



Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**


**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

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Record of Proceedings, 4 April 2019

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Silicosis**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.03 am): Congratulations to the member for Pine Rivers and her partner, Reece.

The emergence of disease from exposure to respirable crystalline silica among engineered stone benchtop workers is a matter the Palaszczuk government is taking very seriously. I was deeply saddened to hear of the recent passing of Anthony White, a Queensland worker from the engineered stone benchtop industry, who died from silicosis, and we offer our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. Workers and their families can be assured that the Palaszczuk government is leading the nation in responding to the threat of silicosis and doing all it can to support people diagnosed with this terrible disease. Since we issued a public warning about the risks of engineered stone in September last year, audits of all known engineered stone benchtop fabricators in Queensland have been undertaken, health screening for 810 workers in this industry has also been arranged and medical and industry forums have been held.

An expert reference group of medical professionals met on 6 March led by the Office of Industrial Relations with assistance from WorkCover Queensland and other agencies. The reference group included representatives from the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand, Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists and Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists. At its first meeting, the expert reference group agreed there was a need for clear, clinical guidance to ensure consistent diagnosis and management of workers who have been exposed to silica dust in the engineered stone benchtop industry. This group will meet again in early May 2019. As recommended by the expert reference group, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine have been invited to join the group recognising the important role of GPs in managing affected workers.

In the meantime, the Office of Industrial Relations and WorkCover Queensland are developing a draft framework for diagnosis and management of workers exposed to silica dust. WorkCover Queensland is ensuring that workers with silicosis are provided with access to high-quality treatment, care and support services. While we know there is no cure for silicosis, there are several treatments available to assist workers to manage symptoms and prevent complications. We also know that more research is required that ensures best practice and evidence based treatment is available for workers which will accurately guide decisions about the treatments best suited to each worker. I look forward to further work with Minister Lynham and Minister Miles in this area.

However, there is an urgent requirement for a national response to these issues. To this end, WorkCover Queensland is consulting with medical experts to understand where this vital research is most needed with a view to funding research to develop an evidence based approach to return to work and vocational rehabilitation for affected workers.

Queensland is leading the way in responding to the threat of silicosis. I again urge any worker worried about their exposure to silica dust to see a doctor and contact WorkCover Queensland to arrange a health screen. This government will stand beside them every step of the way.