



Australian Government

Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

# National strategic plan for asbestos awareness and management

November 2019



2019/23

# National strategic plan for asbestos awareness and management 2019-2023

## Foreword

No Australian home, workplace or the environment should expose people to asbestos fibres that might cause disease or death.

From the 1960s, Australia has been a world leader in progressively restricting and banning the mining, manufacture and use of asbestos. We recognised that without further decisive action, Australians would continue to become seriously ill, or die, from exposure to asbestos fibres. We 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. We have one of the highest rates of asbestos-related diseases of any country in the world. Some 4,000 Australians currently die each year from past exposure to asbestos, which is more than double the number of annual Australian road deaths.

Many public and commercial buildings, homes and infrastructure contain large amounts of ageing asbestos-containing materials (ACMs). Vigilance and proactive action is needed to deal with this legacy to prevent further disease and death.

Under our 2014–18 National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness, all governments worked together researching, increasing awareness and developing and disseminating practical information about asbestos.

Australia made significant progress under that plan, but there is still a long way to go to deal effectively with the remaining asbestos legacy.

The National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2019–2023 (NSP 2019–2023) builds on the previous plan's progress. It complements and enhances existing asbestos policies and actions at all levels of government.

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.

Under this plan, governments and regulatory agencies along with businesses, unions, individual organisations, advocacy groups, researchers and members of the community will work together to support coordinated and more effective asbestos management. Laws will be strongly enforced to meet the community expectation that Australia will manage and dispose of ACMs responsibly.

By continuing to work together, we will be more efficient, effective and economical by ensuring consistent and coordinated awareness messages and asbestos management approaches.

We recognise the deep community concern about the current and future public health threats from poor asbestos management. To focus our collective actions to support long-term change, we have committed to nine targets. The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) is responsible for coordinating NSP 2019–2023 over the next five years.

#### Australian Government working with:



# Australia's past use of asbestos has left a harmful legacy

# Overview

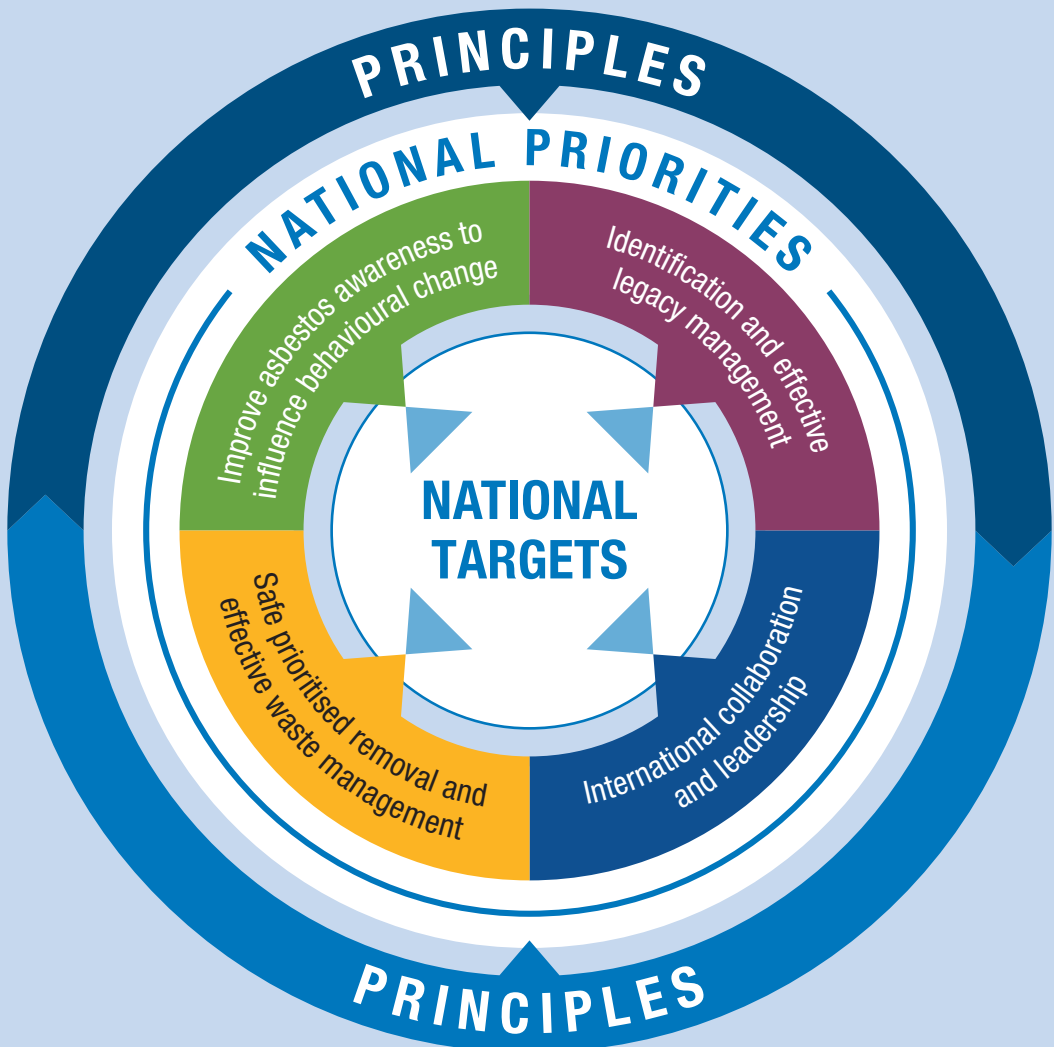
Our aim is to eliminate asbestos-related diseases in Australia by preventing exposure to asbestos fibres.

