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National law firm Slater & Gordon welcomes the establishment of the Bernie Banton Foundation

Ken Fowlie, Slater & Gordon Executive Director, said today the launch of the Bernie Banton Foundation is an important step forward in providing support for growing numbers of asbestos related diseases sufferers.

The Foundation was launched today by Prime Minister Rudd at the Bernie Banton Centre at Concord Hospital in Sydney's inner-west.

"Over the coming years the number of asbestos disease sufferers is expected to grow dramatically and the demand on support services will become stretched," Mr Fowlie said.

"This new Foundation, established in the memory of long-time asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton, will help fill the gap, providing much need face-to-face support, particularly immediately after diagnosis.

"Australia has one of the world's highest per capita incidence of the deadly asbestos related cancer mesothelioma, most of it contracted either during the mining, production, transport or use of asbestos sheeting or other products.

"I don't think anyone can truly understand the shock and devastation of being diagnosed with mesothelioma. And just when sufferers are at their most vulnerable, they are also forced to come to terms with health and support systems that can often be confusing and confronting.

"But with the establishment of the Foundation's support group, 'Bernie's Angels', to offer face-to-face help at this early stage of diagnosis, sufferers will get the right support at the right time," Mr Fowlie said.

In 2004, a Slater & Gordon team headed by Peter Gordon and Ken Fowlie acted pro bono for the ACTU, the union movement and asbestos support groups in the James Hardie Commission of Inquiry.

Following the inquiry, Ken Fowlie acted for the ACTU in the negotiation of the historic agreement which compels James Hardie to fund its asbestos victims for the next 50 years.

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