

Silicosis

INFORMATION BOOKLET



**Asbestos Council
of Victoria**

Incorp. Silica

Booklet revised & reprinted 2025

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared in good faith, exercising due care and attention. However no representations or warranties, are expressed or implied, in relation to the relevance, accuracy, completeness or fitness for the purpose of this document in respect of any particular user's circumstances.

Users of this document should satisfy themselves concerning its application to managing silica issues and where necessary, seek expert advice about their situation.

ACV/GARDS shall not be liable to any person or entity with respect to any liability, loss or damage caused or alleged to have been caused directly or indirectly by this publication.

ACV/GARDS wishes to acknowledge the information in this book was provided in part from Sai Praveen Haranath, MBBS, MPH, FCCP - Chest Foundation - the Asbestos Related Diseases Support Society Queensland - Gordon Legal - Dr Ryan Hoy MB BS FRACP MOccEnvHlth Respiratory and Sleep Disorders Physician & Joanna McNeill - advocate & silica sufferer.

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Treasury
and Finance



Booklet sponsored by Terry Magnuson in memory of David

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INTRODUCTION:

Silicosis Support Group

Our Silicosis Support group was established in response to the increase in diagnosis of dust related lung disease in the engineered stone bench top (silicosis) and coal mining industries (coal workers pneumoconiosis).

The support group is part of Asbestos Council of Victoria/GARDS, which was established in 1991 to help and support sufferers of asbestos related diseases, their families and carers. It is a not-for profit charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission (ACNC).

As a result of the emergence of these dust related lung diseases, our organisation is determined to expand support beyond asbestos related diseases to other dust related lung diseases, firstly silicosis. Over many decades ACV/GARDS has had a proud history of providing support through:

- Meetings of members to share experiences, enjoy the support and company of other members and make connections with those who may be facing similar challenges;
- Facilitation of community meetings to provide current information and hear from a variety of people who are in the asbestos and silica arena for medical, environmental, OH&S and many more
- Access to qualified social workers and medical specialists;
- Telephone support and home visits;
- Referral to personal injury lawyers in relation to potential compensation claims.

The support group operates on the same long-standing principles and services that has supported those suffering from asbestos related diseases. Our organisation has deductible gift recipient status whereby donations of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible. We are a registered charity with tick of approval. Membership fees are minimal, & the latest fees -

ACV/GARDS NEW MEMBERS Joining Fee	\$5.00 PLUS
ACV/GARDS Annual Subscription	
1. Concession (Pensioner/unemployed)	\$5.00
2. Full Rate (employed)	\$15.00

All membership prices include GST
Or if you need more info you can contact 0407274173

What is Crystalline Silica?

Crystalline silica (silica) is found in sand, stone, concrete and mortar. It is also used as the primary filler for engineered (also known as artificial or reconstituted stone, which has become very popular for the fabrication of kitchen and bathroom benchtops). When workers cut, crush, drill, polish, saw or grind products that contain silica, tiny dust particles are generated that are small enough to lodge deep in the lungs and cause disease, including silicosis.

Different types of rock and rock products can contain different amounts of silica. The amount of crystalline silica in products can vary. Examples include:

Brick.....	5-15%
Ceramic Tiles	5-45%
Demolition Dust.....	3 – 4%
Shale.....	22%
Clay Bricks	15 – 27%
Aggregates in Concrete.....	30%
Fibre Cement Bricks	10 – 30%
Granite	25-40%
Natural Sandstone	67%
Engineered, Artificial or Reconstituted Stone.....	90%

(The above represents typical concentrations)

If you're not sure if a product contains crystalline silica, check the safety data sheet (SDS).

What can Silica do?

Dust related lung disease occurs when the human body is unable to break-down or remove certain types of dust once it has entered deep into the lungs. When silica dust lodges in the lungs it can an inflammatory process, resulting in scarring (fibrosis) in the lung tissues and reducing the body's ability to take oxygen into the blood and remove carbon dioxide. Damage to the lung tissue initially causes small rounded areas of scarring, in the form of nodules which can be seen on a chest x-ray.

Silicosis is a form of lung scarring caused by silica. Other dusts which can cause lung scarring include asbestos (asbestosis) and coal mine dust (coal workers pneumoconiosis)

How much exposure does it take?