To do this, we need to deal effectively with the harmful legacy of asbestos in our homes, workplaces and the environment.

NSP 2019–2023 has four national priorities to focus strategic actions. Together, these priorities aim to improve asbestos awareness and management.

## AIM

To prevent exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos-related disease in Australia



# National targets

A suite of national stretch targets will help us remain focused and measure our progress over the next five years. 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 national targets ensure that our focus is clearly on preventing exposure to asbestos fibres now and into the future. NSP 2019–2023 targets reflect how effective our combined strategic actions under each of the four national priorities will be. Our 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 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 asbestos containing materials being present in the residential environment.

# National priorities



## 1. Improve asbestos awareness to influence behavioural change

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To change attitudes and behaviours, we must provide accurate and timely information about the potential health risks of asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) to workers and the community. Governments and community bodies will collaborate to provide trusted, easily understood, practical and widely available information about the risks of ACMs in homes, workplaces and the environment.

### **Strategic actions under this priority include:**

- producing targeted comprehensive and nationally consistent asbestos awareness advice and information campaigns for the community and workers
- producing additional practical information material on asbestos safety in the home, workplace and the environment
- improving education and training for those at risk of exposure to asbestos fibres or who make decisions about ACMs
- establishing or maintaining trusted single sources of asbestos-related information at the national and jurisdictional level
- continuing to develop powerful awareness messages
- expanding and sharing research and information on asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) to improve policy and practice.

# National priorities



## 2. Identification and effective legacy management

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Many homes, public and commercial buildings and infrastructure contain large amounts of ACMs, which have already or soon will reach the end of their product life. Preventing exposure to asbestos fibres requires this material to be accurately identified and then maintained in a safe state until it can be appropriately removed. Even then, natural disasters and emergencies will occasionally disturb previously safely contained materials.

### **Strategic actions under this priority include:**

- identifying and promoting robust models for identifying and grading ACMs
- collaborating to develop a national picture of where ACMs are located in homes, commercial and public buildings, infrastructure and land
- promoting practical and effective information on how to stabilise and contain ACMs in homes, workplaces and the environment
- encouraging effective management of asbestos-contaminated land
- ensuring timely review and revision of emergency and natural disaster planning
- ensuring the provision of information about ACMs at point of sale for all homes, buildings, infrastructure and land
- improving and aligning asbestos-related legal frameworks
- ensuring effective compliance and enforcement of relevant laws by regulatory agencies.

# National priorities



## 3. Safe prioritised removal and effective waste management

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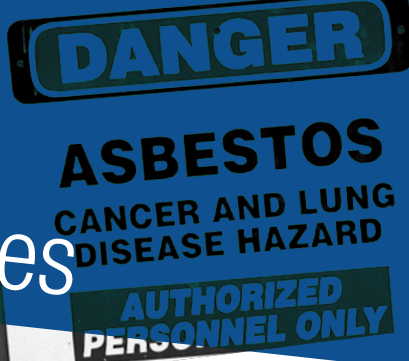
Where ACMs are in poor condition and present a risk to health and safety, they will need to be removed to prevent the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres. This requires careful planning and budgeting. It also requires the development of schedules and processes for prioritised removal according to risk and then safe transport, storage and disposal.

