SunSmart Strategy

From the beach to the bush, the state of Victoria provides wonderful spaces and opportunities to enjoy being outdoors, to get active and to share time with others. But being outdoors means exposure to intense levels of ultraviolet radiation (UV) – the leading cause of skin cancer.

The SunSmart program's impact on preventing skin cancer is acknowledged as one of the 10 greatest successes of public health in Victoria.[1] There has been a decline in melanoma rates in Victorians under 50 years who have lived during the SunSmart era.[2] Furthermore, the SunSmart program is estimated to have prevented more than 43,000 skin cancers between 1988 and 2011, with a net cost saving of $92 million to the public health system in Victoria.[3]

After consultation with stakeholders, a review of the evidence and data, and alignment to existing strategic frameworks – including Cancer Council Victoria's Strategic Plan (2024-2027), the Victorian Cancer Plan and the Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan – SunSmart has created a new strategy to guide us through the next five years, ensuring we remain relevant to the Victorian people and effective in our mission to **reduce skin cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality**.

SunSmart's strategy acknowledges and reflects the interconnectedness of the individual, community and environment and also supports the Victorian Cancer Plan's comprehensive, inclusive and equitable approach. SunSmart will work in collaboration with government departments and key agencies to support **all Victorians** with a focus on priority audiences, including men and regional Victorians.

Who we are

SunSmart supports Victorians to prevent and minimise the adverse effects of UV through the delivery of targeted evidence-informed prevention and early detection programs. This not only reduces the burden on individuals, but also drives down costs to our health system.

Mission	Reduce skin cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality.	
Vision	To lessen the impact of skin cancer on people's lives and deliver value to the Victorian healthcare system.	
Values	- Authoritative, but not authoritarian - Practical - Accessible	- Approachable - Empathetic - Respectful
Priority audiences	All Victorians, with a focus on: - Children and adolescents - Young adults - Adult males over 45 years of age	 - People who work outdoors - Regional Victorians - Individuals at high risk of skin cancer
Priority settings	- Early Childhood Services - Schools - Workplaces	- Health Settings - Public Spaces

Our priority audiences

While skin cancer prevention is a focus for all Victorians, priority audiences have also been identified and interventions will be delivered through settings to reach these groups.

Children and adolescents	**People who work outdoors**
Childhood and adolescence are critical periods during which exposure to UV radiation is more likely to contribute to skin cancer in later life.[4]	People who work outdoors in Australia receive up to 10 times more UV radiation exposure than indoor workers, placing them at higher risk of skin damage and skin cancer.[5] It is estimated that approximately 200 melanomas and 34,000 other skin cancers per year are caused by occupational exposures in Australia.[6]
Young adults	**Regional Victorians**
In 2017, melanoma was the third most commonly diagnosed cancer amongst Australians aged 15–24 years.[7]	Regional Victorians are 44% more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma than those living in major cities.[2]
Adult males over 45 years of age	**Individuals at high risk of skin cancer**
Melanoma incidence rates increase with age and after 45–49 years, rates increase more rapidly for men compared to women in Victoria.[2] Men are twice as likely to die from melanoma than women.[2]	Freckles, light-coloured eyes, red hair, fair skin, and inability to tan increase an individual's risk for melanoma by nearly 50%.[8] Immunosuppression is also a risk factor for melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer.[9]

How we work

Brand evolution	Continue to grow consumer trust and reliability in SunSmart's skin cancer and UV protection expertise and leadership through a targeted refresh of identity and message.
Advocacy	Seek opportunities to influence law and policy reform to reduce the financial and health burden of skin cancer and improve UV protective behaviours and environments in Victoria.
Collaborative culture	With alignment to the Victorian Cancer Plan and Cancer Council Strategic Plan, draw on the knowledge, skills and shared priorities of key stakeholders to enhance and extend influence and impact.
Digital innovation	Build a modern digital culture, communications and capability utilising new skills and tools to optimise our evidence-informed multifaceted work to help us reach all Victorians with a focus on priority populations and settings.
Accountability	Establish effective mechanisms to monitor, measure, evaluate and demonstrate effectiveness to reduce the health and economic impact of skin cancer on the Victorian people and health system.

Skin cancer impact

Skin cancer continues to be a major issue in Victoria, despite it being largely preventable with good sun protection.

In Australia, more than 95% of skin cancer is due to ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure. Although significant progress has been made, skin cancer is, and will remain, a significant burden on individuals and health systems.