Development of dust related lung disease depends on several factors, such as the amount, how often and for how long a worker is exposed to silica containing dust. Some people are more susceptible than others to developing disease even though they may have had similar patterns of workplace exposure.

It is suggested that you have a physical before you work in industry to obtain a fitness level. A candidate's previous and current medical history (e.g. vaccinations, injuries, underlying health conditions and disabilities) are recorded. A general Assessment of the candidates' blood pressure, vision, height, weight and general lung health with a scan and urine analysis is conducted for standard signs of overall health. This establishes a level of your fitness for the future.





What is Silicosis?

There are three types of silicosis:

- Acute silicosis, caused by extremely high levels of silica exposure and causes cough, weight loss, and fatigue, the lungs become very inflamed and can fill with fluid, which causes severe shortness of breath and low blood oxygen levels. This can happen within a few weeks or years of exposure to inhaled silica.
- Chronic silicosis is the most common form and appears after 10 to 30 years of exposure it often affects upper lung areas and sometimes causes extensive scarring, the silica dust causes areas of swelling in the lungs and chest lymph nodes, which makes breathing more difficult. This is called progressive massive fibrosis.
- Accelerated silicosis, which occurs within 10 years of high-level exposure and is more rapidly progressive swelling in the lungs and symptoms occur faster than in chronic forms of silicosis.

Silicosis can develop within a few weeks to even decades after exposure. When people breathe silica dust, they inhale tiny particles of the mineral silica. This silica dust can scar tissue in the lungs that cuts down your ability to breathe. This can lead to lung scarring and cough, weight loss, and fatigue.

Over time, lung capacity decreases, and people with silicosis may need support with oxygen and other devices to help them breathe.

How Silicosis Affects Your Body

Silicosis affects the lungs by damaging the lining of the lung air sacs. Once this begins, it leads to scarring and, in some situations, to a condition called severe progressive massive fibrosis. This condition happens when there is severe scarring and stiffening of the lung, which makes it difficult to breathe.

People with acute silicosis experience cough, weight loss, tiredness, and may have fever or a sharp chest pain. You may also have shortness of breath over time, especially with chronic silicosis. Your health-care provider might hear crackles or wheezing when listening to your lungs. Having silicosis increases the risk of other problems, such as tuberculosis, lung cancer, and chronic bronchitis.

Silicosis Symptoms, Causes, and Risk Factors

What Are the Symptoms of Silicosis?

In the early stages of silicosis, there will usually be no symptoms and the condition may only be detected by chest x-ray or CT scan. Symptoms typically develop and worsen gradually as scarring in the lungs progresses.

Cough is an early symptom and develops over time with exposure to silica that is inhaled.

In acute silicosis, you may experience fever and sharp chest pain along with breathing difficulty. These symptoms can come on suddenly.

In chronic silicosis, you may only have an abnormal chest x-ray in the beginning and then slowly develop a cough and breathing difficulty. More than a third of people with silicosis have phlegm production and cough. Chronic bronchitis like symptoms may occur, and the lungs have additional sounds called wheezes and crackles. As extensive scarring progresses over time, you may see signs of chronic lung disease, such as leg swelling, increased breathing rate, and bluish discoloration of the lips.

What Causes Silicosis?

Silicosis is caused by exposure to crystalline silica, which comes from chipping, cutting, drilling, or grinding soil, sand, granite, or other minerals. Any occupation where the earth's crust is disturbed can cause silicosis. A long list of occupations is known to expose workers to crystalline silica that is inhaled.

These include:

- Coal and Hard Rock Mining
- Construction Work
- Tunnel Work
- Masonry
- Sand Blasting
- Glass Manufacturing
- Ceramics Work
- Steel industry Work
- Quarrying
- Stone Cutting





What Are Risk Factors of Silicosis?

Breathing crystalline silica causes silicosis and the main risk factor is exposure to silica dust. You can prevent silicosis by limiting exposure. There are national guidelines on exposure limits over a lifetime of working. If you work in a job that exposes you to silica dust, your employer must, by law, give you the correct equipment and clothing you need to protect yourself. You are responsible for using it—always—and for taking other steps to protect yourself and your family as you leave your job site and head home. NIOSH also recommends that medical examinations occur before job placement or upon entering a trade, and at least every 3 years thereafter.