### Strategic actions under this priority include:

- improving the quality of asbestos-related training and ensuring effective oversight of licensing regimes
- ensuring existing tools for prioritising removal of ACMs are tested, promoted and used
- developing and sharing jurisdictional policies on prioritised removal of ACMs from government-owned and controlled buildings, land and infrastructure
- prioritising the removal of ACMs by commercial premise owners from buildings, land and infrastructure
- developing incentives to encourage the safe removal and disposal of ACMs from homes
- improving the accessibility and availability of waste disposal facilities for ACMs.



# National priorities



## 4. International collaboration and leadership

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Tragically, Australia was proportionally one of the highest per capita producers and users of asbestos in the world. 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. Effective collaboration, influence and investment amongst Australian and international agencies will also help importers understand and comply with Australia's ban, and stop the illegal importation of ACMs into Australia.

### **Strategic actions under this priority include:**

- 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 of the import supply chain to prevent ACMs entering Australia.

# Five principles to guide the planning and implementation of all our strategic actions

1

**Evidence-based decision-making** – to inform decisions and priority setting we will identify, analyse and disseminate high-quality Australian and international evidence, and where gaps exist, commission national data and research. Robust metrics will allow transparent comparisons across jurisdictions and over time measure progress against NSP 2019–2023 targets.

2

**Consultation, collaboration and cooperation** – as the planning for and management of asbestos involves all tiers of government and partnerships with business and key non-government bodies, our actions will be planned and delivered using respectful consultation, collaboration and cooperation. Asbestos is a matter of serious public concern and where required collaboration with relevant members of the community will be sought.

3

**Transparency** – our actions will be developed and conducted in an open and transparent manner so that stakeholders will have access to relevant and appropriate information. Wherever practical, our actions will be evaluated and the outcomes shared and publicly reported.

4

**Precaution** – a proactive and cautious approach will be used to ensure that the risks of asbestos exposure to all Australians are considered and addressed in any NSP 2019–2023 actions.

5

**Sharing best practice** – our actions and NSP 2019–2023 resources will be designed to suit our target audiences, boost innovation, reduce duplication across jurisdictions and drive continuous improvement.

# Putting our commitments into action

The success of NSP 2019–2023 depends on our collective efforts and sustained action. To achieve our aim and targets, ASEA will develop supporting plans to guide national action for all tiers of government, which our stakeholders can also actively support. These will be published on the ASEA website.

The national plans will include recommended strategic activities, outlining what needs to be done, who needs to do it and when it needs to be done to meet our targets.

Jurisdictional plans and priorities will inform the recommendations as well as the success of progress made to-date.

## Keeping us focused: Monitoring, evaluating and reporting our progress

NSP 2019–2023 signatories will, as far as possible, align their jurisdictional and local action plans with the national priorities and strategic actions.

All signatories will monitor, evaluate and report against their action plans with ASEA and each other. We recognise that we will only meet our targets and achieve our aim if we collaborate effectively, share our successes and challenges.

ASEA will support the national priorities and strategic actions by:

- coordinating, monitoring and commissioning research
- tracking performance against the national targets
- collating signatories' strategic actions and where performance gaps are identified, recommend new activities.

To help keep NSP 2019–2023 on track, ASEA will also develop an annual progress report, which it will provide to all relevant Ministers and publish on its website.

A midpoint review of NSP 2019–2023 will provide an opportunity to amend if required national priorities, strategic actions or targets.

The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council will provide ongoing guidance, advice and recommendations to assist in the successful delivery of NSP 2019–2023 targets.

Together, over the next five years we will invest, learn, celebrate and promote our successes to move towards ending the harmful legacy of asbestos in Australia.

# Roles and responsibilities in the asbestos management system

Asbestos management involves governments at all levels, across a range of areas, as well as a network of organisations and people that influence and help to achieve NSP 2019–2023 aim and targets.

