring the development of a professional training course for asbestos-related obligations.

¹¹³ See discussion under recommendations 3(b) and 6(a) in this report.

Recommendation 7(f): Evaluation

The national benchmark surveys of 2014, 2016 and 2018 provide quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of training of tradespeople and real estate agents. In terms of nationally recognised asbestos training within the VET system, both the training content and RTOs that deliver the training must meet the legislated standards applying in that system, which involves an evaluation process.

Recommendation 7: Improving asbestos education

**Partially
implemented:**
future work required



- ▶ WHS laws mandate training for licensed removal.
- ▶ The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council (ASEC) has referred recommended nationwide consistent mandatory vocational education and training (VET) for asbestos awareness for all workers in relevant trade occupations to Safe Work Australia to action.

Future work

- ▶ Options for mandatory training beyond asbestos awareness training for tradespeople undertaking unlicensed removal up to 10m² of ACMs in jurisdictions where this is permitted.
- ▶ Considering options for real estate agent/property manager training for asbestos-related obligations.

Recommendations 8: Improving data and information sharing; and 10: Medical research

8. The review recommends that the National Strategic Plan provide for:
- (a) Better utilisation of knowledge regarding the locations of asbestos in Australia to obtain an accurate indication of ACM density via a national database and thus assist with civic planning and the development of asbestos abatement policies and management of responses to natural or other disasters.
 - (b) Improved capture and use of epidemiological data by:
 - (i) Supporting the Australian Mesothelioma Registry to continue activities beyond the current contractual period; and
 - (ii) Creating a more comprehensive registry by investigation of the opportunities to extend the Australian Mesothelioma Registry to include asbestos exposure information relating to lung cancer patients and other asbestos-related diseases.
 - (c) Improving opportunities for sharing information and data relating to asbestos which would include:
 - (i) Sharing of all relevant information and research including health-related data, between jurisdictions, social partners and all appropriate stakeholders; and
 - (ii) Monitoring of developments in asbestos research and management, locally, nationally, and internationally, to identify innovations that could be considered for application under the National Strategic Plan.
10. The Review recommends that there be sufficient funding for a coordinated national research effort into ways of preventing or curing asbestos-related disease, particularly mesothelioma.

Context

The AMR noted that there were significant amounts of asbestos-related data that were being collected and used for a single purpose only. It recommended improvements in sharing mechanisms between and across agencies and jurisdictions to improve use of data as well as monitoring asbestos research and management more generally to identify and share innovative approaches. Three broad areas were considered: location data, medical data and medical research.

Location data

On the basis that ‘if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it’, the AMR found that to deal with asbestos management effectively it would be essential to have ‘a rigorous,

comprehensive, reliable, up-to-date and accessible database of asbestos locations'.¹¹⁴ This builds on recommendation 3, discussed earlier in this paper, that ACM locations should be included in databases administered at local government level. The review envisaged that 'databases so established by local government (or equivalent) would be used to populate a current, accurate and reliable national database to be maintained by the new national agency' and that 'the central collation of this information could allow for more targeted management efforts in high density asbestos areas'.¹¹⁵ It suggested better utilisation of location and density data could assist with civic planning and developing asbestos abatement policies as well as managing responses to natural disasters.

Medical data

The review found that the Australian Mesothelioma Registry, which at that time had a contractual period for its management expiring in 2013, should be maintained. It also suggested that the ANSP should build on the activities of the registry to capture data on a wider range of ARDs, including asbestosis and lung cancers attributable to asbestos exposure.

Information sharing

The review noted steps that had been taken within jurisdictions to improve coordinated action on asbestos management and urged greater coordination and information sharing between jurisdictions. It suggested the new national agency monitor and share asbestos-related innovations and research locally, nationally and internationally (including health-related data) to identify innovations which could be progressed under the ANSP. This information sharing should also encompass employer and employee organisation and asbestos support groups. The AMR also concluded that through information sharing, the envisaged asbestos location database could be applied to investigate potential correlations between asbestos location and the incidence of asbestos-related disease.¹¹⁶

Medical research

This relates to recommendation 10. The AMR found that research funding for ARDs was lower than for other cancers and that the competitive processes involved in securing research funding has the potential to work against collaborative work on ARDs. Particular concerns were raised in relation to mesothelioma, in terms of the rise in its incidence, the lack of early diagnosis and the lack of effective treatment options to increase survival rates. The recent spread of ARDs into the broader populations was also cited as requiring enhanced and coordinated research efforts.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 44.

¹¹⁵ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 44.

¹¹⁶ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 45.

¹¹⁷ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 51.

The report identified that this was a further area that would benefit from cross-jurisdictional information sharing to avoid duplication and to close gaps in ARD reporting data and knowledge. It also noted the magnitude of costs caused by ARDs and that funding a national preventative research effort had the potential to reduce these costs.¹¹⁸

Action taken

Recommendation 8(a): utilisation of asbestos location data

One of the guiding principles of ANSP 2014–18 was ‘collaboration’ and strategy three of that ANSP concerning identification included a goal of sharing information regarding the identification of ACMs. The final report for this ANSP noted that data was shared regarding the management of asbestos in terms of the number of WHS removal work notifications and asbestos waste data, but that making comparisons was challenging and that there was a need for improvement in consistent definitions for information sharing in this respect.¹¹⁹

ANSP 2019–23 includes national priority 2, identification and effective legacy management, which has a strategic action of ‘collaborating to develop a national picture of where ACMs are located in homes, commercial and public buildings, infrastructure and land’. It also includes the guiding principles of ‘consultation, collaboration and cooperation’ and ‘sharing best practice’ which are relevant to this recommendation.

Several national targets in ANSP 2019–23 have relevance to identifying the location of ACMs:

- target 2, that all governments have identified ACMs in publicly owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure
- target 5, that all commercial buildings that are required to do so have up-to-date asbestos registers
- target 9, that an evidence-based national picture be developed that assess the likelihood of ACMs being present in the residential environment.

The Mid-term Progress Report for ANSP 2019–23¹²⁰ found that all governments are identifying and assessing the risks associated with ACMs in their assets (target 2), but that degrees of centralisation vary between jurisdictions (as noted earlier under recommendation 3 discussion). It noted that all commercial buildings are required to create and maintain asbestos registers under WHS laws (target 5) but that there was a lack of data to ascertain the extent of compliance with this requirement. It observed that more work was needed and that ASEA would research ways to improve consistency in asbestos risk assessments and centralise asbestos registers where governments and other businesses have multiple assets. It found that the focus of

¹¹⁸ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 52.

¹¹⁹ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 27.

