

SUPPORTING COAL MINERS WITH BLACK LUNG DISEASE AND REDUCING THE SCALE OF THE EPIDEMIC

Appalachia is a region with many rich assets, including our land, water, heritage and people who have mined coal that has fueled the United States for over a century. Yet one of the consequences of our mining history has been that generations of our families and communities have suffered from high rates of black lung disease, an incurable and fatal disease caused by exposure to coal and silica dust. Rates of black lung disease have sharply increased in recent years and new case data indicates that black lung disease is likely to get worse in the years to come.



As the region continues to extract coal, Appalachian lawmakers have a responsibility to ensure that coal miners are adequately protected from occupational health and safety hazards. Further, we must honor our commitment to these miners by ensuring that they and their families are taken care of when they can no longer work due to disability caused by black lung disease.

In an effort to meet this responsibility, we encourage federal lawmakers to lead and support policies to:

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Improve the Black Lung Program

- Increase the monthly black lung disability benefit to — at a minimum — keep pace with inflation each year, and immediately raise the benefits to the level they would be if the benefit had increased with inflation since it was established in 1969.
- Encourage more attorneys to take on black lung cases. Given that the claims process occurs in several stages, attorneys should be permitted small payments after each stage is completed rather than having to wait years, or even decades, for the case to close.
- Make the costs of some of the medical examinations that miners and their families have to pay for out-of-pocket reimbursable during the claims process.

(continued) →

Platform endorsed by: **Appalachian Voices** | **Center for Coalfield Justice** | **Reimagine Appalachia**

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- Ensure that coal mining families aren't forced to pay back their interim benefits if a judge later rejects their claim.
- Ensure sustainable funding for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund by advocating for a tax system that accurately assesses the cost to make the fund solvent so that coal companies, not taxpayers, pay for the financial costs of the disease.
- Ensure that coal operators carry an adequate level of bonding and insurance to be able to pay for their true black lung liabilities.

Enhance coal miner health and safety:

- Ensure adequate agency funding and staffing for the Mine Safety and Health Administration, including mine inspectors, because the agency has lost nearly half of its inspectors over the last ten years.
- Increase the frequency of unannounced inspections of mines with a history of dust violations or accidents.
- Ensure adequate and sustained funding for the Black Lung Clinic Program, which helps to diagnose cases of black lung disease and provides care for miners who have been diagnosed.
- Support a strong, enforceable standard for silica dust exposure that sets minimum exposure limits to 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air.
- Ensure that the Mine Safety and Health Administration has the authority, tools and staff capacity to adequately protect miners from the root causes of black lung disease, including silica dust.
- Ensure the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health is adequately funded and the programs that work on coal miner safety, like the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program and the Mining Research Division, have the staff necessary to carry out their important work.



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