

Research context

This section outlines the background to the project, and specifies the research objectives.

2.1 Background

Skin cancer in Australia Skin cancer is a particularly significant issue for Australia. Australia's incidence and mortality rates for melanoma are by far the highest in the world:² around four times higher than those found in Canada, the UK and the US and up to ten times higher than in other countries. The overall cost of treating skin cancer in all its forms in Australia is thought to be around \$300 million per annum.³

There are three main types of skin cancer: melanoma, basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), with the latter two being types of non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC). These different types are discussed in more detail below.

Melanoma Of those cancers systematically reported to cancer registries, melanoma is currently the third most common cancer among women (at around 10% of new cases) and the fourth most common cancer among men (also around 10% of new cases). There were 8,885 people who developed melanoma in 2001 and 1,012 deaths.⁴ It is projected that by 2011, melanoma will overtake lung cancer as the third most common cancer among men. For Australians aged 15 to 44, it is predicted that the incidence of melanoma will be even greater – melanoma is expected to become the second most common form of cancer for

² I McDerimid. *Cancer incidence projections, Australia 2002 to 2011* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Australasian Association of Cancer Registries (AACR) and the National Cancer Strategies Group (NCSG), Canberra, 2005, p. xvi. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/can/cipa02-011/cipa02-011.pdf>. Accessed 22-11-2005.

³ Cancer Council Victoria, *SunSmart Program 2003–2006*, Melbourne, 2003, p. 6. http://www.sunsmart.com.au/downloads/about_sunsmart/sunsmart_program_2003_2006.pdf. Accessed 22-11-2005.

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australasian Association of Cancer Registries 2004.

women, and the most common for men⁵. Melanoma is one of the most aggressive forms of human cancer, and has perhaps the highest impact on productive life years because it affects young people to a relatively greater extent than most cancers.⁶

NMSC

While melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer, there are other more common skin cancers for which data are not routinely collected by state and territory cancer registries (with the exception of Tasmania). Non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) – including basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), as noted above – is in fact the most widespread class of skin cancer in Australia. National household surveys have estimated NMSC to be three times more common than all other forms of cancer diagnosed in Australia⁷. Survey findings indicate that around 118,000 Australians were treated for SCC in 2002, with a further 256,000 treated for BCC⁸. It is estimated that, in terms of dollars spent on diagnosis and treatment, NMSC costs Australia more than any other cancer⁹.

The vast majority of NMSC's are curable. They spread slowly and, when detected early, can be treated well before they become life-threatening. Ease of detection and successful treatment options are not the only weapons against skin cancer: It has long been known that exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the single greatest cause of all types of skin cancer, and that genetic inheritance generally plays less of a direct role than it does in other cancers. It follows that primary prevention strategies aimed at minimising risk and influencing healthy sun-exposure behaviour do have the potential to make a significant positive difference.

⁵ McDermid p. 1.

⁶ Australian Cancer Research Foundation website
http://www.acrf.com.au/plugins/newsfeed.cgi?rm=content&plugin_data_id=4680 Accessed 22-11-2005

⁷ MP Staples, ed. *The 2002 national non-melanoma skin cancer survey: A report by the NCCI Non-melanoma Skin Cancer Working Group*, National Cancer Control Initiative, Melbourne, 2003, p. 9. <http://www.ncci.org.au/pdf/NMSCreport.pdf>
Accessed 22-11-2005.

⁸ Staples, p. 7.

⁹ Staples p. 9.

⁶ Cancer Council Victoria p. 1.

**Strengthening
Cancer Care**

The Australian Government's Strengthening Cancer Care initiative has allocated more than \$189.4 million over the five years to 2008-09 to help reduce the burden of cancer. The key aims of this initiative are to achieve better coordination of the national cancer effort; increase research funding for cancer care; enhance cancer prevention and screening programs; and ensure better support and treatment for those living with cancer¹⁰. Under this initiative, the Government has committed new funding of \$5.5 million over two years, to 2006-07, to educate Australians about the importance of protecting themselves from skin cancer. To help achieve this objective, the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (the Department) is planning a nationwide skin cancer campaign, to be held in the summer of 2006-07.

**Past campaigns
and research**

Numerous skin cancer prevention campaigns have been implemented in Australia since the 1970s, and the most successful of them are well regarded both at home and abroad. The memorable "Slip! Slop! Slap!" campaign, for example, launched by the then Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria¹¹ in 1980, was influential not only across Australia but internationally: As recently as 1998, its slogan was borrowed by the American Cancer Society for its own awareness-raising campaign¹².

A short history of past campaigns would include the following:

- 1980-1988 The "Slip! Slop! Slap!" campaign, designed to increase broad awareness of skin cancer and sun protection strategies, was found to have helped combat pro-tanning attitudes, change sun-protection behaviour and reduce sunburn.
- 1988 The Cancer Council Victoria launched its "SunSmart" program, involving multiple strategies, including mass media, sponsorship, education and policy development. The program



¹⁰ Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *Health Fact Sheet 1 - Investing in Australia's health: Strengthening Cancer Care*, <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/budget/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-budget2005-hbudget-hfact1.htm>. Accessed 22-11-2005.