¹²⁰ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 34.

target 5 should be considered in the mid-term review of ANSP 2019–23 given that it is really a restatement of an existing legal requirement and may be better captured as part of compliance and enforcement activity under targets 4 and 6.

It also stated that significant progress had been made towards target 9 with the completion of the asbestos cement roof hotspots study during the reporting period, which would feed into the development of the residential asbestos heatmap. Since this time, the first version of the National Residential Asbestos Heatmap has been completed, meaning that target 9 has now been achieved.

While the national database envisaged by the AMR was not ultimately pursued, there has been significant action on the underlying principles of this part of recommendation 8, particularly the first ever national residential asbestos heatmap which compiles all available residential asbestos data and information in a centralised format. This provides an evidence-based national picture that assess the likelihood of ACMs being present in the residential environment, thereby achieving target 9 of ANSP 2019–23. ASEA has provided resources to all jurisdictions to improve residential asbestos management, including secure access to the heatmap, training (virtual and in-person demonstrations) and guidance about how more granular information can be included over time to improve the accuracy of the heatmap. This shared information can guide asbestos strategic planning at all government levels, including supporting disaster resilience, response and recovery.

Research has not been conducted to investigate the potential correlation between the national residential asbestos heatmap and ARD incidence; however, related research has found that this type of investigation is hindered by the long latency period of ARDs. The agency has contributed to research published by Cancer Council Australia in 2022, which found that there were special differences in standardised incidence rates of mesothelioma linked to state and territory location and to remoteness. This research found that some of the geographic distribution of diagnoses can be explained by the location of historical mines and asbestos-related industries but that long latency of the disease coupled with population migration between the time of exposure and developing an ARD hinders any associations between geographic location and mesothelioma incidence more broadly.¹²¹

Recommendation 8(b): improved capture and use of epidemiological data, including the continuation of the Mesothelioma Registry and investigating opportunities for data collection for other ARDs

Recommendation 8(c): improving opportunities to share asbestos information and data including health-related data and monitoring research developments in Australia and overseas

¹²¹ Cameron JK, Aitken J, Reid A, et al. *Geographic distribution of malignant mesothelioma incidence and survival in Australia*. Lung Cancer. 2022; 167: 17-24.

Recommendation 10: sufficient funding for coordinated national research into prevention or cure of ARDs, particularly mesothelioma

The aim of both phases of the ANSP to date is ‘to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia’ reflecting the wording used in section 5A of the ASEA Act which defines the ANSP. Exposure to asbestos fibres can cause mesothelioma, asbestosis and cancer of the lung, ovary and larynx. Because ARDs usually develop decades after asbestos exposure there is necessarily a delay of many years before the effectiveness of prevention efforts can be assessed.

This emphasis on exposure prevention also reflects the functions of the Agency as set out in the ASEA Act, which includes to promote research about ‘asbestos safety’¹²² rather than ARDs per se.

ANSP 2014–18 included strategy five, ‘Research’, which had the goal of ‘commission, monitor and promote research into the prevention of asbestos exposure and asbestos related disease’. In 2016, ASEA commissioned research to project the number of mesothelioma cases diagnosed in future years in Australia to inform policy options for future asbestos management nationally. This study concluded that an increasing proportion of mesothelioma cases would relate to non-occupational exposure spread across the broader Australian community and identified this as an emerging public health problem. It noted that some of these emerging are ‘generally associated with relatively low doses of asbestos exposure and include some individuals who will be unaware they have even been exposed to asbestos’.¹²³

The final report for ANSP 2014–18 noted that ASEA had developed the National Asbestos Profile ‘to provide information and define the baseline situation with regard to the elimination of asbestos related diseases’.¹²⁴ This document followed the reporting structure proposed by the World Health Organization for national profiles and included information about populations at risk from current and past exposures and the economic burden of ARDs.

This report also noted a working group led by Safe Work Australia which had been established to review the Australian Mesothelioma Register. This is a register of all diagnosed cases of mesothelioma since 1 July 2010. It captures information about mesothelioma incidence, mortality and asbestos exposure. As recommended by the AMR, the mesothelioma register has been continued since its inception more than 10 years ago and it is the most up-to-date source of data on mesothelioma in Australia. It is currently funded through Safe Work Australia and operates within the auspices of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

¹²² See s8(1)(f) and the s3 definition of ‘asbestos safety’ which includes ‘matters relating to asbestos awareness, education and information sharing, and the identification, management, removal, transportation, storage or disposal of asbestos in Australia or internationally’.

¹²³ [Future Projections of the Burden of Mesothelioma in Australia](#), a report prepared by Finity Consulting for the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, March 2016, p 26.

¹²⁴ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014-2018 Final Report](#), p 16.

ANSP 2019–23 includes in target 1 ‘increased awareness of the health risks of ACMs and where to source information’ and the aim of the ANSP is ‘to eliminate ARDs in Australia by preventing exposure to asbestos fibres’. The mid-term progress report¹²⁵ provided an overview of the latest available ARD statistics for Australia. It noted that estimates of the number of deaths from ARDs in Australia are reported through the Global Burden of Disease Study (GBD Study).¹²⁶ As envisaged by recommendation 8(b) of this review, this reporting includes a breakdown of figures for all deaths from ARDs, namely mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung, ovarian and laryngeal cancers. GBD Study estimates are used to quantify ARD burden in Australia, because the Australian Burden of Disease Study (ABDS) does not currently provide a comprehensive report of disease burden attributable to asbestos exposure. Where disease burden attributable to asbestos exposure is reported by the ABDS, such as for asbestosis, GBD data is an identified source for this reporting.¹²⁷

As well as giving a breakdown of estimated deaths due to each ARD, the GBD Study provides estimates of the proportion of these deaths for each disease that were attributable to asbestos exposure. This is particularly useful in regard to lung cancer, ovarian cancer and laryngeal cancer, which are known to also be attributable to other causes. The latest GBD Study (GBD 2019) estimated the proportions of these diseases attributable asbestos exposure to be 33% (95% UI 25–40) for lung cancer, 3% (95% UI 6–20) for ovarian cancer, and 19% (95% UI 11–26) for laryngeal cancer. As indicated through the review, this level of understanding of the contribution of asbestos exposure to overall disease burden in Australia is critical for planning an adequate response to asbestos exposure risk and for targeting resources to prevent and treat these diseases.

Subrecommendation 8(b)(ii) suggests investigating opportunities to extend the Australian Mesothelioma Registry to include asbestos exposure information about lung cancer patients and other ARDs. While there are still some barriers to establishing a definitive causal link to individual cases of lung cancer and past asbestos exposure, the latest estimates from the GBD Study suggest that about 33% of all lung cancer deaths in Australia in 2019 were attributable to past asbestos exposure. Therefore, opportunities should continue to be explored to further assess the link between the incidence of lung cancer in Australia and past asbestos exposure, including the potential to incorporate lung cancer and other ARDs into an existing registry.