While melanoma incidence is stabilising (for those who have lived during the SunSmart era), the number of new melanoma cases is expected to increase by 24% over the next decade as our population grows and ages.[10]

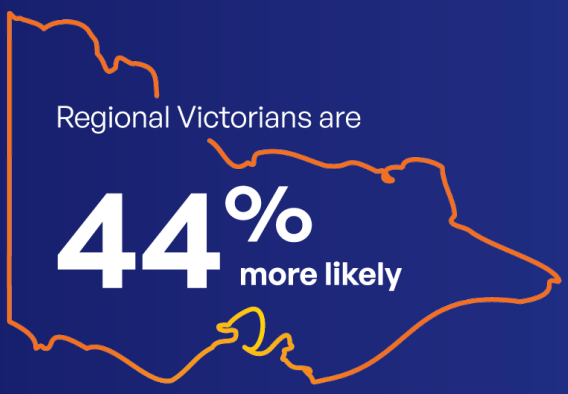
COVID-19 continues to impact on early detection behaviour in Victorians. Despite the projected increase in melanoma rates, in 2020, there was an 18.1% decline in melanoma diagnosis and a 12.5% decline in 2021, resulting in 827 fewer melanoma diagnoses in 2020 and 2021 than expected.

Skin cancer in Victoria

- Melanoma is the fifth most common cancer, accounting for 8% of all new cases diagnosed in 2021.
- Regional Victorians are 44% more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma than those living in major cities.
- In 2021-22, there were 344 admissions to Victorian emergency departments with sunburn.

In Victoria each year there are:

- Nearly 3000 new melanoma skin cancer diagnoses.
- Around 150,000 treatments for non-melanoma skin cancers.
- Around 400 deaths from all skin cancer types.



The cost of skin cancer in Victoria is growing

Skin cancer costs the Australian health economy A$1.7 billion each year – the highest for any cancer type.[11]

The high incidence of skin cancer, and the resources used in their management, translates to a high-cost burden to our public health system.

Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most common cancer requiring hospitalisation. Of the 1.3 million cancer-related hospitalisations in Australia, one quarter (325,000) had a principal diagnosis of non-melanoma skin cancer.[12]

In Victoria in 2021, estimated costs of newly diagnosed persons with melanoma were $80.2 million and $57.4 million for non-melanoma skin cancer – a total of $137.6 million.[13] These figures highlight the potential savings of successful prevention strategies for skin cancer on healthcare costs.

As melanoma case numbers are expected to climb in the foreseeable future, high-cost therapies will continue to strain healthcare budgets.

Primary prevention of skin cancer must remain high on the public health agenda.

Victoria has a great opportunity to continue to demonstrate international leadership when it comes to skin cancer.

Cancer Council Victoria is a designated World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborative Centre for Ultraviolet Radiation and has led the development of the SunSmart Global UV app with the support of the WHO and the World Meteorological Organization.

SunSmart is supported by the **Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer (CBRC)**. CBRC's internationally-recognised research and evaluation focuses on finding the best ways to prevent or reduce behaviours that increase cancer risk. CBRC conducts and shares findings from its research with SunSmart to ensure programs and campaigns are underpinned by the best available evidence.

Use all five forms of sun protection

Slip

Slop

Slap

Seek

Slide

Our goals

SunSmart's strategy is focussed on three main goals to achieve our mission to reduce skin cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality.

GOAL ONE: To improve UV protection behaviours

The preventability of skin cancer presents a considerable opportunity to implement effective public health education programs and campaigns.

Priorities

- Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of behaviour change campaigns.
- Be a pro-active presence to promote skin cancer prevention and correct misinformation.
- Lead education initiatives to improve UV protection behaviours in early childhood services, primary and secondary schools, workplaces, and other priority settings.
- Partner with key state government agencies and peak bodies to support UV protection behaviours.
- Collaborate with the health service and workforce to deliver education and interventions to prevent skin cancer, with a focus on high-risk groups.
- Use research insights and evidence to inform UV protection behaviour strategies.
- Use data and information to monitor outcomes and evaluate impact of public education campaigns and other interventions.

How

Through strategic communications, public education campaigns and evidence informed programs, SunSmart will increase awareness and knowledge about the harms of UV radiation, and improve attitudes and behaviours to protect against UV exposure.

Examples

- Deliver public education campaigns; these have been shown to increase behaviour change intentions and contribute to a decline in skin cancer rates of younger Victorians.
- Continue to leverage earned and owned channels (public relations, social media and website) to engage priority audiences and have a proactive voice in the media, provide a trusted source of information and address misinformation.
- Amplify the reach and impact of SunSmart interventions by collaborating with credible peak bodies and organisations to ensure alignment of messaging and capitalise on their influence of priority populations.
- Continue to work across settings including early childhood services, schools and workplaces to reach priority audiences and support sun protective environments and behaviours.
- Continue to work with the health workforce and health settings to ensure effective access to relevant and targeted strategies, information and resources.

