



19 January 2017

Chair  
Senate Standing Committee on Economics  
Inquiry into Non-conforming Building Products  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA

Via email: [economics.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:economics.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Senate Chair

### **Senate Inquiry into non-conforming Building Products**

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) welcomes the opportunity to provide the following comments on the importance of preventing exposure and protecting the health and safety of workers and the public from materials and products containing asbestos.

Established in 1924, the ANMF is the largest industrial and professional organisation in Australia for nurses, midwives and carers, with Branches in each State and Territory of Australia. Our core business is the industrial and professional representation of ANMF members and the professions of nursing and midwifery.

Our membership of over 258,000 nurses, midwives and carers, is employed in a wide range of settings in urban, rural and remote locations in both the public and private health and aged care sectors.

Accordingly our members are front line health care professionals who witness the deadly and insidious impact of exposure to asbestos.

While the ANMF supports workplaces that are free of asbestos unfortunately it remains the case that many nurses and midwives care for patients and elderly residents in large, aging facilities that contain asbestos products.

Further the nature of health and aged services means that such places of employment and care are often the subject of ongoing refurbishment, renovation and extension with the consequent potential risk of direct exposure to asbestos.

ANMF advocates for the safe removal, and ongoing monitoring, of asbestos products in health and aged care facilities and considers the process should be a requirement underpinned by regulation.

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#### **Canberra Office**

Unit 3, or PO Box 4239  
28 Eyre Street  
Kingston ACT 2604  
Australia

T +612 6232 6533  
F +612 6232 6610  
E [anmfcanberra@anmf.org.au](mailto:anmfcanberra@anmf.org.au)  
W [www.anmf.org.au](http://www.anmf.org.au)

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#### **Melbourne Office**

Level 1, 365 Queen Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
Australia

T +613 9602 8500  
F +613 9602 8567  
E [anmfmelbourne@anmf.org.au](mailto:anmfmelbourne@anmf.org.au)  
W [www.anmf.org.au](http://www.anmf.org.au)

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#### **ANMF Journals**

**Australian Nursing and  
Midwifery Journal**  
E [anmj@anmf.org.au](mailto:anmj@anmf.org.au)

**Australian Journal of  
Advanced Nursing**  
E [ajan@anmf.org.au](mailto:ajan@anmf.org.au)

ABN 41 816 898 298

We applaud the efforts of governments and employers to remove asbestos from work places though more needs to be done. For example while the Victorian government is to be commended for its commitment to removing asbestos from all Victorian schools, to reduce the risk to students (and of course to teachers and other workers), there is not the same commitment in relation to hospitals and healthcare facilities.

To assist employers to take the necessary steps to make their workplace asbestos free ANMF would support tied government funding or financial grants to employers in recognition that the removal of asbestos is a time consuming and expensive exercise that often significantly disrupts services. Financial support, in concert with revised building codes and regulations may also reduce the likelihood of employers using cheaper imported building materials that may contain asbestos products.

The removal of asbestos products in health and aged care facilities must become a priority and be undertaken in consultation with employees and with patients, residents and their families. And while many employers do make their employees aware of the existence of asbestos, in most cases the information provided is lacking. ANMF is regularly contacted by members who, after having seen a notice seek further information about the risks for them and their patients of continuing to work in the affected workplace.

Along with the right to consultation and the provision of relevant information, employees must have the right not to remain working in areas where asbestos is, or is likely to, be present. Given the hazard to life that asbestos presents, this workplace right must be unfettered.

In summary the ANMF submits that the regulatory framework must promote a safe environment for employees, patients and visitors in all health care facilities and place a clear obligation on employers to prevent exposure to asbestos.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Thomas', written in a cursive style.

Lee Thomas  
Federal Secretary