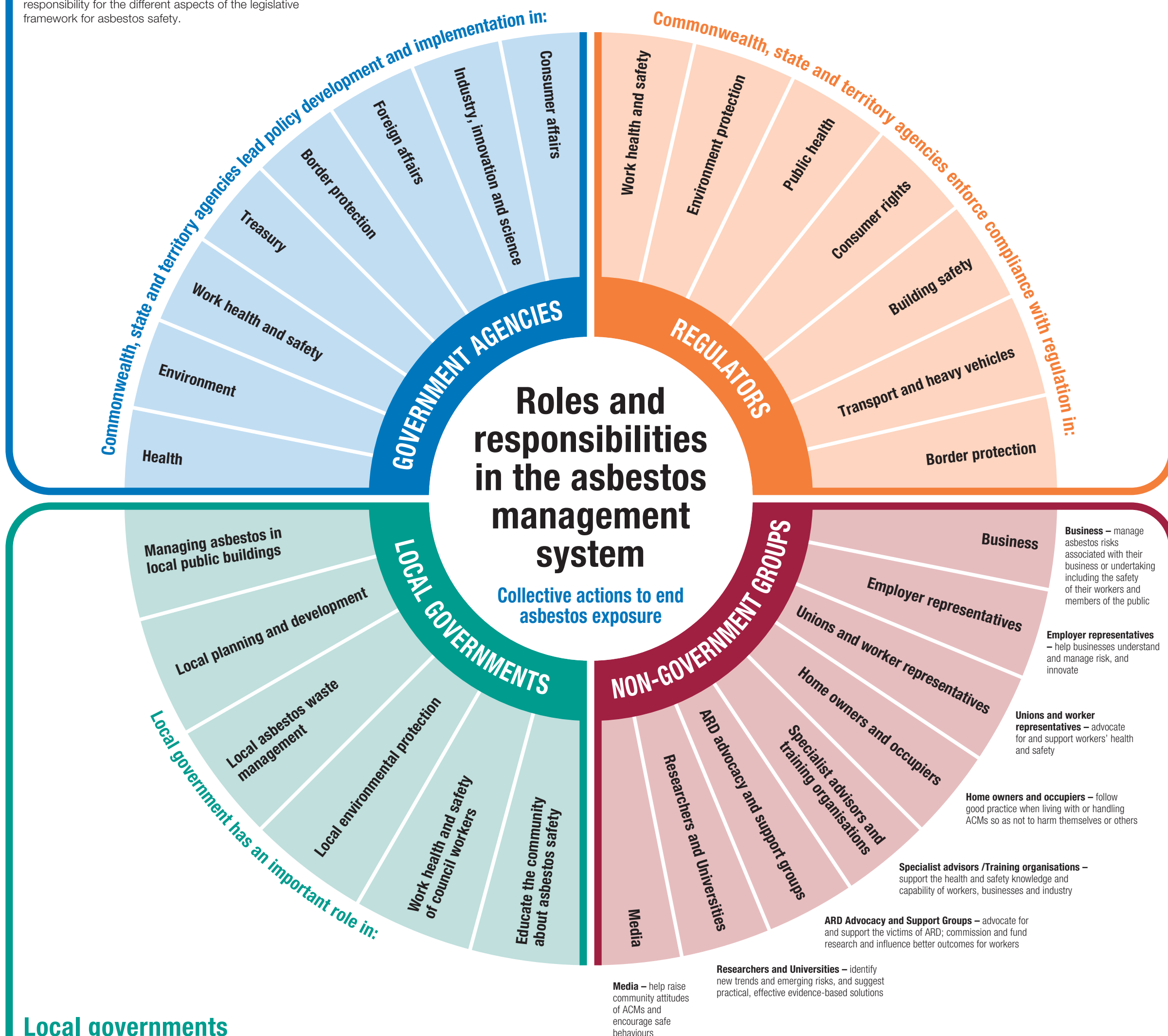
All members of the asbestos management system have important and discrete roles in increasing awareness and ensuring effective management. The success of NSP 2019–2023 depends on collective efforts and sustained action.

## Government agencies

A range of Commonwealth, state and territory agencies have the overarching role to develop policy or coordinate its implementation. They set the strategic direction and have responsibility for the different aspects of the legislative framework for asbestos safety.

## Regulators

Commonwealth and state and territory regulators all play a vital role enforcing compliance with a network of laws that deal with or touch on asbestos-safety matters.



## Local governments

As the level of government closest to builders and do-it-yourself (DIY) home renovators, local governments play a vital role in asbestos safety. They can help educate their communities and often have responsibility for local asbestos waste and disaster management.

## Non-government groups

Non-government groups undertake a range of activities and collaborate with each other and government organisations to share solutions and resources.