

Good news and bad news in new skin cancer report

Cancer Council says urgent need to tackle case and cost blowout

A new report showing an increase in the number of Australians diagnosed with skin cancer highlights why the Government needs to invest in a national prevention campaign before the healthcare burden becomes unsustainable, Cancer Council Australia said today.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Sanchia Aranda, said while she welcomed findings showing a drop in melanoma rates in Australians aged under 40, a longstanding underinvestment by the Government in prevention campaigns was a concern.

“The good news is that melanoma rates in younger Australians are dropping,” Professor Aranda said. “The bad news is that the overall number of skin cancer cases and the health system costs continue to rise – despite skin cancer being our most preventable common cancer.

“Cancer Council estimates that Australia spends more than \$1 billion per year treating skin cancer, with costs increasing substantially over the past few years. Skin cancer awareness campaigns are among the most cost-effective public health investments a government can make, yet there has been no significant investment at the federal level since 2007.

“Given the rapid growth in skin cancer treatment costs, and mounting pressures on the health system as our population ages, there is an urgent need to get skin cancer prevention back on the federal agenda.

“A revived national skin cancer awareness campaign will help ensure that the next time one of these reports is released, skin cancer death rates will have continued to decline in younger generations and more Australians are detecting skin cancer earlier, when it is easier to treat.”

Professor Aranda said that the decline in melanoma rates in younger generations showed that the sun protection message, originated by the Cancer Council back in the early 1980s, was having a benefit.

“However, given the size of the problem at a population level, Australia can’t rely on a nongovernment charity organisation to communicate such an important message alone. We need a mass media campaign, this summer and the next.”

Professor Aranda said a 63 per cent increase in melanoma hospitalisations over the past 11 years and 39 per cent for non-melanoma hospital visits further reflected the increase in the cost.

“These hospital statistics also emphasise the risks to individuals, including in relation to non-melanoma skin cancer – which many people see as something that’s just burned off by your GP. The reality is, more than 114,000 people end up hospitalised because of non-melanoma skin cancer.

“Whichever way you look at it, prevention is better than cure. Early detection is critical too, so check your skin and see your doctor if you have any concerns. The skin cancer statistics in future reports are the people among us today – we all need to be more aware of prevention and early detection.”

“Skin cancer in Australia” was released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

MEDIA CONTACT: Hollie Jenkins, 0400 762 010, hollie.jenkins@cancer.org.au