



UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL BULLETIN

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NCOM Endorses National Push to Include Motor Neurone Diseases in Presumptive Legislation

TO ALL UFUA MEMBERS,

On the 26th and 27th of November, the UFUA held the National Committee of Management Meeting in Canberra. NCOM delegates and observers were joined by expert guests who presented on a range of critical issues impacting firefighters nationally. The formal meeting of NCOM also took place, with discussion on several motions, policies and rule changes.

ALS and MND NCOM Policy

One of the important issues discussed at this year's NCOM related to an emerging body of research that indicates a link between Motor Neurone Diseases (MND) and occupational exposures faced by firefighters.



Photo: NCOM delegates and attendees with Greg McConville, Alex Forrest and Leigh Hills (left to right) at the front of the group.

We were honored to be joined by Alex Forrest, whose advocacy in firefighter health and safety has been crucial to securing presumptive cancer protections across Australia. Mr Forrest has recently dedicated his time to raise awareness and advocate for presumptive protections to extend to firefighters diagnosed with MND, work he presented on during NCOM.

At the meeting, NCOM unanimously voted to endorse a Policy of the Union to advocate for the inclusion of MND under local and federal workers compensation laws and regulations. Members can refer to the *ALS and MND* Policy attached to this Bulletin.

The Union has hit the ground running on advocating for these reforms, with National Secretary Greg McConville appearing on ABC News Breakfast this morning. In speaking about this Policy, Mr McConville stated:

“We're now identifying that firefighters are succumbing to motor neurone diseases such as ALS and Parkinson's at increasing rates”

“[these] diseases are related to many of the same chemical exposures associated with firefighter occupational cancer and have the same mechanistic effects in terms of affecting DNA and the body's resilience to disease as the chemicals that firefighters are exposed to.”

“There is no specific legal recognition for these diseases and so we are commencing national advocacy for the addition of these diseases to the presumptive workers compensation provisions.”

Mr McConville continued, noting that work is being done to support current member claims, further noting the importance of these reforms.

“I've had experienced firefighters through my door in the last couple of weeks and it's heartbreaking to watch them literally fall apart.”

Further updates on this campaign will be provided to members through future bulletins.

Presumptive Cancer Rights for Firefighters NCOM Policy

The current state of presumptive cancer protections was another crucial issue discussed during the NCOM meeting. The discussion builds upon years of work and advocacy from the UFU to ensure that firefighters Australia wide have access to compensation for occupational cancers incurred through their work.

The *Presumptive Cancer Rights for Firefighters* Policy, endorsed by NCOM, provides a snapshot of where presumptive cancer legislation sits nationally, with Victoria and New South Wales being the two only jurisdictions that have not expanded the list of 12 presumptive cancers to the 20+ recognised in all other jurisdictions.

In speaking to ABC News Breakfast this morning, Mr McConville highlighted the need for harmonisation, stating:

“[With] Firefighters helping... each other out across jurisdictions, you can be fighting the very same fires... and experience different compensation entitlements depending on where you're from.”

In addition, the Policy highlighted the current gaps in protection for Ventia and private sector firefighters nationally. The Policy commits the Union to push for further cancer prevention and presumptive rights for Ventia and other private sector firefighters.

Members can refer to the policy endorsed by NCOM, attached to this Bulletin.

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Authorised by Greg McConville, National Secretary, United Firefighters Union of Australia, Canberra.



National Policy

ALS and Motor Neurone Diseases (Amnd.)

[NP4-2024]

Recognising that:

Firefighters are succumbing to Motor Neurone diseases (ALS and Parkinsons) at increasing rates;

These diseases are related to many of the same chemical exposures that are associated with firefighter occupational cancer;

The incidence of these diseases among defence force personnel has similarly been associated with chemicals that firefighters are exposed to.

NCOM notes:

That there is currently no specific legal recognition of these diseases as firefighter occupational diseases.

NCOM resolves:

To commence national advocacy for the addition of these diseases to firefighter presumptive workers compensation provisions

To develop a body of expertise to support workers compensation claims despite the absence of presumptive rights.

To facilitate among branches a strategic approach to litigation where necessary to achieve workers compensation entitlements for adversely affected members.



National Policy
Presumptive Cancer Rights for Firefighters (Amnd.)
[NP3-2024]

Recognising:

The World Health Organisation International Agency for Research on Cancer (WHO IARC) in 2022 classified firefighting as conclusively carcinogenic to humans.

In response, jurisdictions across Australia have legislated to increase the number of cancers covered by presumptive legislation from 12 to:

- 20 in the Commonwealth and ACT
- 20 in Western Australia
- 21 in Tasmania
- 23 in Queensland
- 23 in the Northern Territory

NCOM further notes that:

the South Australian Legislative Council has amended a workers compensation Bill to add a further 11 cancers (total 23), and that the South Australian Government is yet to confirm support for this expansion;

the New South Wales Government has not made any commitment to expansion of presumptive cancer legislation;

the Victorian Government has pursued legislation to only add three cancers to the 12 already legislated; and

Ventia Firefighters have inconsistent presumptive cancer rights depending on where they are located.

NCOM resolves to:

Commit the UFUA to pursuit of harmonisation of presumptive cancer and presumptive post-traumatic stress legislation across Australia by:

- Highlighting the differences identified by this motion;
- Lobbying Commonwealth, State and Territory Work Health Safety ministers to give effect to harmonisation;
- Lowering the qualifying (latency) periods mandated in presumptive cancer legislation.
- Active pursuit of cancer prevention and presumptive rights for Ventia and other private sector firefighters.