Current approaches for capturing ARD data differ. There are several models, for example:

- Some are disease specific; for example, the Australian Mesothelioma Registry which records all diagnosed mesothelioma cases in Australia, both occupationally and non-occupationally acquired.

¹²⁵ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 15.

¹²⁶ Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 (GBD 2019) Results, Seattle, USA, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2020.

¹²⁷ [Australian Burden of Disease Study: Methods and supplementary material 2018](#)

- Some are under the auspices of public health legislation notifiable disease requirements; for example, in NSW asbestosis is a notifiable disease under Part 4 of the *Public Health Act 2010*.
- Some have capacity for a range of diseases to be included but only those which have been occupationally acquired; for example, the proposed national occupational respiratory disease registry, which will require respiratory and occupational physicians to notify diagnoses of occupationally caused silicosis and will allow voluntary notification of other occupational respiratory diseases. The National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 which establishes this registry also provides capacity for the minister to prescribe other occupational diseases for mandatory notification, so there would be potential for some ARDs to be captured in the future.

The goal of capturing and centralising ARD data in Australia more generally requires further consideration. This would need to include examining:

- whether all ARDs should be captured on one database, including both occupationally and non-occupationally acquired ARDs
- which diseases should be captured: while there is an established clear link with asbestos exposure for some diseases (for example, mesothelioma) for others including some forms of cancer, the link to asbestos exposure may be less clear
- notifiable disease models where medical practitioners are legally obliged to report specific diseases.

In terms of improving opportunities for sharing relevant information and data relating to asbestos (subrecommendation 8(c)), this is done in part through ASEA's ANSP reporting, reflecting that collaboration is an overarching aim of the ANSP. In addition, ASEA has progressed data and information sharing through its day-to-day activities including through:

- publishing ASEA generated or commissioned research reports and case studies as well as links to external relevant publications on the ASEA website
- providing templates to promote jurisdictional consistency in data collection and reporting in relation to the ANSP, and a dedicated implementation portal for easier reporting of data that has been collated and analysed at a jurisdictional level
- holding annual ANSP implementation summits and conferences where research is presented and shared
- contributing to journal articles to highlight and promote asbestos best-practice approaches in Australia and around the world to a broad audience.¹²⁸

ASEA also monitors developments in asbestos research and management, locally, nationally and internationally (subrecommendation 8(c)(ii)). For example, the recent

¹²⁸ For example, ASEA staff contributed to a special issue of the *Sustainability* journal with several articles published in 2023, including some co-written with external experts.

journal articles mentioned above included an article summarising current and emerging technological asbestos waste management alternatives in Australia and overseas.¹²⁹ Although our functions are limited in this regard, we are looking at how to better consolidate data to identify trends. We are also conducting research to assist with characterising actual and potential sources of asbestos exposure in Australia today, including levels of asbestos exposure, sources of asbestos exposure and the various scenarios in which asbestos exposure could occur.

Recommendation 10

In keeping with the overarching aim of both ANSPs and its statutory functions, much of ASEAs work has primarily been focused on preventing exposure to asbestos fibres rather than on researching ARDs themselves.

In 2010 the Australian Government launched the Asbestos Innovation Fund including providing funding for medical research over a 3-year period from 1 January 2012. After the release of the AMR Report, Minister Shorten announced¹³⁰ new recipients of the fund, noting this work included ‘finding new ways of treatment for those suffering from asbestos related diseases’ and ‘provide better treatment and support for asbestos disease sufferers and their families’.

ANSP 2014–18’s fifth strategy included the goal to ‘commission, monitor and promote research into the prevention of asbestos exposure and asbestos related disease’. In keeping with ANSP 2014–18’s focus of establishing an evidence base, ASEA commissioned and published 2 significant pieces of work. The first was the 2016 research outlined above into future projections for the incidence of mesothelioma. This projected there would be about 19,000 cases of mesothelioma diagnosed in Australia between 2015 and the end of the century with an increasing proportion of cases relating to ‘third wave’ non-occupational exposures. It was estimated that third-wave exposures accounted for one in 3 cases but this would increase.¹³¹ This highlights the need for further work on the health effects of low-level asbestos exposure.

The second significant piece of research related to the economic and social impacts of ARDs more generally. The highest economic costs identified in this research were productivity costs (estimated at \$321 million for 2015–16¹³²) and health system costs (estimated at \$192 million for the same period¹³³). The social costs were measured by

¹²⁹ Frangioudakis Khatib, G, Hollins, I, Ross, J, ‘Managing asbestos waste using technological alternatives to approved deep burial landfill methods: An Australian perspective’, *Sustainability* 2023, 15, 4066. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054066>.

¹³⁰ See [More action on asbestos | Ministers’ Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#) (media release, 27 November 2012) which included more than \$500,000 for ARD-related work. See also: [\\$1.5 million Asbestos Innovation Fund launched | Ministers’ Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#) and [Key funding to tackle asbestos | Ministers’ Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#).

¹³¹ [Future Projections of the Burden of Mesothelioma in Australia](#), a report prepared by Finit Consulting for the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, March 2016, p 26.

¹³² [The Economic Burden of Asbestos-Related Disease](#), a report prepared by the Centre for International Economics, May 2019, p 35.

¹³³ [The Economic Burden of Asbestos-Related Disease](#), p 19.

losses associated with reduced quality of life, with an estimated monetary value of \$10.8 billion in 2015 although it was noted that this value may have been ‘overstated for the elderly sufferers of disease’.¹³⁴

ANSP 2019–23 includes the strategic action of ‘expanding and sharing research and information on ARDs to improve policy and practice’. This ANSP recognises that due to the long latency of ARDs, any data on the incidence of these diseases will reflect historical exposures and our failure to take action in the past.

The mid-term report for ANSP 2019–23 provided an overview of advances in treatment for mesothelioma and lung cancer.¹³⁵ It noted that the tracking of ARDs helps inform policymakers of the effectiveness of actions to address Australia’s asbestos legacy and that ASEA will continue to monitor data on ARDs and promote research to improve treatment and prevention of asbestos-related disease.¹³⁶

This report highlighted the lack of information about non-occupational exposure, which is likely to be the main form of exposure in the future, including from undertaking DIY or living in homes undergoing renovations. Other concerns beyond DIY scenarios relevant to this work would include potential asbestos exposure occurring through: general ageing and weathering of asbestos cement products, asbestos-contaminated land, recycled and imported products that may contain low to trace levels of asbestos, illegal dumping and re-use of fill material. Given these other concerns, this area of work could be better described as examining ‘low-level’ exposure rather than ‘non-occupational’ given that these circumstances can occur through work-based exposure too (for example, an office in a heritage building containing ACMs which are ageing). This research could reduce uncertainty about cancer risk for low-level exposure; how to best measure low-level exposure, and what levels of exposure arise in different scenarios. This is an area where further work is needed.

