



Australian Government

Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council

12 December 2019

Dr Carl-Magnus Larsson
CEO
Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
619 Lower Plenty Road
YALLAMBIE VIC 3085

Dear Dr Larsson

RE: A National Approach to Skin Cancer Prevention

The Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council (**Council**) has considered a national approach to skin cancer prevention through ultraviolet (UV) radiation protection and the role the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (**ARPANSA**) should play.

Skin cancer including melanoma is a significant public health problem in Australia, imposing a substantial economic burden. Prolonged exposure to solar UV radiation is the major environmental cause of skin cancer making it one of the most preventable forms of cancer, yet skin cancer incidence rates are the highest of all cancers. The Commonwealth last provided funding for a coordinated national approach to prevent skin cancer in 2009 and Commonwealth investment in skin cancer prevention remains only a fraction of the substantial total spent on early detection of skin cancer, and treatments of skin cancer including drugs for the treatment of advanced melanoma.

Council believes that a strong national approach to skin cancer prevention would provide the stimulus and guidance to governments, jurisdictions, non-government organisations and researchers to work to change UV protection behaviour across all age groups and targeted high-risk groups to reduce the burden of UV related skin disease in Australia.

The Council agreed that the following priority areas for a national approach to skin cancer prevention through UV radiation protection and other measures should be considered by the Commonwealth.

Priority Area 1: Commonwealth Call to Action

- Develop, implement and evaluate policies and initiatives that reduce exposure to UV radiation.
- Estimate the national health and economic benefits of sun protection measures, building on past state-based knowledge, to justify and guide current and future prevention efforts.
- Enhance and coordinate a single Commonwealth approach to advance our nation's skin cancer prevention efforts.
- Establish partnerships between public and private sectors to disseminate effective messages about skin cancer prevention.

Priority Area 2: Fund Healthy Choice Programs

- Support innovative approaches for the use of sun protective behaviours and reduce sunburn risk.
- Fund incentive schemes that promote daily use of the five sun safe behaviours.
- Promote sun safety in high risk population subgroups (e.g. schools, sporting clubs) and high-risk patient groups (e.g. immunosuppressed organ transplant recipients).
- Integrate sun safety into early childhood care, and schools and workplace health education and promotion programs.

Priority Area 3: Build, Conduct and Sustain Surveillance Programs

- Build a register for periodic, coordinated collection of national skin cancer incidence data (not collected since 2002).
- Monitor prevalence, trends, and impacts of sunburn.
- Monitor sun-safe behaviours by maintaining the national health surveys and report the levels, dose and trends of UV radiation exposure in the Australian community.

Priority Area 4: Strengthen Funding for Prevention Research

- Set research strategies based on gaps in knowledge and research including estimates of the national health and economic benefits of sun protection measures.
- Promote and focus research in UV protection within the academic and research sectors.
- Encourage funding of prevention research that includes UV radiation protection programs.

Priority Area 5: Fund Social Marketing Campaign using Tailored Messaging

- Collaborate with academia, local governments and industry to identify and promote good communication practice.
- Collaborate with key partners for delivery of social marketing campaigns that provide clear and consistent messaging to promote daily use of the five sun safe behaviours.
- Develop tailored messaging for high risk population subgroups that is risk-informed and evidence-based to enable individuals to make informed choices about UV radiation exposure and protection.

Any national approach to skin cancer prevention should also consider eye health as a secondary benefit. Extended exposure to solar UV radiation has also been linked to significant eye diseases.

Council considers that there is a role for ARPANSA to play in providing services and information to the public – it is for the CEO of ARPANSA to “provide services relating to radiation protection” and to “provide advice on radiation protection”¹. ARPANSA embraces these functions through its Vision, Purpose and Strategic Objectives in its current Corporate Plan 2019-2023².

As Council is aware, ARPANSA is a national leader in solar UV radiation protection for workers and the public. ARPANSA provides a range services and activities that are underpinned by assessing solar UV radiation exposure and risk in the Australian population. Council recognises the benefits of aligning ARPANSA’s priorities with a national approach and vision to allow ARPANSA to re-invest in priority activities in UV protection underpinned by a whole of government approach.

¹ Section 15 of Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act (ARPANS Act).

² ARPANSA Corporate Plan 2019-2023 at <https://www.arpansa.gov.au/about-us/corporate-publications/corporate-plan/corporate-plan-2019-2023>

Council also recognises that ARPANSA, as a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for UV radiation protection, is committed to building international collaborations, implementing key research activities and developing international best practice.

Accordingly, Council recommends to ARPANSA that it continue to build and maintain UV radiation protection services and advice, and continue to provide evidence based information to inform UV radiation protection for workers and the public.

In addition, Council recommends that ARPANSA should continue to consult with Commonwealth agencies to create awareness of priority areas for a national approach to skin cancer prevention and to strengthen alignment of ARPANSA's activities with a whole of government approach to UV radiation protection and other measures.

The benefits of these proposed actions will be the provision of comprehensive, community-wide programs that can increase sun protection behaviours and reduce UV radiation exposure and prevent skin cancer in Australia.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane Canestra".

Dr Jane Canestra
Acting Chair
Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council