Patients with silicosis have an increased risk of other problems, such as tuberculosis, lung cancer, and chronic bronchitis. If you are a smoker, quitting may help, as smoking damages the lungs.

When to See Your Doctor

Any person who works in industries with exposure to inhaled silica should get regular health check-ups and be monitored for signs and symptoms of lung disease. In addition, if you have a cough, phlegm, or breathing difficulty that is not improving, you should be closely evaluated by your doctor. Some people with acute silicosis also have fever, weight loss, and fatigue.

Diagnosing and Treating Silicosis

If you work or have worked in an occupation with exposure to inhaled silica and have a cough, phlegm, or breathing difficulty, you should be evaluated for silicosis.

What to Expect

It may take multiple doctor's visits and tests to diagnose silicosis. Once diagnosed, expect long-term monitoring and follow-up. You will also need to take measures to avoid further exposure.

How It's Diagnosed

Having worked in an at-risk industry is the best clue for your doctor, and a chest X-ray is crucial to diagnose the type of silicosis. Your visit will include a physical examination - your health-care provider will listen to your lungs - and a chest X-ray. Your chest X-ray may be normal, or you may have a lot of scarring in the lungs. There may be a series of tests, such as:

- Breathing tests
- High resolution CT scan of the chest
- A bronchoscopy to evaluate the inside of the lungs
- A biopsy of the lungs

Additional tests, such as mucus (sputum) evaluation, may be needed to assess for associated diseases, such as tuberculosis (TB).

How Silicosis Is Treated

There is no cure for silicosis. Prevention is still the best way to avoid the disease. Once silicosis has developed, your doctor will assess the degree of lung damage with tests. Some people may need urgent treatment with oxygen and support for breathing. Others may need medicines to decrease sputum production, such as inhaled steroids. Some may need inhaled bronchodilators, which relax the air tubes.

Once the disease advances, the management is similar to many other chronic lung diseases and needs a multidisciplinary or team approach. To keep the disease from getting worse, it is important to stay away from any additional sources of silica and other lung irritants, such as indoor and outdoor air pollution, allergens and smoke. You may be eligible to submit a claim for workers compensation and be provided support to assist in changing occupations.

Cases of severe silicosis lung transplant may need to be considered.

Living with Silicosis

Patients with silicosis need to maintain their health by leading an active lifestyle and avoiding further exposure. Quitting smoking, getting adequate exercise, managing your weight, and monitoring for complications are all important.

What to Expect

Many people with silicosis have chronic symptoms and a decrease in lifespan. However, over the last few decades, supportive care and earlier detection have improved survival significantly.

Managing the Disease

Appropriate diagnosis and treatment will make life with silicosis easier. Using the proper medications and seeing an experienced specialist are important to managing the disease. Here are a few tips to manage silicosis:

- Quit smoking.
- Get yearly vaccinations, such as pneumococcal and influenza.
- Be vigilant about watching for the development of TB or other infections.
- Avoid further exposure to silica.
- Educate yourself about the disease.
- Consider enrolling in clinical trials.
- Have a plan to manage flare-ups of the disease.





Lung Damage

Oxygen support or other ways to manage chronic lung failure, like the use of non-invasive ventilator devices may be needed.

Lung damage can Contribute to autoimmune problems

Interesting fact that high iron levels seem to have a connection to silicosis

What is autoimmune lung disease?

An example of autoimmune disease caused by silicosis - one person's experience - can be uncommon but potentially life altering complication associated with rheumatic or autoimmune diseases, including Rheumatic arthritis, an inflammatory disease that primarily affects the joints.

Dermatomyositis, which results in inflammation in muscles and skin

Systemic sclerosis, also known as scleroderma, is a rare, chronic autoimmune disease that primarily affects the skin and connective tissues, but, can also impact internal organs.

There are various terms fo this complication autoimmune lung disease, interstitial lung disease, and interstitial fibrosis. Characterized by lung inflammation and or scarring, it is one of many potential complications affecting different organs in people who have an underlying autoimmune or rheumatic disease.