Current understanding of the risk of ARDs from long-term, low-level or background exposure, including from renovations or through disaster and emergency events, is poor. What is known is that the number of people exposed to in-situ asbestos in Australia is probably very large. Therefore, we need to improve our understanding about the disease risks associated with exposure to ambient levels of asbestos in the general community and from activities that are likely to release airborne asbestos fibres above ambient levels.

ASEA continues to research ARD data. Recently, ASEA analysed the latest data from both the Australian Mesothelioma Registry and the GBD Study for an article published in the *Sustainability Journal*. Latest AMR data shows a steady increase in the number of new cases of mesothelioma and that deaths from mesothelioma in Australia remain

¹³⁴ [The Economic Burden of Asbestos-Related Disease](#), a report prepared by the Centre for International Economics, May 2019, p 3.

¹³⁵ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 19.

¹³⁶ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), p 20.

stable at about 700 per year.¹³⁷ However, as highlighted by the article, since about 2003 there has been a considerable decrease in the age-standardised rate of men diagnosed with the disease, while the age-standardised rate of women diagnosed has declined only slightly. As a result, the proportion of mesothelioma cases comprising women has increased over this period.¹³⁸ The article also noted that while most of the estimated 4,449 people in Australia that were reported in the GBD Study to have died from ARDs in 2019 were due to past occupational exposures, a small proportion of them probably arose from non-occupational exposure (which is not reported separately). The article also highlighted and there is an ongoing concern about the many potential sources of asbestos exposure remaining in homes and the broader built environment as a legacy of past use, including for non-occupational exposure. Therefore, ASEA continues to prioritise research that will assist to characterise and prevent non-occupational asbestos exposure (including low-level exposure).

ASEA also administers the National Asbestos Exposure Register. This was established by the Australian Government in 2013¹³⁹ to capture details of members of the community who think that they may have been exposed to ACMs. The purpose of the register is to have a record of potential exposure in case an individual develops an ARD in the future. This is a self-report survey that is completed voluntarily and captures information about where and when potential exposure occurred. Using the data recorded, ASEA can report trends in potential asbestos exposure based on age, gender, location, type of exposure, and frequency of exposure. ASEA includes data on the number of people who have reported exposure through its annual reports.¹⁴⁰ However, this reporting acknowledges the limitations of the register. Because the data is voluntary and self-reported, it cannot provide an accurate picture of asbestos exposures or ARDs in Australia.

A further element of recommendation 10 is calling for a coordinated approach to national research for curing ARDs, particularly mesothelioma. This goes beyond the ARD data collection and analysis role ASEA currently performs and in the context of making this recommendation, the AMR acknowledged that medical research and patient management was outside its terms of reference.

The review also acknowledged that there were effective cooperative research efforts already in place. For example, the National Centre for Asbestos-Related Diseases, established by the Australian Government, has operated since 2007 in Perth. Its aim is 'to enable the best Australian scientists, clinicians and researchers in the field, using the best available modern technology, to work cooperatively to prevent, monitor, treat,

¹³⁷ [Mesothelioma in Australia 2021](#), AIHW 2023.

¹³⁸ Mahoney K, Driscoll T, Collins J, Ross, J. *The Past, Present and Future of Asbestos-Related Diseases in Australia: What are the Data telling us?* [Sustainability](#) 2023.

¹³⁹ See [Labor to deliver first national asbestos exposure register | Ministers' Media Centre \(dese.gov.au\)](#), 3 June 2013.

¹⁴⁰ The number of registrations reported in [ASEA's 2021-22 Annual Report](#) was 1,337 reports in that financial year – see p 30.

and/or cure asbestos cancers in the shortest realistic timeframe'.¹⁴¹ This centre received a 5-year grant (until 2025) worth \$2.5 million from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) for its ongoing study into mesothelioma and lung cancer.

Another ARD-focused medical research institute is the Asbestos and Dust Diseases Research Institute (ADDRI), which was opened in 2009. ADDRI conducts preclinical, clinical and epidemiological research into ARDs to improve outcomes for patients diagnosed with asbestos- and dust-related diseases. Its research efforts include 'developing a cure for mesothelioma'.¹⁴² Other ARD medical research is funded through various government and non-government organisations including the NHMRC, the Lung Foundation Australia, the Cancer Council and Cancer Australia. A recent example of this kind of funding was the Cancer Council WA Research Fellowship grant of \$480,000 over 4 years being awarded to a researcher from the University of Western Australia for research into the treatment of those living with lung cancer and mesothelioma.¹⁴³

Recommendations 8 and 10:

**Asbestos data and information sharing,
and Medical research**

**Partially
implemented:**
future work required



- ▶ ASEA's research is on preventing exposure to ACMs to prevent asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) and the social and economic impacts of ARDs, as distinct from funding medical research itself.
- ▶ The residential heatmap provides a nationwide indication of ACM location likelihood and will assist with civic and disaster planning and abatement policies.
- ▶ The Australian Mesothelioma Registry has continued to be funded through Safe Work Australia.

Future work

- ▶ Consideration of all current and potential ARD registries to examine more effective centralisation of all ARD data across a range of diseases. This should comprise ARDs however acquired and seek to improve the consistency and accuracy of the input data, including consideration of mandatory reporting by medical professionals for all ARDs.
- ▶ Research into the effects of low-level exposure to ACMs, both occupational and non-occupational.

¹⁴¹ From the [National Centre for Asbestos-Related Diseases website](#), viewed 16 May 2023.

¹⁴² From the [ADDRI website](#), viewed 5 April 2023.

¹⁴³ [Lung cancer and mesothelioma research receives funding boost \(uwa.edu.au\)](#), viewed 28 March 2023.

Recommendation 9: Administration of the National Strategic Plan

The review recommends that the Australian Government support and legislate for the establishment of a new national agency to have responsibility for the implementation, review, refinement and further development of the plan in accordance with the principles and recommendations outlined in this report. The Australian Asbestos Awareness and Management Agency (AAAMA) should:

- (a) Have the expertise and authority to coordinate activities across all tiers of government, affecting multiple portfolios such as health, safety, environment, and education;
- (b) Engage with the asbestos regulatory coordination frameworks established within state and territory jurisdictions;
- (c) Be overseen by a governing board with high-level tripartite membership, including an independent chairperson, a medical expert, representation of all Australian governments including local government and national peak bodies;
- (d) Be supported by input and technical expertise from an appointed advisory committee consisting of appropriate community representatives and professionals; and
- (e) Have appropriate staffing and resources to implement, monitor and review its activities under the direction of a chief executive officer.

