



MEDIA STATEMENT

Verity Firth MP

**Minister for Women
Minister for Science and Medical Research
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)
Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Environment & Water**

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NEW CAMPAIGN WARNS OF TANNING'S DARKER SIDE

STATE PLAN TARGET S2: Reduce the number of potentially avoidable deaths for people under 75 to 150 per 100,000 people by 2016

The NSW Government will commit \$2.16 million to develop a new, graphic skin cancer awareness ad campaign following the release of the latest research showing a large number of people are dicing with death in pursuit of a suntan.

Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer) Verity Firth said the Cancer Institute's *Lifestyle and Cancer Survey* reveals a picture of wide-spread complacency about the risks associated with unprotected exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation – be it from the sun or artificial tanning devices such as solariums.

“Few in the community are taking the ‘slip, slop, slap’ message seriously, with more than a quarter of NSW residents reporting that they got sunburnt at least three times in the last 12 months,” said Ms Firth.

“Even more alarmingly, one in three NSW residents (34 per cent) appear to believe the old urban myth that says a suntan makes you healthier and burning is an acceptable way to get one.

“The desire for a tan is greatest amongst teenagers and Generation Y.”

According to the research 68 per cent of 13 to 17 year olds want a tan; while amongst 18 to 24 year olds the figure is 62 per cent.

“As a consequence of this increasingly common pro-tanning attitude, significantly fewer people are taking even the basic steps to protect themselves from the sun, with only 11 per cent of those surveyed saying they regularly use sunscreen,” said Ms Firth.

“The research also reveals a widespread belief that the treatment for skin cancer is straightforward and almost 100 per cent effective.

“This alarming shift in community attitudes and the growing complacency towards the dangers of skin cancer have prompted the NSW Government to set aside more

than \$2 million to develop a new, confronting public health campaign for the coming summer months.

The NSW Government's *Dark Side of Tanning* campaign will challenge the misconception that a tan is healthy by showing the damage that can happen to the skin even before there are signs of burning.

"While the basic 'slip, slop, slap' message will remain the same, the central task for our new campaign will be to make this message relevant to everyone, tackling the growing 'it can't happen to me' mentality," said Ms Firth.

"When our new campaign hits television screens in November, the NSW community will see firsthand the deadly darker side to having a suntan.

"None of us can afford to ignore the tragic story of Clare Oliver, the 26 year old Melbourne woman who died last week from melanoma of the skin.

"The lesson we must all take away from this tragedy is that tanning is a dangerous activity and having a tan does not make you healthier.

"People, particularly the young, must stop putting unattainable, media-derived concepts of 'beauty' before their long term health.

"The fact is, Australia already has the world's highest rate of skin cancer, with melanoma of the skin the most common cancer amongst men aged 25-54 and females aged 15-29 – and its prevalence is growing."

The Cancer Institute estimates that there will be around 4,200 new cases of melanoma each year in NSW by 2010, compared with the 3,800 cases expected this year. In 2004 skin cancer claimed the lives of 388 people and cost the NSW health system more than any other cancer to diagnose and treat.

In addition to skin cancer, unprotected exposure to UV radiation can lead to the premature ageing of the skin.

"While the latest research is an important wake up call, it also presents us with a real opportunity to make an impact on the future rates of melanoma – skin cancer is preventable but only if we take skin protection far more seriously," said Ms Firth.

"Importantly, skin protection does not have to come at the expense of our outdoor, beach-going way of life – in fact, the consistent use of skin protection products allows us to enjoy this way of life without jeopardising our health."

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Lifestyle and Cancer Survey

In late 2006, the NSW Government's Cancer Institute conducted its very first *Lifestyle and Cancer Survey* in an effort to better understand the community's behaviours, knowledge and attitudes with respect to a range of lifestyle factors and cancer.

The key findings were:

- Almost three-fifths of those surveyed reported being sunburnt in the last 12 months, with more than a quarter reporting they got burnt more than three times;
- Sunglasses are the most commonly adopted sun protection measure, with 53 per cent of respondents always wearing them when outdoors;
- Only 11 per cent of respondents said they regularly use sunscreen;
- 64 per cent of respondents nominated the risk of skin cancer/melanoma as the main reason for using sun protection measures;
- 34 per cent of respondents agreed that they feel healthier with a suntan.

NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey

The findings from the Cancer Institute's *Lifestyle and Cancer Survey* add to earlier research undertaken by the NSW Health Department.

The Department's 2005 *NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey* of secondary students aged 12 to 17 found:

- 35 per cent wear a hat (down 6% since 2002)
- 26 per cent stay mainly in the shade between 11am and 3pm (down 2% since 2002)
- 43 per cent use sunscreen (down 20% since 1993)
- 25 per cent did not want a suntan;
- 30 per cent believe you only get skin cancer if you get sunburnt often;
- 79 per cent had been sunburnt at least once during the last summer.

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