Other Complications from Silica

- Mental Health
- Can affect eyes
- Septic Arthritis
- Chronic pain all over
- Sleep Apnea
- Asthma
- can affect other tissue and organs
- shortness of breath
- tiredness
- Chest pains
- Wheezing
- Coughing & weight loss
- It can increase the risk of Tuberculosis, Lung Cancer, and Chronic Bronchitis

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Silicosis

Making notes before your visit, as well as taking along a trusted family member or friend, can help you through the first appointment with your doctor. You'll want to provide a complete exposure history and work together on planning for a team approach to manage silicosis.

- What tests do I need to confirm my diagnosis?
- How can the disease be monitored?
- What choices do I have to assist with my symptoms?
- What is the prognosis for my situation?
- Are there any advances in therapy?
- Are there any counselling resources available?
- Where can I look for information on methods to obtain compensation?
- What options are available to help me quit smoking?
- What vaccines do I need?
- Do I have progressive massive fibrosis?
- Do I need a lung transplant?

Benefits of Support Groups

Sometimes it can be an overwhelming experience to know who to turn to when you have been diagnosed with an unexpected illness. Support Groups are facilitated for members to share experiences, enjoy the support and company of others, make connections with those who may be facing similar challenges and provide much needed emotional support. ACV/GARDS Silicosis Support group is committed to supporting its members who have been impacted by silicosis to access a range of information from medical specialists, lawyers and allied health care professionals. In conjunction ACV/GARDS members also have access to our own support workers who can provide information and support at our support group meeting. For further information on the Silicosis Support group, please phone 0407 274 173 and 0481 987 953

Legal Questions

Can I bring a compensation claim for silicosis?

Yes, a person who has been diagnosed with silicosis can generally pursue a compensation claim for the condition and the associated disability.

There are generally two types of claims available in Australia for conditions like silicosis – either a workers' compensation claim or a damages claim. Workers' compensation schemes are a no-fault claim process. An injured worker simply needs to establish that they have been diagnosed with a work-related condition that is causing impairment to recover compensation. A claim for damages however involves establishing negligence of the other party. Deciding to pursue a damages claim involves a legal assessment which should be discussed with a lawyer.





When dealing with WorkCover

It could also be valuable to contact Injured Workers Support Team (IWST) - We're Stronger together they are on facebook. This team consists of volunteers who have extensive knowledge of the complexities of the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 and can assist in navigating interactions with insurance companies.

Online Support Group

Injured Workers Support Team – We're Stronger Together

A Facebook Group of injured workers offering support, advocacy and assistance to injured workers, 'Where no one stands alone'. The group is by invitation only so please contact the info line of the Facebook site for assistance and to join.



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/416951452944110/>

Worth mentioning that once you're not receiving weekly payments through WorkCover, you can explore transitioning to ongoing payments via NDIS or Centrelink.

Please note: It's important that we mention that accessing Total and Permanent Disability (TPD) benefits through superannuation can be done independently, without the need for a lawyer.

Are there time limits for bringing a claim for silicosis?

Yes.

In Victoria, under the Workcover system you are required to notify your employer that you have suffered an injury (including silicosis) within 30 days of diagnosis. This can either be done by lodging a claim form or writing to/emailing your employer advising of your diagnosis.

If you have been diagnosed with silicosis, but have not notified your employer within 30 days, do not worry, as you will be very likely to still be able to proceed with a claim, but it's a good idea to lodge your claim form as soon as possible.

What can I claim for?

In Victoria, most claims for silicosis are initially pursued through the Workcover system. Then, if you have suffered a 'serious injury' (which has a specific legal meaning) in negligent circumstances, you can bring a claim for common law damages.

Through the Victorian Workcover system, you are entitled to:

- Payment of reasonable medical and like expenses - this may include home help such as gardening if you can no longer perform such tasks because of your injury;
 - Weekly payments of compensation if you cannot work;
 - A lump sum for impairment benefit (in some circumstances).
- At common law, the damages you can claim for depend on when and where you were exposed. This is because not only do different states have different laws, but in Victoria, there were changes to the law over the years that change people's entitlements. However, generally you can claim for:
- Pain and suffering;
 - Past economic loss and lost superannuation;
 - Future lost earning capacity and future lost superannuation.

Do I need a lawyer?

It is recommended that anyone who has been diagnosed with silicosis should seek independent legal advice regarding their circumstances and their potential entitlements.