Context

The AMR considered 3 main options for establishing a national entity to coordinate asbestos management and awareness: a new national body, a new committee, or to give responsibility to an existing body or committee.

In considering these options, it noted that ‘the overwhelming majority of stakeholders agreed that there was a pressing need for a national body to take responsibility for the National Strategic Plan – and that there was no existing agency that could appropriately assume that role’.¹⁴⁴

In relation to membership of the new proposed national body, it noted the *National Declaration: Towards and Australian Safe Asbestos Free Environment* of the June 2010 Asbestos Summit called for the establishment of a national asbestos authority which would be overseen by a board of management comprising representation of key stakeholders from unions, community asbestos disease support groups, health groups and government.¹⁴⁵ The AMR considered that a smaller management board would be more suitable, comprising high-level tripartite membership, including an independent chairperson, a medical expert, representation of all Australian governments including

¹⁴⁴ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 49.

¹⁴⁵ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 48.

local government, and national peak union and employer bodies. It suggested this smaller board could be supported by input from an advisory committee consisting of suitable community and expert representatives. In support of this approach, it cited the large number of agencies and other parties involved in national asbestos issues and the scope of the problem. A further factor it noted was the absence of a national peak or umbrella body of asbestos disease support groups.

The AMR did not favour allocating the administration of the ANSP to an existing body or new committee at the national level. Although it considered this approach would capitalise on existing infrastructure, expertise and resources, it concluded that:

- the entities may not have the necessary authority across the full scope of asbestos issues
- the challenges posed by asbestos required a specialist and dedicated agency where its focus will not be diverted by other activities or priorities.

Further, it did not support recommending the new body have regulatory functions in the first instance. It noted that jurisdictions would continue to have direct carriage of many of the activities under the ANSP and, as states and territories have most of the responsibility for asbestos management, they have the greatest level of existing expertise and resources. It also recommended the body comprise a CEO with appropriate resourcing and staffing.

Action taken

This recommendation was implemented with the establishment of ASEA on 1 July 2013. The ASEA Act expressly confers functions on ASEA including ‘to liaise with Commonwealth, state, territory, local and other governments, agencies or bodies about the implementation, review or amendment of the National Strategic Plan’.¹⁴⁶ The Act provides for the appointment of a CEO to manage the affairs of the agency and for staffing including public servants and consultants engaged by the CEO.¹⁴⁷

In terms of having the expertise to fulfil its functions, in its 2020–21 Annual Report, ASEA noted that it ‘continues to adapt and improve internal capabilities by adapting skills and fostering talent’.¹⁴⁸ That report also noted that due to its small size, ASEA sometimes needs to engage consultants to provide specialist expertise and independent research.¹⁴⁹

The AMR suggested the appointment of an advisory committee consisting of suitable community and expert representatives to support the proposed national asbestos agency. Under section 24(1) of the ASEA Act, the CEO may establish committees to assist in the performance of ASEA’s functions. Sometimes working groups are established for particular projects, for example, the Water Pipes Working Group, while

¹⁴⁶ See s8(1)(e)(i) of the ASEA Act.

¹⁴⁷ Under Part 3 of the ASEA Act.

¹⁴⁸ [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Annual Report 2021–22](#), p 36.

¹⁴⁹ [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Annual Report 2021–22](#), p 44.

other committees have a more ongoing role. Committees' membership and roles evolve to reflect changing priorities and stakeholder identification. For example, the Management and Removal Committee, established in 2014,¹⁵⁰ was set up for the construction and demolition sector because of its ongoing interest in asbestos issues. In 2022, this committee was rolled into the Non-Government Asbestos Advisory Committee. At the time of writing, ASEA has the following committees and working groups to help it perform its functions:

- Research and Evaluation Committee: established in 2015 to provide expert advice on technical research projects, strategies and methodologies to achieve the aim of the ANSP, which is to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia
- Non-Government Asbestos Advisory Committee: established in 2021 to provide advice regarding increasing awareness and ensuring effective management and removal of ACMs as part of implementing the ANSP
- Asbestos Assessments Working Group: established in 2022 as a consultative forum to inform the development of national guidelines for asbestos assessments
- Asbestos Awareness Committee: established in 2020 to guide the development of behaviour change programs.

In relation to financial resourcing, as part of the 2021–22 Budget, the Australian Government provided ASEA with an extra \$5.4 million over 4 years (and \$1.3 million a year ongoing). This was largely in response to ASEA being accorded further legislative functions as recommended by the 2019 Review of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency's Role and Functions (the 2019 Review).¹⁵¹ The 2019 Review was undertaken in line with section 47 of the ASEA Act, 5 years after its commencement. This review invited submissions from organisations and members of the public, and the final report was tabled in Parliament on 27 November 2019. The portfolio minister at that time issued a media release to the effect that he supported the review's recommendations in principle and had asked his department to progress options for their implementation.¹⁵²

The additional functions came into effect in April 2022¹⁵³ and are:

- (a) to raise awareness of asbestos safety, including by developing and promoting materials on asbestos safety
- (b) to collect and analyse data required for measuring progress on preventing exposure to asbestos fibres and for informing evidence-based policies and strategies

¹⁵⁰ Its original name at that time was the Building, Construction and Demolition Sectors Committee.

¹⁵¹ See recommendation 4 of the [2019 Review report](#).

¹⁵² See media release of the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations of 27/11/19: [26 Mar 2021 – Review of the role and functions of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency | Attorney-General for Australia and Minister for Industrial Relations - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#).

¹⁵³ [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Rule 2022](#).

- (c) to promote consistent messages, policies and practices in relation to asbestos safety.

The additional funding and staffing is enabling ASEA to make critical improvements to data and research capabilities, allowing it to meaningfully measure jurisdictional progress towards implementing ANSP 2019–23. The funding has also allowed ASEA to take a more active role in increasing public awareness about the risks of asbestos exposure. This expanded awareness-raising role will allow ASEA to ensure that asbestos-related messaging is coordinated, nationally consistent, and targets groups most at risk of asbestos exposure.