Outcome

More Victorians use sun protection when UV levels are three or more.

GOAL TWO: To support early detection of skin cancer with a focus on high-risk groups

The early detection of skin cancer not only impacts health outcomes but also treatment costs. Melanoma survival is strongly related to stage at diagnosis and tumour thickness.[14]

Priorities

- Lead targeted communications and media engagement.
- Ensure guidelines support best practice early detection of skin cancer.
- Lead early detection education initiatives in high-risk and priority populations.
- Upskill the health workforce to detect early and manage skin cancer.
- Use research insights and evidence to inform early detection strategies.
- Use data and information to monitor outcomes and evaluate impact of health workforce education programs and other interventions.

Examples

- General practitioners (GPs) play a pivotal role in the prevention, early detection and management of skin cancer in Australia. SunSmart will continue to lead the successful Dermoscopy for Victorian General Practice Program.
- Resource and support Victoria's health workforce with a focus on regional areas.
- Continue to raise awareness of early detection through targeted communication strategies, including campaigns, social media channels and integrated public relation activities with key organisations.

How

SunSmart will target priority populations and high-risk individuals to increase awareness and knowledge; improve attitudes and confidence to undertake behaviours to detect skin cancer early; and support health professionals to diagnose and treat skin cancer early.

Outcome

High-risk Victorians have increased awareness and efficacy for the early detection of skin cancer.

Dermoscopy Program

SunSmart's Dermoscopy for Victorian General Practice Program supports Victoria's health workforce with a focus on addressing equity of access to trained health professionals in regional areas. The program has trained and equipped more than 400 Victorian GPs and GP registrars, the majority of these from regional Victoria where there is a higher incidence of melanoma (compared to metro areas) and a shortage of specialist help.

Training GPs in the use of dermoscopy and providing them with equipment helps detect skin cancer at an earlier, more easily treatable stage, reducing both costs to the health system and the personal burden of skin cancer. The program's major training component is accredited by the Australasian College of Dermatologists.

GOAL THREE: To improve policies and environments to reduce UV exposure

Program-driven environmental changes, including UV radiation protection policies and provision of shade, have been shown to be effective in facilitating and supporting increased UV protection behaviour.

Priorities

- Identify opportunities to include and improve UV protection in policies and guidelines.
- Influence policies in early childhood services, primary and secondary schools, workplaces, and other priority settings.
- Promote the co-benefits of shade, including UV protection and its importance in climate change adaptation and impact on health.
- Advocate for effective shade to be included in public space policies and guidelines.
- Generate and use research insights and evidence to inform advocacy.
- Collect and use data and information to monitor shade-focused outcomes and UV protection policies.

Examples

- Continue to support stakeholders to address UV risk reduction and sun protection across key settings through the development, review and implementation of UV radiation protection policies and guidelines.
- Continue to support priority settings to effectively implement sun protection policies.
- Advocate for UV protective shade and low UV reflective surfaces across priority settings, including active transport routes and open spaces.
- Identify opportunities to include UV protection as a co-benefit of shade in relevant climate and health strategies, documents, policies and plans.

How

SunSmart will support an increase in comprehensive, evidence-informed sun protection policies being implemented in key settings, and an increase in policies and plans that include shade as a UV reduction strategy.

Outcome

Victorian priority settings have comprehensive, evidence-informed sun protection policies and increased awareness of the importance of UV protective shade.

Schools

The SunSmart Schools and Early Childhood Program has been supporting Victorian schools and early childhood services to reduce UV exposure and skin cancer risk for nearly 30 years. Prior to the program commencing, only 17% of schools reported having a sun protection policy in 1993. Decades later close to 90% of Victorian primary schools and early childhood services are registered members of the SunSmart program, with a SunSmart-approved policy, reaching an estimated 700,000 children and their families.

Together with the Department of Education, SunSmart continues to play an important role in supporting schools and early childhood services through providing policy support, education, curriculum tools and resources to protect young Victorians.

SunSmart App

UV radiation is the main cause of skin cancer; however, most people don't think to check UV levels before going outdoors. The free SunSmart Global UV app provides reliable UV level forecasts across the state and worldwide, as well as easily accessible sun protection advice in eight languages.

Bringing together decades of experience of delivering sun protection information, the development and design of this app was led by the expertise of Victoria's iconic SunSmart program and Cancer Council Victoria, in conjunction with Deakin University and government agencies, including Bureau of Meteorology and the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency.

Cancer Council Victoria acknowledges and respects Australia's First Peoples and Traditional Owners of the land and waters; recognising their loss of land, children and families, languages and health.

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