More information

If you would like more detailed information about artificial stone more specifically we have included a link for you to investigate from the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (AFOEM) and the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) – you can also find this link on our web site under our Silicosis information www.gards.org

<https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/division-faculty-and-chapter-priorities/faculty-of-occupational-environmental-medicine/accelerated-silicosis>





DIRECTORY

Emergency only call..... 000

GENERAL

Commonwealth Respite & Carelink Centre 1800 052 222

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres provide free and confidential information on local carer support, disability and community services. Centres are located throughout Australia and you can contact your nearest Centre by phoning the no listed above (Free call except from mobile phones). If you require information on services in another region, your call can be transferred to any other Centre around Australia, free of charge.

Palliative Care Australia 02 6232 4433
www.palliativecare.org.au

is also available through Commonwealth Respite & Carelink Centre

Cancer Council Victoria..... 13 11 20
www.cancervic.org.au

The Cancer Council Helpline is staffed by trained professionals with knowledge about cancer and cancer care. They are there to help you with information, support and referrals to other services from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday.

The Cancer Counselling Service gives people affected by cancer the opportunity to talk through problems and learn new ways of coping. They are linked to a number of support programs that offer peer support and information to people with cancer and their families and a range of informative workshops and seminars. The Cancer Connect service provides cancer patients with peer support and information by connecting them with people who have had similar cancer experiences.

Veterans & Veterans Families Consulting Service - 1800 011 046
Regional Callers - 1800 555 254

Multi Purpose Taxi Program (03) 9655 6666
taxi.vic.gov.au/passengers/mptp

The Multi Purpose Taxi Program makes it easier for Victorians with a severe and permanent disability to afford taxis.

The Multi Purpose Taxi Program helps the people who most need it. You can become a member of the Multi Purpose Taxi Program if you:

- live in Victoria, and
- have a severe and permanent disability, and
- have a disability that means you can't use public transport by yourself.

To become a member you also need to either:

- use a wheelchair all the time, or
- hold a Department of Veterans' Affairs Pensioner Concession Card or gold Repatriation Health Card, or
- hold certain Pensioner Concession or Health Care Cards from Centrelink, or
- be able to show you have financial hardship by providing financial information.

COUNSELLING SERVICES

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636
www.beyondblue.org.au

beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia.

Life Line 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Lifeline is staffed by trained volunteer telephone counsellors who are ready to take calls from any person 24-hours a day, any day of the week from anywhere in Australia. Lifeline offers a counselling service that respects everyone's right to be heard, understood and cared for as well as information about other support services that are available in communities around Australia. Lifeline telephone counsellors are ready to talk and listen no matter how big or how small the problem might seem. They are trained.

Suicide Call Back Service..... 1800 659 467

Mensline Aust..... 1300 789 978
 000 for emergencies

For Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People 1300 YARN (139276)

LGBTIQ+ People QLife..... 1800 184 527

The Australian Psychological Society 1800 333 497
www.psychology.org.au





For Financial Wellbeing & Sport

Salvation Army Financial Counselling 1800 722 363

St Vincent de Paul Financial Wellbeing 1800 846 643

Search for a psychologist in your area. Access over 2,300 psychologists Australia wide, who are in private practice and provide services for a fee. Psychologists who are endorsed by Medicare Australia can provide consultations with a Medicare rebate.

Kids Help Line

Phone Counselling Service 1800 551 800

www.kidshelpline.com.au

Australia's only free, private and confidential, phone counselling service especially for young people aged between 5 and 25 years.

Regional
ACV/GARDS office
211 Lloyd Street Moe 3825
Last Tuesday of Month
1.30pm -3.30pm
Mobile: 0407 274 173



Metro
Amaroo Neighbourhood Centre
34 Amaroo Street
Chadstone 3148
2nd Monday of Month
1.30pm – 3.30pm
Mobile: 0481 987 953

Please note - No support group meetings are held in December or January – there are calendars posted on our web site of dates for meetings at www.gards.org and also posted in each edition of our newsletters

ACV/GARDS has a night time organisational meeting which is held at our main office 211 Lloyd Street Moe on the 3rd Tuesday of the month – there are no night time meetings held in Dec or Jan

About our support groups

ACV/GARDS provides support and information to asbestos & silica sufferers, their families and carers. This includes telephone information/ support service 24 hours, 7 days a week – ACV/GARDS has an office, which is open for sufferers their families and carers and the general community to access at the times listed

Office Hours located in Gippsland
Monday – Thursday
10am – 4.00pm
Friday by appointment

Please note there is no office in the Metro area.

