

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Asbestos Campaigner and Widow of Bernie Banton, Karen Banton-Smith, Passes Away**

**Melbourne, Australia - 24 September 2026:** Public health advocate Karen Banton-Smith - widow of iconic asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton AM and founder of the Bernie Banton Foundation - has passed away following a courageous six-year battle with Corticobasal Degeneration.

An apolitical champion for asbestos-related diseases awareness and victim advocacy, Karen dedicated over two decades of her life to supporting affected families. Following the death of her late husband Bernie in 2007, Karen established the Bernie Banton Foundation in 2009 to continue his historic legacy.

As CEO until her retirement in 2020, she navigated terminal dust disease diagnoses for over 1,400 families, lobbied for increased palliative care funding, and spearheaded major public health initiatives across Australia. Her advocacy work achieved a potential media reach of over 24 million with critical messaging on asbestos exposure and DIY safety.

Karen drove these vital programs alongside her husband Rod Smith, who served as the Foundation's Awareness and Support Coordinator from 2012.

Karen's passing follows a six-year battle with Corticobasal Degeneration, a rare and progressive neurological disease, akin to Motor Neuron Disease (MND). First experiencing symptoms in 2020, Karen endured a complex diagnostic journey before being formally diagnosed in September 2023.

Karen is survived by her loving husband, Rod Smith, and her son, Dean Banton.

Paying tribute to Karen, Rod Smith said:

*"Karen had an incredible drive to do what was right, and her tenacity inspired everyone who knew her. She poured her heart into advocating for victims and their families, grounded always by her deep faith and genuine compassion. Even through a gruelling illness, her spirit never wavered. She spent her life serving others, and her courage and integrity will stay with us forever."*

Family, friends, and advocates recently gathered at Gateway Church Australia in Seaford, Victoria, to commemorate Karen's life, faith, and enduring impact.

**- ENDS -**

#### **Interviews:**

Rod Smith is available for select media interviews upon request.

#### **Media Kit:**

- [Photos](#)
- [Videos](#)

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