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Experts issue urgent call to action on Queensland skin cancer rates

Queenslanders are being challenged to slash the state's skin cancer numbers by a quarter over the next three decades with a new report showing we've dropped the ball on prevention of the deadly disease.

A comprehensive *Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland* report, led by preeminent scientists from QIMR Berghofer and The University of Queensland, sets bold cross-sector goals to reduce the incidence of skin cancer by 5 per cent by 2030 and 25 per cent by 2050.

See [video](#) (Download a TV and radio news compile of clean interview clips and overlay for broadcast use [here](#)).

Queensland is the skin cancer capital of the world, with more Queenslanders dying from skin cancer than road crashes each year. QIMR Berghofer Professor Rachel Neale, who co-chairs Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland, said a change in approach is urgently needed to cut the prevalence of these largely preventable cancers.

"Nearly half of all Queensland adults and children are still getting sunburnt every year. Only one in five adults use sun protection strategies when outside in summer, and not enough sunscreen is used when it is applied," Professor Neale said.

There is a need to significantly increase the numbers of people wearing hats and applying sunscreen daily. By 2030, the report aims for around half of all Queenslanders to apply sunscreen daily and to wear a broad-brimmed hat outdoors, and for a 20 per cent reduction in the percentage of people reporting being sunburnt.

"We need to change the narrative around sun protection so it becomes the norm to wear a broad-brimmed hat outdoors and to put on sunscreen every day before we leave the house," Professor Neale said.

The report found three priority groups with a particularly low uptake of sun protection behaviours - outdoor workers, people playing outdoor sports, and adolescents.

Professor Monika Janda from The University of Queensland, co-chair of Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland, said these groups have a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

"Our report suggests that a combination of interventions will help change sun protection behaviours," Professor Janda said.

“We know innovative and targeted public health interventions can be successful in reducing skin cancer rates. For example, research has found regular and interactive text messaging helped reduce sunburn among younger adults.”

Each year more than 3,600 Queenslanders are diagnosed with the deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma, and more than 350,000 non-melanoma skin cancers are treated. The numbers are forecast to increase due to the ageing population. Skin cancer costs the Australian health system more than \$1.7 billion annually.

The Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland report emphasises prevention as the key. In 2022, the amount spent on treating skin cancer was 100 times more than what was spent on prevention.

Professor Neale says the targets contained in the report are ambitious but achievable.

“Improving our everyday behaviours will reduce the number of skin cancers. The title of ‘Skin Cancer Capital of the World’ is one we want to lose. We’re calling on all Queenslanders to come together to make this happen,” Professor Neale said.

The report proposes a range of initiatives and research areas including:

- Developing a government-coordinated skin cancer prevention strategy
- Implementing modern traditional and social media sun safety campaigns
- Addressing barriers to the use of sunscreen and sun-protective clothing
- Investigating an accreditation program to certify sun-safety compliance for specific settings that would be renewed regularly, similar to what is required for first-aid certification

Specific actions for priority groups in the Workplace Health & Safety, Sports & Recreation, and Secondary School Education sectors include:

- Improved monitoring of sun-safety compliance in workplaces for outdoor workers
- Improved implementation of sun-safe policies in secondary schools
- Investigating how athletes’ uniforms can be made more sun-safe & whether clothing regulations are needed
- Investigating an incentives-driven awards system for sun-safe sporting organisations that is linked to government funding

The report is the first time a broad cross-section of Queensland’s major sectors have collaborated on the challenge of skin cancer prevention, with Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland bringing together government departments, university and medical researchers, sporting bodies, not-for-profit organisations, and cancer advocacy groups.

The report is available on the [Australian Skin and Skin Cancer Research Centre website](#).

To request an interview with Professor Rachel Neale and Professor Monika Janda, please email media@qimrberghofer.edu.au or contact Jodie Stephens on 0427 179 216.