

Protecting Victorians from skin cancer

Local government action guide no. 10

Promoting health and preventing illness in the community



Local governments play a major role in supporting the objectives of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* by protecting, improving and promoting public health within their municipality. By integrating action across the social, cultural, built, economic and natural environments, council policies and practices can make major contributions to economic prosperity, community cohesion and population health outcomes.^{1,2}

Councils can help prevent skin cancer caused by ultraviolet (UV) radiation by providing residents and visitors with access to facilities and services that protect them from UV radiation and information about personal sun protection measures.

This guide is one of ten outlining a range of evidence-informed actions that councils may consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other strategies. The proposed strategies are consistent with national and state health promotion priorities and prevention frameworks, including *The Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2011–2015* and the Cancer Council Victoria SunSmart guidelines.

Why is preventing skin cancer a public health and wellbeing priority?

- More than 1,600 Australians die from skin cancer each year.³ In 2010, 2,256 Victorians were diagnosed with melanoma and 297 died from melanoma.⁴
- At least two in three Australians are diagnosed with skin cancer before 70 years of age.⁵
- In 2007, melanoma was the fourth most commonly reported cancer in Australia⁶ and was the most commonly diagnosed cancer among adolescents and young adults between 2003 and 2007.⁷
- Skin cancer is the most expensive of all cancers on the Australian health system⁸ and also one of the most preventable.⁹
- In Victoria from September to April, UV radiation levels are 3 and above for most of the day. At this level UV radiation is strong enough to damage skin.

Shade alone can reduce overall exposure to UV radiation by approximately 75 per cent. When shade is used in conjunction with sun protective clothing, hats, sunglasses and sunscreen, maximum sun protection can be achieved.¹⁰

A sample council strategy to protect Victorians from skin cancer

Strategic goal

Council is committed to providing services and facilities that provide appropriate protection from UV radiation.

Objectives and actions

Create environments that protect residents and visitors from harmful UV radiation levels

- Develop policies and guidelines based on best practice of UV protection for council services and facilities in outdoor areas such as sporting grounds, playgrounds, beaches, swimming pools and parks.
- Conduct a shade audit¹¹ to assess whether there is sufficient shade in outdoor areas within the municipality.
- Develop a shade policy for council outdoor areas.
- Ensure council planning permit applications consider appropriate shade in open spaces.
- Provide guidelines about planning and designing UV protection in outdoor areas.
- Ensure the provision of shade at outdoor council-run events.
- Consider hosting outdoor council events at times outside peak UV levels (such as mornings and evenings) during September to April or hosting events from May to August.

Ensure council and council staff adopt SunSmart guidelines and practices

- Develop policies and guidelines for all council staff to reflect current sun protection practices and healthy UV exposure recommendations.
- Provide employees who work outdoors with sun protective clothing, SPF30+ sunscreen, hats and sunglasses that meet the Australian standards.
- Promote a healthy UV balance to employees and the community by raising awareness of skin cancer prevention and the need for some exposure to vitamin D.¹²
- Provide signage at council outdoor facilities and spaces to encourage sun protection practices.

Support people at risk of vitamin D deficiency

- Work with local health services to identify population groups that are at higher risk of vitamin D deficiency.
- Ensure local health services follow Department of Health guidelines when providing advice on maintaining vitamin D levels for good health.¹³

References

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- 3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, *States & Territories GRIM (General Record of Incidence of Mortality) Books*, AIHW, Canberra.
- 4 Thursfield, V & Farrugia, H, 2011, *Cancer in Victoria: Statistics and trends 2010*, Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne.
- 5 Staples, M, Elwood, M, Burton, R, Williams, J, Marks, R & Giles, G, 2006, 'Non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia: The 2002 national survey and trends since 1985', *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 184, pp. 6–10.
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- 7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011, *Cancer in adolescents and young adults in Australia*, cancer series no. 62, cat. no. CAN 59, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.
- 8 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, *Health system expenditures on cancer and other neoplasms in Australia 2000-01*, cat. no. HWE 29, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.
- 9 Cancer Council Victoria 2011, *SunSmart*, www.cancervic.org.au/preventing-cancer/be-sunsmart
- 10 SunSmart 2012, *Shade policy background information sheet*, www.sunsmart.com.au/workplaces_and_local_government/in_local_government
- 11 See the SunSmart Shade Audit Tool at www.sunsmart.com.au/workplaces_and_local_government/in_local_government
- 12 See *How much sun is enough for vitamin D?* at www.sunsmart.com.au/vitamin_d/how_much_sun_is_enough
- 13 See *Low vitamin D in Victoria: Key health messages for doctors, nurses and allied health* at www.sunsmart.com.au/downloads/Vitamin_D/low_vitamin_d_doctors_nurses_allied.pdf