

The Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act of 2022

U.S. Senators Joe Manchin III, Bob Casey, Sherrod Brown, Tim Kaine, and Mark Warner

For decades, coal miners powered this country and far too many paid the price for it. Coal workers' pneumoconiosis, commonly referred to as "black lung," is a debilitating and deadly disease caused by the long-term inhalation of coal dust in underground and surface coal mines. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the disease has caused or contributed to more than 78,000 deaths since 1968.

The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, which included the Black Lung Benefits Act, established health and safety standards to reduce miners' exposure to coal dust and created a program to provide compensation and medical care to miners who are totally disabled because of the disease. As a result of this law, the United States has seen a significant decline in the prevalence of black lung disease and has awarded billions of dollars in benefit payments to victims and surviving family members.

Despite these successes, recent studies show that the prevalence and severity of black lung disease is on the rise among Central Appalachian miners. According to NIOSH, miners are developing advanced cases of the disease at younger ages. Investigations have also revealed that the Black Lung Benefits Program, which requires coal miners to engage in complex litigation against coal operators, unfairly burdens claimants and prevents them from accessing benefits.

The Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act

The Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act helps miners and their survivors access the workers compensation benefits they are entitled to receive. The legislation:

- helps miners and their survivors' access legal representation
- ensures benefits are not eroded due to inflation
- reduces the time for processing claims
- protects taxpayers from taking a hit when a self-insured coal company goes bankrupt and cannot pay black lung claims

Decades ago, Congress established the Black Lung Benefits Act to provide monthly compensation and medical coverage for coal miners who develop black lung disease and are totally disabled. A GAO report found that miners often lack the necessary medical and legal resources to develop evidence to prove their claims. The Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act makes needed updates to the Black Lung Benefits Act to ensure Congress is fulfilling its commitment to the Nation's coal miners.

Supporting Organizations

United Mineworkers (UMWA), Appalachian Citizens' Law Center (UCLC), BlueGreen Alliance, Appalachian Voices