

## **VicHealth's response to queries from Inquiry into skin cancer in Australia**

### **1. What are the challenges of implementing skin cancer prevention work in workplaces?**

Approximately 200 melanomas and 34,000 NMSC per year are caused by occupational exposures in Australia with outdoor workers receiving between five and ten times more UV exposure yearly than indoor workers.

SunSmart Victoria has committed significant resources to educating outdoor workers (predominantly) in the occupational risks of UV and the ways to reduce this risk since 1996. Approximately 1,500 education sessions have been conducted since 2002, attracting more than 30,000 participants. While these numbers are not small, the population reach is limited; partly due to limited program resources to further increase reach. Some population level changes have been measured in UV policy development, sunscreen and shade provision but not to the levels reported in primary schools and early childhood services.

The workplace setting also poses a number of challenges with its considerable diversity in size, nature, organisational structures, and variable stability of the sector. It remains very difficult to engage particularly with small businesses, self-employed tradespeople and owner builders for example.

Advocacy strategies have been a critical element in the recognition of UV over-exposure as a workplace hazard. In 2003, the SunSmart program successfully advocated the Australian Tax Office to make sun protection products tax deductible. In the same year a former outdoor worker successfully sued his employer after developing multiple skin cancers that he says were caused by unprotected UV exposure while at work. This was the first court case in Victoria to establish that skin cancer could be a serious occupational injury and assisted to put skin cancer on the agenda with other well-known occupational health issues.

### **2. What are the legislative barriers and enablers in Victoria to prevent skin cancer exposure in the workplace?**

In 2007 SunSmart led national advocacy activities for the review and update of the 1991 Australian Safety and Compensation Councils Guidance Note for the Protection of Outdoor Workers from Ultraviolet Radiation in Sunlight. This opportunity also opened the door for the inclusion of UV information in model Codes of Practices as part of a move to harmonise work health and safety laws across Australia.

Codes of Practice are practical guides to achieving the standards of health, safety and welfare required under the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act and the WHS Regulations in a jurisdiction. A collaborative effort by all Cancer Councils saw the inclusion of UV information in the 'Model Code of Practice for Construction' (specifically in relation to the provision of personal protective equipment) and in the model Code of Practice 'Managing the Work Environment and Facilities'.

UV radiation remains a class 1 carcinogen (known cause of cancer), so greater priority should be given to overexposure to UV radiation as an occupational health and safety issue. This should include a **dedicated code of practice and a translation to underpinning legislation mandating specified sun protection measures.**

Currently engagement with state based statutory authorities to implement strategies to minimise the risk of UV overexposure is variable given this **lack of prioritisation of the issue**.

Evidence also shows that workplaces “with a **written sun protection policy were more likely to have higher levels of awareness and compliance with sun protection measures**. Research also suggests that sun protection policies should be **mandatory and monitored for compliance** in order to be effective in **reducing rates of skin cancer among outdoor workers**”.<sup>1</sup>

A total of 1360 workers compensation claims for sun-related injury or disease were made in Australia between 2000 and 2009 at a cost of \$38.4 million paid in compensation.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. What are the challenges of implementing skin cancer prevention work in secondary schools?**

Adolescence is a critical period during which exposure to UV radiation is more likely to contribute to skin cancer in later life. Secondary schools therefore offer an obvious setting to influence young people’s attitudes and practices towards sun exposure.

Given school hours fall within the high UV periods of the day, the school setting plays an important role in reducing UV exposure amongst students, staff and the wider school community.

Cancer Council Victoria’s SunSmart Program works across educational settings from early childhood and primary schools, through to secondary schools and universities.

Engagement with these settings includes production of resources, delivery of professional development, support and advice, along with promotion of two membership programs – the SunSmart Program for early childhood and primary schools and the UV Program for secondary schools.

Victorian primary schools have been successful in implementing the SunSmart Program, reinforcing sensible uniforms, a ‘hats on’ policy, shade, sunscreen provision and education on a healthy UV balance.

Secondary schools however, present with more complex, age specific challenges and to date, have not been as successful in reducing UV.

New Year 7 students arriving from primary school with well-established sun protection practices can, within a very short space of time, become complacent about looking after their skin.

Without the **appropriate structures and policies in place**, these behaviours which have been inherent to their daily life at primary school, are quickly forgotten.

Secondary schools can play an integral role in reducing UV exposure amongst adolescents and hence the reduction of future skin cancer rates given:

- significant UV exposure occurs during childhood and adolescence
- school hours fall within the peak UV periods of the day
- secondary schools can play a significant role by creating sun safe environments and influencing behaviors through education and role modeling.

