

**Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group (GMAVSG)  
Annual Report 2021- 22**



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## **Foreword**

*“To be told you have an asbestos disease is always hard. But it has been especially tough for asbestos victims during the ongoing pandemic. Many have suffered from delays to diagnosis & medical treatment, and delays in getting financial help. Many have died after contracting COVID-19. Many have suffered under the mental strain & isolation of lockdown.*

*Throughout it all, we have done what we can to support asbestos victims in Greater Manchester & beyond. To do so, we have had to change the way we work. To avoid spreading COVID-19, we have had to help asbestos victims by phone rather than face-to-face. Our Bereaved Families & Living Well support groups have had to meet online. And, at times, our staff have had to work from home.*

*It has been a challenging year. But there are reasons to be hopeful for the future. During the pandemic, immunotherapy became available on the NHS for the first time, for some people with mesothelioma. We hope that will continue. We hope that the COVID-19 vaccines will greatly diminish the danger, fear, and isolation that many people with asbestos diseases have suffered over the last 12 months.*

*We hope too, as we emerge from the pandemic, that the government will finally get to grips with the ongoing crisis of asbestos disease in this country. For too long funding for research into treatments for mesothelioma has lagged behind that for other cancers. For too long governments have dithered over finally removing asbestos from our schools and workplaces. Change is needed, urgently.”*

Rob Rayner, GMAVSG co-ordinator

This annual report covers the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

## **Advice Work**

GMAVSG offer free advice on benefits & compensation to asbestos victims & their families.

Our specialist knowledge of industrial injuries benefits, and of the local employers and industries that used asbestos, is vital to the advice we offer.

In 2020-21, we were forced to deliver our advice over the phone or online, due to COVID-19. Previously, we were able to offer home visits.

In 2020-21, we helped 234 people newly diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease. 126 had been diagnosed with mesothelioma, an aggressive cancer caused by asbestos.

For comparison, in 2019-20 we saw 275 people newly diagnosed, of whom 121 had mesothelioma.

During the first lockdown in spring 2020, there was a marked drop in the numbers of people with asbestosis, diffuse pleural thickening, and lung cancer being referred to us by hospitals. At the time, many people were reluctant to attend hospitals & GP surgeries, and the NHS was facing considerable strain & disruption.

2020-21 GMAVSG cases (234 in total):

Mesothelioma	126	53.8%
Asbestosis	55	23.5%
Pleural Thickening	29	12.4%
Lung Cancer	10	4.2%
Lung Cancer & Asbestosis	8	3.4%
Asbestosis & Pleural Thickening	6	2.6%

## **Action Mesothelioma Day 2020**

Mesothelioma is an aggressive cancer caused by asbestos. Action Mesothelioma Day, held on the first Friday in July, is a day to remember those who have died, and to push for justice for asbestos victims.

In previous years, we held a rally in Manchester city centre, and released doves in memory of those who have died. Our events were well attended by asbestos victims, campaigners, trade unionists, the press, and local MPs.

This year, our Action Mesothelioma Day event (on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020) had to be held online, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## **Support Groups**

GMAVSG runs two support groups. Our Bereaved Families group is for people who have lost a loved one to asbestos disease. The Living Well group, which we run in partnership with the specialist mesothelioma nurses at Wythenshawe hospital, is for people with mesothelioma (and those who care for them).

Due to COVID-19, both groups have had to meet online only throughout 2020-21. The groups' Christmas lunches and summer outings had to be cancelled.

## **Campaigning**

GMAVSG has continued to play a leading role in the national campaigns of the Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK.

The Forum's legal battle to access documents relating to former asbestos manufacturer Cape Intermediate Holdings Limited has now concluded. Discussions are ongoing about how to make these documents accessible to the public. We feel the public deserve to know what the asbestos industry really knew about the dangers of asbestos, and the influence it had on setting health and safety standards in the UK.

The Forum would not have been able to pursue this case without the agreement of its legal team to act pro bono. Our thanks go out to Harminder Bains of Leigh Day Solicitors and Rob Weir QC, Jonathan Butters and Harry Sheehan of Devereux Chambers.

The Forum has also pushed hard against ongoing delays in the processing of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) claims for benign diseases. Face-to-face medical assessments to decide these claims were suspended at the start of the pandemic. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were extremely slow to introduce assessments based on medical records as a safe & obvious alternative.

Many struggled financially while waiting for their IIDB claims to be paid. Some, sadly, died before their claims were decided. Due to the current benefit rules, many also saw their payments under the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers Compensation) Act 1979 cut, as a direct result of IIDB delays.

## **Donations**

We would like to thank all those who made donations to our charity in 2020-21. Many of you donated in memory of family and friends who have died from mesothelioma. Without your support, none of what we have achieved would have been possible. Thank you.

Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), we can no longer list the names of those who have donated in our annual report. Please let us know if you are happy for your donation to be acknowledged on our website and social media instead.

## **Financial Report**

*“Despite the pandemic, which meant we could not run a fundraising appeal for Action Mesothelioma Day 2020, our finances are sound.*

*In terms of income in 2020-21, our panel of 6 solicitor firms (through their annual donations to charity) contributed £90,000. We received a very generous donation of £70,000 from an individual, with donations from other individuals totalling around £25,000. We received a grant from the MAPS Benevolent Trust 2019-20. Around £9,000 of the grant was carried over into 2020-21. We received about £14,500 from the government’s Job Retention Scheme, as the GMAVSG workload was much reduced at the start of the pandemic in spring 2020.*

*In terms of expenditure in 2020-21, we spent £83,500 on staffing costs. Our overall expenditure on other costs (around £16,000 in 2020-21) was reduced due to the pandemic. Though we invested money in upgrading our website, phone & ICT systems, we have not been able to run any face-to-face events or to travel to meet clients face-to-face.*

*Our reserves therefore increased in 2020-21. Our reserves are now held in more than one savings account, to protect us in the event of bank failure. These accounts are paying a small amount of interest.*

*The financial outlook for 2021-22 looks stable. Once it is safe to do so, we intend to return to home visits for clients, and to face-to-face events. When we do, our expenditure will increase. Several sources of income in 2020-21 (i.e., specific donations, the MAPS grant and the Job Retention Scheme) will not be repeated in 2021-22, so income is likely to decrease. However, our reserves are healthy.”*

Caroline Bedale, GMAVSG treasurer

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank our volunteer trustees who supported & directed our work in 2020-21: Caroline Bedale, Lorraine Creech, Anthony Coombs, Ann Oldham, Vera Rigby, Lauren Ross, Geoffrey Tweedale, and Tony Whitston.

Thanks also to our panel solicitors for their support in 2020-21: Asbestos Law Partnership, Field Fisher, Irwin Mitchell, Leigh Day, Thompsons, and Slater & Gordon.

Thank you, also, to Mark & Andrea at PC Paramedics for the redesign of our website and logo, and the upgrading of our ICT systems.

Yours faithfully

Rob Rayner & Graham Dring (GMAVSG staff)

19<sup>th</sup> May 2021