Implementation of ANSP 2019–23 involves ASEA coordinating activities across jurisdictions, tiers of government and multiple portfolios. Most jurisdictions have now set up interagency coordination groups consisting of representatives from all their government agencies that have asbestos-related responsibilities, and ASEA participates in the meetings of these groups. ASEA also hosts an annual forum where government agencies with asbestos-related responsibilities come together to share information and collaborate.¹⁵⁴

Membership

As noted above, the AMR Report recommended ASEC comprise: an independent chairperson, a medical expert, representation of all Australian governments including local government, and national peak union and employer bodies.

In line with the Australian Government's plan for responding to the recommendations of the report, the newly created Office of Asbestos Safety (precursor to ASEA and located in the portfolio department) was given responsibility to respond to the recommendations in consultation with a range of stakeholders including state, territory and local governments. This consultation informed the content of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Bill 2013. The bill as introduced provided for a membership on ASEC of: a chair; one member representing the Commonwealth; 2 members representing state, territory and local governments; and 4 other members with relevant expertise.

After its introduction, the bill was referred to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee for its consideration. That committee invited submissions on the bill and held public hearings. In its subsequent report the committee noted that submitters were generally critical of the proposed membership of the council.¹⁵⁵ The government proposed changes to the council membership provisions of the bill to comprise: a chair; a Commonwealth member; a member representing workers and a member representing employers; 4 members representing state, territory and local governments; and 2 other members with relevant expertise. The supplementary explanatory memorandum noted that these amendments better

¹⁵⁴ [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022, p 9.

¹⁵⁵ See [report](#): Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Bill 2013 [Provisions], Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee, May 2013, pp 12–13.

reflected the relevant AMR recommendation and were informed by the Senate Committee Report as well as further consultation with state and territory governments.¹⁵⁶ These changes were incorporated into what became the ASEA Act.

In addition to these members, at the time of writing this report, one standing observer attends ASEC meetings representing an otherwise unrepresented stakeholder: the VAEA.¹⁵⁷ Other unrepresented jurisdictions have also previously had observers attend.¹⁵⁸

The membership of ASEC was again raised in consultations from the 2019 Review when ‘submissions from unions, employer representatives, local government and asbestos disease support groups all raised concerns about the lack of respective representation’.¹⁵⁹ This led to the recommendation that ‘the Australian Government review the membership and role of the Council taking into account the stakeholder comments provided in this review’. This has not yet been undertaken at the time of writing this report but it seems timely to consider whether the current membership is optimal. The model of having 4 representatives covering 9 jurisdictions (8 states and territories and local government) is unusual. The question of whether each jurisdiction should be represented, either on ASEC or a committee established under the ASEA Act, could be examined, particularly given all jurisdictions have endorsed the ANSP. The 2019 Review observed:

It is believed this could make it easier for the Council to function and achieve a stronger commitment in the Agency’s work and the implementation of the [A]NSP. Stakeholders agree that these representatives should have sufficient authority to make decisions and to report back to governments.¹⁶⁰

Giving formal status to representation from asbestos disease and advocacy groups was also raised by stakeholders in the 2019 Review¹⁶¹ and should be considered in any review of membership.

Technical expertise

Ensuring suitable levels of technical expertise for ASEA is an ongoing priority. As a micro-agency it can be difficult for ASEA to maintain its internal capabilities for technical expertise, particularly given the multiple portfolio areas it needs to traverse. ASEA continues to seek to improve its internal capabilities through seeking candidates with a wide range of specialist skills from workplace, environmental and community health to data analytics.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ [Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Bill 2013](#), p 7.

¹⁵⁷ The VAEA observer since 2018.

¹⁵⁸ For example, asbestos support groups and jurisdictional observers from Queensland and Tasmania when these states had no appointed representatives, see [ASEA’s Annual Report 2019–20](#), p 13.

¹⁵⁹ [2019 Review Report](#), April 2019, p 38.

¹⁶⁰ [2019 Review Report](#), p 40.

¹⁶¹ [2019 Review Report](#), pp 39–40.

¹⁶² For example, positions in ASEA advertised on APSjobs in early 2023 included recruiting from the following areas that could transfer to policy: occupational hygiene, epidemiology or toxicology; data

Recommendation 9: Administration of the National Strategic Plan

Fully
implemented



- ▶ This was fully implemented with the creation of ASEA and its underpinning legislation.

Recommendation 11: International obligations

11. The review recommends that the Australian Government continue to play a leadership role in a global campaign aimed at securing a total worldwide ban in the production and trade of asbestos and asbestos-containing products so as to contribute towards the worldwide elimination of asbestos-related diseases, and to more effectively control the entry of ACMs into this country.

Although beyond its terms of reference, the AMR found that a significant number of stakeholders raised the importance of Australia continuing to play an active role internationally regarding overseas trading of asbestos, particularly to developing countries.

It noted that the Rotterdam Convention promotes a cooperative approach to all non-chrysotile asbestos by imposing informed consent procedures and that Australia was promoting extending this approach to chrysotile asbestos.

It also acknowledged the need for effective regulation and management of asbestos in the maritime industry given that ships can both contain ACMs structurally or seek to illegally bring ACMs to Australian territory.

In conclusion, the review asserted that, particularly in light of its own history with asbestos, Australia had a moral obligation to ‘pursue all opportunities to actively lobby for improvements in international arrangements governing the management and trade of asbestos with the objective of achieving a total worldwide ban in the production and trade of asbestos and asbestos containing products’.¹⁶³

It recommended Australia continue to play this leadership role to contribute to global elimination of ARDs and to control the entry of ACMs into the country more effectively.

The Australian Government accepted recommendation 11 of the AMR Report.¹⁶⁴

Action taken

ANSP 2014–18 included strategy six, ‘International leadership’, with a goal mirroring the review’s recommendation that ‘Australia continues to play a leadership role in a global campaign for a worldwide ban on asbestos mining and manufacturing’. The outcomes listed under this strategy were:

- International issues relating to asbestos and ARDs are effectively coordinated.
- Recognition of Australia as an international voice in the global campaign against asbestos hazards.
- Best practice for awareness, management and eradication of asbestos is shared internationally.

¹⁶³ [2019 Review Report](#), April 2019, p 46.

¹⁶⁴ See p 10 of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations’ Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Inquiry into the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Bill 2013.

ANSP 2014–18 also noted that ‘the international management of asbestos is an issue that impacts the Australian community’ as it continues to be widespread and there can be ‘inadvertent importation of products that contain asbestos into Australia’.¹⁶⁵ Strategy three of ANSP 2014–18, ‘Identification’, included the deliverable of improving ‘coordinated efforts to identify and respond to the importation of ACMs’ with the outcome of an ‘effective coordinated response when ACMs in imported products are identified’.¹⁶⁶

The Final Report for ANSP 2014–18¹⁶⁷ noted the Commonwealth’s ongoing international work including:

- support for the whole-of-government advocacy for listing of chrysotile in the hazardous chemicals list in Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention
- that ASEA continued to provide ‘support, information, research and advice’ to South-East Asian and Pacific nations, particularly in relation to working towards local asbestos bans and improving asbestos risk management.

