



Cancer Society New Zealand  
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **New report from the Cancer Society shows that skin cancer costs New Zealand!**

A new report commissioned by the Cancer Society estimates that skin cancer costs the New Zealand health system in excess of \$57 million each year.

The report notes that these costs do not take into account a range of less direct, but very real, costs to the nation relating to loss of life and productivity estimated at an additional \$66 million per year. Nor do they account for the costs to the individual sufferer, which often involve pain, disfigurement, worry and, sometimes, time out of work.

Dermatologist, Marius Rademaker, notes that “people often do not realise the potential seriousness of non-melanoma skin cancer, assuming that it’s just something that can easily be cut out or removed. However, many people who have needed treatment for skin cancer will tell you that it is not always simple or painless, and is certainly quite costly particularly if you add in the need to travel, time off work and time for recovery.”

The report’s author, health economist Des O’ Dea notes that “it is often assumed that because death rates for non-melanoma skin cancers are very low, this is not a serious concern for health funding decision makers. But, in reality, the large number of cases imposes a significant burden on the health system.”

The report notes that New Zealand’s melanoma incidence rates are similar to those of Australia but far higher than rates in countries such as Britain, Canada and the United States.

Skin cancers are by far the commonest type of cancer. At around 70,000 new cases annually, including around 2,000 cases of melanoma, they account for just over 80 percent of all new cancers each year. In 2006, there were 287 deaths from melanoma and 102 from non-melanoma skin cancers. New Zealand also has higher death rates for both melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers than Australia.

The Cancer Society’s Skin Cancer Control Advisor, Dr Judith Galtry, notes that “This finding highlights the need for increased commitment and funding to be given to skin cancer prevention and early detection initiatives. Both the health system costs and individual costs involved are largely avoidable. We know that skin cancer, including the sometimes deadly melanoma, is largely preventable.”

The Cancer Society is concerned that the Government does not appear to be taking the issue of skin cancer control seriously enough, with the Society responsible for funding and delivering most of this work. Yet, skin cancer prevention and detection is highlighted as a priority in the Cancer Control Strategy developed by government and non-government agencies.

Mr O'Dea points to a just published Australian study on the economic evaluation of skin cancer prevention which concludes that "a sustained modest investment in skin cancer control is potentially excellent value for money" and that "the case for a well-funded comprehensive SunSmart program is compelling and recent reductions in investment need to be reversed."

According to O'Dea, "this Australian analysis very probably applies also to the New Zealand situation."

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## **Facts & Figures**

- In 2005, there were 18,610 new cancer registrations.
- Of these 2,017 were 'Malignant melanoma of skin'; 10.8 percent of all cancer registrations.
- Non-melanoma skin cancers are not registered under the Cancer Registry (which only measures melanoma) but each year there are an estimated 67,000 new non-melanoma skin cancers.
- In total, new skin cancer cases each year total about 69,000.
- Most skin cancer cases occur among the more elderly. But melanoma has a significantly lower average age of incidence, and mortality, than non-melanoma skin cancers. In 2005, 11.9 percent of melanoma deaths were of persons aged under 45, compared with none for non-melanoma skin cancer, and 4.6 percent for all cancer deaths.
- Female skin cancer incidence rates are considerably lower than those of males, and female mortality rates about half those of males.
- Were it not for skin cancer New Zealanders would have lived an additional 4,741 life-years in 2006.
- In addition these persons if alive would have made an economic contribution through employment of an estimated additional NZ\$66 million in 2006 (in 2007/08 dollars).

## **Advice from the Cancer Society**

**Remember to protect yourself from the sun between September and April, especially between the hours of 11am and 4pm.**

Key strategies for protection include:

- Scheduling outside work/play before 11 am or after 4 pm (particularly in January, February and March)
- Wearing an effective sunhat that protects that the face, neck and ears
- Wearing long sleeved clothing with collars and long-legged pants.
- Using a broad-spectrum SPF 30 + sunscreen and sunglasses
- Staying out of the sun during the middle of the day.