ACV/GARDS welcomes visits to the Regional office at all times listed – if you are coming from any distance it would be advisable to ring before you come in case we have an emergency or are at a meeting.



CONTACT DETAILS OF THE ASSOCIATION:

Asbestos Council of Victoria (ACV)

Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support Inc. (GARDS)

PO Box 111, Moe. Victoria. 3825

Ph: 0407 274 173 (24/7)

Email: enquiries@gards.org

Web: www.gards.org



www.facebook.com/gardsinc

RESPIRABLE CRYSTALLINE SILICA (RCS)

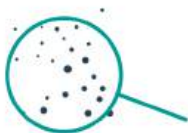
A 2022 study estimated **584,000** Australian workers are **exposed to RCS** in 2016⁹



If uncontrolled, this exposure could result in up to **103,000** silicosis cases and **10,000** lung cancers⁹

103k

RCS particles are typically **100 times** smaller than a grain of beach sand^{10,11}



Exposure to RCS can cause serious lung disease leading to permanent disability and death¹²



Globally, silicosis accounts for **90%** of all **pneumoconiosis cases** and is a serious public health issue¹³

90%

Silica-related diseases are preventable¹²



Crystalline silica is a common, naturally occurring mineral found in most rocks and soils¹⁴



RCS is generated when crystalline silica products are subjected to **mechanical processing**¹⁴





Asbestos Council of Victoria

Incorp. Silica

ACV/GARDS INC. Membership Form

Name

Address

..... P/Code

Telephone

Email

Occupation

ACV/GARDS NEW MEMBERS Joining Fee \$5.00

PLUS

ACV/GARDS Annual Subscription 20____

1. Concession (Pensioner/unemployed) \$5.00

2. Full Rate (employed) \$15.00

Upon my admission as a Member, I agree to be bound by the rules of ACV/GARDS Inc.

Signature Date

Please return to ACV/GARDS with payment, PO Box 111, MOE, Vic. 3825

Office Use Only

I, a Member of the ACV/GARDS Inc. nominate the Applicant for Membership of the Association

Signature of Proposer Date:

I, a member of ACV/GARDS Inc., second the nomination of the Applicant for membership of the Association.

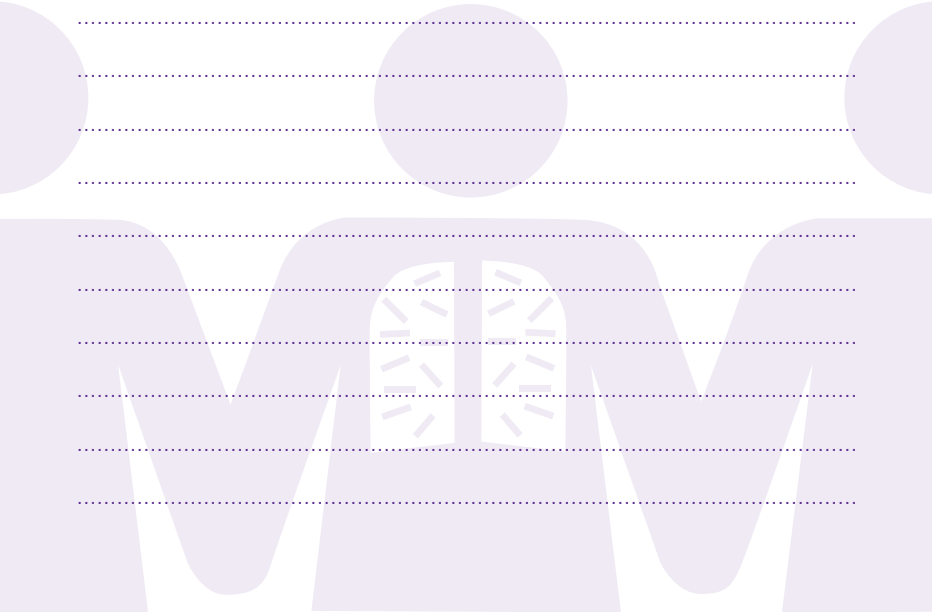
Signature of Date

Signature of Seconder Date

NOTES



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NOTES



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