In keeping with ANSP 2014–18’s research focus, ASEA published a report in 2016, [Asbestos: the International and Australian Contexts](#), prepared by Murdoch University outlining the global context for asbestos use and attempts to regulate its export and import through international conventions. This report found that the failure of chrysotile asbestos being listed in the Rotterdam Convention was due ‘in large part to the efforts of asbestos producing and manufacturing nations’.¹⁶⁸ It concluded that ‘on the global scale, it is important to recognise that asbestos materials are meeting a very real demand in developing nations, and its continuing use raises the risk of asbestos exposure and ARDs across the globe.’¹⁶⁹

In terms preventing the illegal importation of ACMs, the Final Report for ANSP 2014–18 noted the development of a Rapid Response Protocol (RRP) and information on protecting consumers from illegally imported ACMs.¹⁷⁰ It also noted the ongoing coordination efforts of both the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities Imported Materials with Asbestos Working Group and the Commonwealth’s Asbestos Interdepartmental Committee in improving efforts to identify and respond to the importation of ACMs. It acknowledged the work of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection on these issues, as well as the role of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in terms of consumer product safety and ACMs.¹⁷¹

ANSP 2019–23 continues an international focus. It includes national priority 4: ‘International collaboration and leadership’. This priority noted Australia’s history as

¹⁶⁵ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 6.

¹⁶⁶ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18](#), p 12.

¹⁶⁷ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 47.

¹⁶⁸ Murdoch University, *Asbestos: The International and Australian Contexts*, published by ASEA June 2016, p 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Asbestos: The International and Australian Contexts*, p 8.

¹⁷⁰ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 14.

¹⁷¹ [National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness 2014–18 Final Report](#), p 39.

proportionally one of the highest per capita producers and users of asbestos in the world and that it is 'important that we now use our experience in a positive way, particularly in our region, to assist the campaign to ban the production and trade of asbestos and ACMs'. This national priority has the following strategic actions:

- continuing to present the Australian Government's position on banning asbestos mining, manufacture and use to relevant international bodies
- sharing best practice approaches to asbestos awareness, management and eradication at international events
- identifying and managing ACM importation risks through proactive international engagement
- continuing education on the import supply chain to prevent ACMs entering Australia.

The Australian Government is responsible for implementation of priority 4, with several government agencies contributing to this work.

ANSP 2019–23 also includes 2 specific national targets pertaining to international work, namely that 'all regulators are investigating, prosecuting and penalising serious known breaches of asbestos-related laws ... including importation' (target 6) and another that 'bans of asbestos production and use in South-East Asia and the Pacific have been influenced and progressed' (target 8).

Action taken regarding the importation of asbestos is taken at the following 3 stages:

(1) Action taken before the border:

- The administration of the permit system: Importing and exporting asbestos is prohibited under the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956* and the *Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations 1958*, except in very limited circumstances. Import permits allow samples of goods to be imported and tested at an accredited laboratory in Australia before shipments leave the country of origin. If asbestos is detected, the goods cannot be imported. ASEA manages the asbestos import and export permissions system under the customs regulations.
- Industry engagement to promote voluntary compliance. The Australian Border Force (ABF) identifies and engages with industries that trade in goods at risk of asbestos contamination and targets high-risk goods using a risk profiling process.

(2) Action taken at the border:

The ABF is responsible for enforcing Australia's import prohibition for asbestos. When goods reach the Australian border, the ABF risk assesses them, taking into account known information about asbestos use in countries of origin, at-risk manufacturing industries and prior border detections of asbestos. If goods are suspected of containing asbestos, the ABF will direct that the goods are tested by an accredited

laboratory and if asbestos is detected the goods will be seized as a prohibited import and forfeited.

In the 2021–22 financial year, the ABF reported there were 355 asbestos tests at the border and 73 detections.¹⁷² ASEA publishes data received from the ABF on asbestos testing and detections at the border on its website.

(3) Action taken if illegal goods make it past the border:

If asbestos-containing goods enter the market in Australia, the ABF, WHS regulators and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission work together to trace imports and start remediation. This may include publishing safety alerts, negotiating and monitoring product recalls and initiating an RRP. The RRP is a coordinated response procedure by the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities Imported Materials with Asbestos Working Group.

For as long as some countries allow asbestos to be traded, there will be a continued risk of exposure globally. ASEA continues to work with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water which administers Australia's obligations under the Rotterdam Convention. This includes continuing to promote reforms to the convention about asbestos.

A proposal to amend the Rotterdam Convention, which Australia co-sponsored, was considered by the eleventh Conference of the Parties in May 2023. This convention regulates international trade and use of hazardous chemicals. It allows importing countries to decide whether and under what conditions to accept chemical imports for specified listed hazardous chemicals under Annex III. It requires exporters to get permission from an importing country before these chemicals can be exported. This is known as 'prior informed consent'. The convention does not ban particular chemicals, rather it provides information to help importing parties to make informed decisions and manage risks for listed hazardous chemicals.

So far, attempts to list chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous substance under Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention have not been successful. The convention requires consensus from treaty members for an item to be listed under Annex III, and chrysotile's inclusion has been consistently blocked.

The amendments to the convention sought in May 2023 were to create a new annex, Annex VIII, which would allow chemicals to be listed if agreement to list them in Annex III cannot be reached. Had these amendments been accepted, they would only have applied to countries which chose to ratify them. This amendment would not have changed Annex III although the inclusion of chrysotile would continue to be pursued. The Annex VIII approach would have allowed the prior informed consent process to apply for chrysotile asbestos in the interim for countries that chose to be covered by it.

¹⁷² [Asbestos Safety and Eradication Annual Report 2021–22](#), p 32.

In the event, the proposed amendment failed to garner the required two-thirds majority by a slim margin.

In relation to target 8 under ANSP 2019–23, since its inception, ASEA has worked in the South-East Asia and Pacific region, along with partners in the field, to support nations and non-government organisations in their work towards bans including by:

- educating about the history of the Australian ban, how it came into force and how it is enforced today
- information sharing around legislation, compensation, waste, removal, WHS and asbestos management and the impacts of ARDs
- reviewing guidance materials on implementing bans and asbestos management for the Pacific region and participating in workshops and meetings with relevant South-East Asian and Pacific stakeholders.