SunSmart has worked with the secondary school setting to employ a mix of interventions around shade advocacy, resource development, professional training, leadership and policy including:

- Engage with pre service teachers
- Provide cross curriculum teaching resources
- Deliver professional development for teaching staff
- Respond to parliamentary/DEECD enquiries and align SunSmart alongside current curriculum initiatives
- Advocate for shade in the secondary school setting.
- Provide website, telephone and email support as required.
- Maintain a presence at educational conferences and events to promote the SunSmart service and messages.
- Adolescents are traditionally resistant to a number of psychosocial interventions for skin cancer control and other issues. Despite having a high awareness of skin cancer issues, Australian adolescents' compliance with sun protection measures is low with teenage respondents commonly reported the reason they got sunburn was due to 'forgetting to protect' and/or 'poor application of sunscreen'. Other barriers to young people using sun protection identified include the 'hassle' of covering up, discomfort with hat wearing and image to peers.

A recent review found that **“schools have more comprehensive sun protection practices in the presence of a comprehensive written policy. Furthermore results demonstrate that SunSmart membership is associated with more comprehensive written policies, which in turn is associated with more comprehensive practices”**.

Research also shows that a focus on ensuring **environmental strategies are in place in secondary schools such as shade is vital**.

Shade alone can reduce overall exposure to UV radiation by up to 75%. A Cancer Council study published in the prestigious British Medical Journal, examined whether secondary students used or avoid newly shaded areas created by shade-sails installed at schools.

The shade-sail intervention was shown to increase students' use of newly shaded areas at schools. Further, the students did not avoid the shaded areas. Extending the data in this study to daily use during a typical spring and summer term, potentially up to one third of the student enrolment would have a reduced level of exposure to UV radiation by using newly shaded areas. This suggests shade structures are a practical means of reducing adolescents' exposure to ultraviolet radiation and an important consideration in design planning of schools sites.

Currently in the state of Victoria (by way of example) there is currently no requirement for shade to be considered when building new schools or upgrading existing facilities. This could be easily accommodated **with the inclusion for adequate levels of well-planned shade in schools in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Facilities Schedules (and similar regulations in other states and territories)**. The Victorian Department's facilities schedules of

entitlement (7.24.2.1) assist in the planning of new schools and the upgrade of existing ones. They provide an essential reference to the planners of new schools. There are three separate schedules, one each for primary schools, secondary colleges and special/special developmental schools. The current schedules include Landscaping and Site Improvements and Outbuildings and Covered Ways, but do not include shade.

As with the primary school setting, a mix of interventions remains important in secondary schools, including:

- Encouraging a combination of sun protection strategies, with a particular emphasis on shade. SunSmart's UV Program policy template allows secondary schools to select those UV strategies which they feel are achievable in their specific setting and invites them to plan for addressing the remaining strategies in the future. The policy, along with SunSmart's secondary school e-newsletter shares explanatory notes, practical tips and case studies of successes in other secondary schools.
- Recognising the importance of role modelling in the secondary school setting and the crucial role that professional development plays in educating staff on role modelling the desired behaviours.
- Using celebrities as role models. Cricket Victoria allowed the captains of the men's and women's state teams to act as ambassadors at the launch of the program, and provided a cricket clinic to one of the first schools to register.
- Continue to build the bank of cross curricular teaching and learning resources which meet current educational priorities around the AUSVELS and Australian Curriculum.

#### **4. Has the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council ever prioritised skin cancer prevention before?**

Except for the matter of solariums (which is outside the Parliamentary Inquiry's Terms of Reference), skin cancer prevention has not been discussed by the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council in recent years. We looked back to 2008.

#### **5. How have the shade grants program been implemented in Victoria and what is the progress to date?**

The Department of Health are working with the Municipal Association of Victoria to deliver a \$4 million Shade Grant Project over four years. Project planning commenced in June 2013, and the pilot rollout commenced in January 2014. Under the project, Councils will be eligible for a grant of up to \$100,000 for permanent, natural and demountable shade solutions in public spaces within their municipality. Local councils are required to work closely with sports clubs and other community groups to determine the areas most in need of shade within their municipality. Councils will be invited in stages, to apply for a grant and approximately 36 Councils will be awarded grants over the four year span of the project.

##### *Progress*

- The grants are currently being piloted with the City of Ballarat, City of Greater Geelong and Kingston City Council.
- The pilot councils have been invited by the Minister for Health to apply for a grant.

- The project was formally launched by the Minister for Health on 15 March 2014, at the Carrum Surf Life Saving Club, in Kingston.
- Next steps are to assess incoming applications from the pilot Councils, and commence stage 1 of the formal rollout to a further 7 – 10 Councils.

**References:**

1. Woolley T, Buettner PG, Lowe JB. Predictors of sun protection in northern Australian men with a history of non-melanoma skin cancer. *Preventative Medicine*, 2004. 39(2): p. 300-307
2. Available from: <https://www.cancerwa.asn.au/resources/2011-12-05-occupational-exposure-to-ultraviolet-radiation.pdf>