¹¹ Referred to subsequently in this report by its current name "Cancer Council Victoria".

¹² American Cancer Society website http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS_5_1x_Slip_Slop_Slap.asp. Accessed 22-11-2005.

continues today and elements of it have been borrowed by other States, and the brand enjoys high recognition among Australians.

- 1990-1995 The Cancer Council Victoria's "You can leave your hat on" and "The Line" campaigns; aimed at influencing younger people's sun protection attitudes, in particular at countering the idea that sun protection is unfashionable. These campaigns were found to have high recall but limited behavioural impact.
- 1990-2002 The "Me no fry" campaign, developed in New South Wales and later adopted by Western Australia. This campaign specifically targeted adolescents in an attempt to replace a 'sun-worship' culture with one of sun protection. The campaign was found to have had mixed results, with some short-term behavioural changes in NSW.
- 1997 The Cancer Council Victoria launched a confronting campaign, "How to remove a skin cancer", which was aimed at 16-24 year-olds. Recall of the campaign was high (75% over two years), and the campaign evaluation found that one in two Victorians respondents agreed that the ad increased the likelihood of their checking their skin for skin cancer or asking a doctor to do so.
- 1997-2000 New South Wales Cancer Council conducted a campaign targeting parents and carers of children 0-11 years of age, using "Seymour the Snowman". Recall was found to be relatively high. Short-term increases in sun protection behaviour were observed and there were found to be some improvements in the importance parents placed on protecting their children from the sun.
- 1999-2001 The Cancer Council Victoria launched another graphic campaign, "Timebomb", to reduce UVR exposure among 16-25 year olds, especially young men. The advertisement had a similar effect on sun protection behaviour as "How to remove a skin cancer", but total awareness was lower for "Timebomb". The campaign was also run with some success in 2000-01 in Victoria and SA.
- 2003-2005 A "Tattoo" campaign with the slogan "skin cancer, it's killer body art", developed by the Cancer Council Victoria, was introduced in Victoria and New



South Wales to dispel misconceptions about the risks of tanning. Findings from the 2004 Victorian evaluation revealed lower awareness than anticipated. It achieved greater recall levels in 2005.

- 2004 The Cancer Council New South Wales developed a campaign targeting older Australians 55 years and over with an early detection message. No evaluation results are yet available.

While past mass-media skin-cancer campaigns have had some success in influencing community attitudes, they have for the most part been limited to particular States and Territories. The continued prevalence of skin cancer suggests that Australia would benefit from a nation-wide campaign soundly informed by past successes and further developmental research. The Department has consulted representatives of State and Territory Cancer Councils to draw upon their campaign development experience and expertise.

The Department itself has not conducted specific research into skin cancer, sun protection or early detection. In 2003-04, however, the Department contributed towards the funding of a National Sun Survey, coordinated by the Cancer Council Victoria, which shed light on important attitudinal and behavioural factors, including:

- suntan desirability;
- hours spent outdoors in summer;
- sunburn incidence;
- level of sun protection among different age groups and genders;
- predictors of time spent outdoors during peak UV times; and
- predictors of sun protection measures

This telephone survey was the first national collection of behavioural data on sun protection, although behavioural data has been collected by Victoria since the summer of 1987-88.

The need for further research With the exception of the National Sun Survey, past research has been limited in scope. Small in scale, confined to individual States or Territories, and undertaken more often to develop or evaluate specific campaigns than to investigate consumer perceptions and behaviours, past research was

considered insufficient to guide the development of a new national campaign strategy. Therefore, the Department commissioned Eureka Strategic Research to undertake developmental research. The research objectives are specified under the following heading.

2.2 Research objectives

Overall, the aim of this research was to inform the strategic development of a national skin cancer awareness campaign by exploring the target audience's level of awareness and attitudes, knowledge and skills, and motivations and barriers to behaviour change relating to both sun protection and early detection of skin cancer.

To guide the 2006/7 campaign, the research sought to explore:

- levels of awareness and understanding about sun protection and early detection of skin cancer;
- attitudes, knowledge and skills regarding sun protection and early detection of skin cancer;
- perceptions of skin cancer risk;
- barriers to sun protection and early detection of skin cancer, and
- any potential segmentation of the target audiences.

The research program undertaken to meet the research objectives and explore these issues is outlined in the following section.

In meeting these objectives, it was useful to consider the following questions:

- Is a mass market campaign appropriate?
- Should its focus be prevention or detection?
- At whom should the campaign be targeted?
- Should the message be positively or negatively framed?

- What message(s) should the campaign seek to convey?
- Are there any approaches that should be explored?
- What unintended messages should be avoided?

These questions were used to guide the analysis and frame the conclusions and recommendations reported in this document.