Only one of 11 countries in South-East Asia, Brunei, has banned the use of all types of asbestos. Singapore banned the use of all types of raw asbestos. While no other South-East Asian country has yet implemented a national ban, there has been significant progress in the following countries:

- Vietnam: The production, importation and use of ACMs continues to decline.
- Indonesia has initiated regional and local asbestos bans.
- Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) has its National Action Plan to eliminate ARDs and ban chrysotile.
- Cambodia established its National Asbestos Profile in 2019 and has announced it will stop asbestos use in 2025.¹⁷³

ASEA continues to strengthen its direct connections with governments in the region and to promote the use of its website as a source of trusted information on asbestos.

ASEA has a longstanding partnership with the non-government organisation Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad Incorporated, known as Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA (APHEDA). APHEDA provides on-the-ground support and assistance to Australia's neighbours in South-East Asia and the Pacific, including work to support asbestos bans. South-East Asia and the Pacific have high levels of chrysotile asbestos consumption often coupled with low levels of WHS regulation and so are particularly at risk.

The main focus of this work is to promote the 'Asbestos – Not here, not anywhere' campaign, which aims to:

- raise awareness about asbestos exposure risks among high-risk groups and policymakers
- promote the elimination of ARDs
- phase out asbestos imports

¹⁷³ See: [Cambodia to stop using asbestos from 2025 to improve workers' welfare | Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA](#).

- implement national bans on the production and use of ACMs.

In September 2022 a delegation from ASEA and APHEDA visited South-East Asia to support the progress of the national action plans for the elimination of ARDs in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

ASEA is also researching the incidence of ARDs in South-East Asian countries, using the latest GBD Study data to estimate the number of deaths from ARDs in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Information about asbestos use in those countries is included in the report to help characterise ongoing asbestos exposure risk and predict the likelihood of future ARD burden. The GBD Study estimates ARD-related deaths will continue to rise in all 4 countries and analysis of available data shows that asbestos use is continuing and, in some countries, increasing. It is envisaged that this research will contribute to a report that can support the development of national action plans to eliminate ARDs. It will establish the current and potential future economic burden of ARDs, contributing to the evidence base by reinforcing the need for action. This will help advance priority 4 and target 8.

In relation to work in the Pacific, the mid-term progress report for ANSP 2019–23¹⁷⁴ noted Australia provides financial support to the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). Twenty-one member states of SPREP endorsed a proposal to ban or restrict the importation, re-use and re-sale of products and waste containing asbestos in Pacific island countries in 2017.

This report also noted other international work ASEA had undertaken including:

- preparing guidance material for Colombia to support its ban on asbestos, which came into effect in 2021
- its contribution to the ADDRI [eToolkit](#) 2021, an online training and education resource for the elimination of ARDs in developing countries.

Recommendation 11: International obligations

Fully
implemented
and ongoing



- ▶ Ongoing work includes:
 - continuing prevention of ACM illegal importation
 - assisting in the international campaign to ban production and trade of asbestos and ACMs including influencing the progression of bans on asbestos production and use in South-East Asia and the Pacific
 - sharing best practice for the management, removal and disposal of ACMs internationally.

¹⁷⁴ See discussion at p 63 of the [Asbestos National Strategic Plan Mid-term Progress Report](#), March 2022.

Recommendation 12: Former compulsorily acquired property

12. The review recommends that where ACMs were introduced onto previously privately owned land during a period of compulsory government acquisition, and such land has reverted to its original ownership and remains so, the relevant government agency should remediate the property.

Context

This recommendation arose from one response to a question raised in the AMR's Issue Paper which sought views on what responsibility governments should have in relation to the removal of asbestos from former government-owned properties which 'piqued the review's interest'.¹⁷⁵

The review noted provisions of the Commonwealth's *Land Acquisitions Act 1989* which apply a general principle that if compulsorily acquired land has not been substantially improved and is to be resold within 7 years of the acquisition, it should be offered to the previous owner first.¹⁷⁶

The relevant submission concerned a family farm, a portion of which had been compulsorily acquired by the Department of Defence before the Second World War which was reacquired by the same family in the 1960s. This submission noted that buildings which were constructed on the property by the Department of Defence were later found to contain asbestos and argued that the Australian Government should be responsible for remediating this.

The review considered there was a 'strong moral obligation to make good the management and remediation of the ACMs concerned'.¹⁷⁷ It recommended this occur generally where ACMs are introduced during the compulsory acquisition period if the land reverts to its original private owners.

Action taken

This recommendation has not been reflected in ANSPs devised since the review.

On 23 April 2013 the Office of Asbestos Safety appeared before the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee during its inquiry into the provisions of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Bill 2013. In providing evidence, a discussion draft for the proposed first ANSP was tendered.¹⁷⁸ This did not include any text relevant to recommendation 12 and no final ANSP has included it. The reasons for this are not readily apparent; however, it could be speculated that as the issue was peripheral to the Review Committee's terms of reference, it was not deemed relevant for inclusion. It may also reflect that, in the course of considering the views of

¹⁷⁵ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 56.

¹⁷⁶ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 56, citing s121 of the Act.

¹⁷⁷ [Asbestos Management Review Report June 2012](#), p 56.

¹⁷⁸ See item 2 in 'Additional information received' at [Submissions received by the Committee – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](#).

jurisdictions on the AMR's recommendations, it was ultimately decided it not be pursued.

As noted in the AMR, the recommendation arose from one particular submission to the review. It is not an issue that appears to have been raised by stakeholders subsequently.

Recommendation 12:

Former compulsorily acquired property

Not
implemented



- ▶ This recommendation was not implemented. The reasons for this are not clear, but it appears it was based on one submission and was not a systemic issue.

Conclusion

This ‘stocktake’ of the AMR Report recommendations has provided us with a clear picture of the evolution of the AMR recommendations since their inception and where they now fit into broader national action on asbestos. It also provides a roadmap of some areas still requiring further or ongoing work to eliminate ARDs in Australia by preventing exposure to asbestos fibres and will contribute to the research informing the next phase of the ANSP.

One additional issue which has been noted in compiling this paper is that none of the iterations of the ANSP up to now has specifically referred to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Given the particular burden of the asbestos legacy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this omission should also be considered in the context of devising the next phase of the ANSP.

More than 10 years after the AMR tabled its report, ASEA continues to play an important role in coordinating implementation of the ANSP nationally. In recognition of this experience, ASEA’s remit is to be extended after the 2023–24 Budget announcement that its functions will be broadened to include the prevention of silicosis and other silica-related occupational diseases. It is anticipated that this will involve significant amendments to the ASEA Act and the roles of ASEA and ASEC to allow them to play a central role in coordinating, monitoring and reporting on national efforts to eliminate asbestos and silica-related diseases in Australia, and support those affected by these diseases.