Skin cancer costs NSW upwards of $500 million

A new study from the Cancer Institute NSW shows the overwhelming cost of skin cancer on the NSW community.

The eye-opening report gives a conservative estimate of $536 million in lifetime costs for the 150,000 cases of skin cancer diagnosed in the state in 2010.

The investigation, presented at the 3rd International Conference on UV and Skin Cancer Prevention in Melbourne this week, calculates the skin cancer burden based on treatment costs, lost productivity and premature deaths.

Each melanoma case averaged a cost of $44,796 while the more common and often less complex to treat non-melanoma skin cancers averaged $2459.

"Australia has the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. With two in every three Australians diagnosed in their life time, skin cancer is often thought of as our national cancer," NSW Chief Cancer Officer and CEO of the Cancer Institute, NSW Professor David Currow said.

"Unlike most cancer types, skin cancer is almost entirely preventable, which means so too is the enormous social and economic toll it takes."

The Cancer Institute NSW has led the way with the NSW Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy 2012-2015, which saw a collaboration between NSW government and non-government organisations come together to become the first state to ban the use of tanning beds.

For the past ten years, people in NSW have been educated through mass community awareness campaigns highlighting the dangers of over exposure to the sun and reinforcing the importance of five sun safe behaviours – seeking shade, wearing protective clothing, applying sunscreen regularly, wearing sunglasses and donning a hat when out in the sun.

In 2015 the NSW government through the Cancer Institute NSW, invested more than $1 million in grants to support schools, community groups, local councils and sporting clubs to provide shade structures.

"The Cancer Institute NSW is committed to reducing the burden of skin cancer on the lives of people in NSW by supporting people to take better care of their skin and driving researchers to uncover better treatment options," Professor Currow said.

"The days of lying in the sun covered in tanning oil or spending all day working outside without a hat, shirt or sunscreen are still in our living memory; but we have come a long

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1 2015 Doran et al, Estimating the economic cost of skin cancer in New South Wales, Australia
The Cancer Institute NSW is Australia’s first statewide government cancer control agency. Established under the Cancer Institute (NSW) Act 2003, the Institute is responsible for lessening the impact of cancer by reducing cancer incidence, increasing cancer survival, improving quality of life for people living with cancer, and providing expert advice on cancer.

Way in understanding the dangers of over exposure to UV radiation and we can reduce its enormous burden on our community.

“The message is simple – stop sun damage, stop 95 per cent of melanomas and 99 per cent of non-melanoma skin cancers.”

Skin Cancer Facts

- Australia has the highest skin cancer rate in the world
- Overexposure to UV radiation and sun burn have been found to cause around 99% of non-melanoma skin cancers and 95% of melanoma skin cancers in Australia
- Overexposure to UVR is the main risk factor for skin cancers (skin type and family history are also important).
- Melanoma is the most common cancer affecting young Australians
- In 2010 there were 3,898 new cases of melanoma (2,344 for men and 1,554 for women) and 488 people died of melanoma (349 males, 139 females)
- 5 sun-safe behaviours have been proven to protect against skin cancer – seeking shade, applying sunscreen regularly, wearing sunglasses and protective clothing and donning a hat when outdoors.
- NSW has some of the highest UV levels in the world. When the UV index hits 3 or above, skin is most at risk of sun damage.
- 12,960 new cases of melanoma are expected to be diagnosed in Australia in 2015
- There are three types of skin cancer, but all are caused when skin cells are damaged by UV radiation. The different types of skin cancer are caused by damage to different parts of the skin:
  - Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)
  - Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)
  - Melanoma – the most serious form of skin cancer, and the fourth most common cancer in NSW.
- Basal Cell Carcinomas and Squamous Cell Carcinomas are the most common skin cancers and are often grouped together as non-melanomatous skin cancers. The treatment of these skin cancers can be terrible often resulting in disfiguring surgery that plastic surgeons can’t repair.
- Sun damage at any age can cause skin cancers

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2 2010 NSW Central Cancer Registry
3 AIHW, Melanoma Skin Cancer in Australia

Working together to lessen the impact of cancer