

Statement

Impact of skin cancer in Australia

Purpose: To provide the most up to date available evidence on the key skin cancer statistics in Australia, including the economic impact.

Audience: Community

Endorsement: This statement has been approved by The Australasian College of Dermatologists Expert Advisory Committee.

Supplementary resources: The Australasian College of Dermatologists has developed a suite of factsheets relating to skin cancer for patients and health professionals available [here](#), including:

- What types of skin cancers are there?
- Knowing your risk factors and monitoring your own skin
- How do I protect my skin from the sun?
- When to see a health professional for advice?

There is also the A-Z of Skin page, [Skin Cancer: An Overview](#), which provides general information on skin cancer in Australia.

Disclaimer: This statement reflects the general views of the Australasian College of Dermatologists at the date of release and may be subject to amendment to reflect emerging clinical and scientific evidence. This information provides educational information and is not intended as a substitute for individual patient assessment. Practitioners are advised to interpret and apply recommendations according to the needs and circumstances of each patient.

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Key messages and recommendations

- Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world,¹ with 2,105 estimated deaths in 2023 from melanoma and keratinocyte cancers (KCs) (previously called non-melanoma skin cancer) combined.²
- KCs are the most common cancer in Australia. However, data on KC incidence are not routinely collected. The Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) recommends that a national registry for KC would help to accurately identify the extent of the disease and track progress against national cancer control efforts.
- Skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers through appropriate sun protection measures.³ The majority of skin cancer cases in Australia are attributable to excessive exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV) from the sun or from solariums.³ Public awareness campaigns continue to improve sun protection behaviour.
- Five-year survival rates for melanoma have improved with earlier detection and diagnosis, however survival rates remain low for melanoma diagnosed at an advanced stage.
- Skin cancer, both melanoma and KC are responsible for the highest cancer-related health system expenditure at more than \$1.6 billion, placing significant burden on Australia's healthcare system.⁴
- The ACD recognises that early detection of skin cancer is critical, with 5-year survival of melanoma high if detected and treated early.
- The ACD recommends ongoing national investment in the prevention and early detection of skin cancer is needed to continue to raise awareness of sun protective behaviours and attitudes, particularly among the younger generation of Australians.

ACD Statement – Impact of skin cancer in Australia

Skin cancer statistics in Australia

Melanoma

Incidence

In 2023, melanoma was the third most common cancer diagnosed, comprising 11% of all cancer diagnosed.² In 2023, 18,257 were estimated to be diagnosed with melanoma (10,639 men and 7,618 women).²

Between 1982 and 2023, the age-standardised incidence rate for melanoma has increased from 26.7 cases per 100,000 persons to 57.3 cases per 100,000 persons.² Improvements in diagnostic methods could explain for some of this increase.

The incidence rate for melanoma increases with age, peaking between 85 and 89 years of age. In 2023, the risk of being diagnosed with melanoma by the 85 is 1 in 21 for women and 1 in 14 for men.²

Melanoma rates also differ by state and/or territory, with people living in Queensland at highest risk of developing melanoma, followed by Tasmania, New South Wales, Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Victoria and South Australia.² In 2019, people living in Queensland were 1.4 times more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma than the Australian population.²

Mortality

In 2023, there were estimated to be 1,314 deaths from melanoma (853 men and 461 women) in Australia.² The mortality rate for melanoma also increases with age.

During the period 1971-2021, age-standardised mortality rates for melanoma have increased slightly, from 3.4 deaths per 100,000 to 4.4 deaths per 100,000 persons.²

Survival

In 2015-2019, the five-year relative survival rate for melanoma was 93.6%.² During the same period, five-year relative survival was higher for women compared to men (95.4% vs. 92.4%).²

Since 1990-1994, five-year relative survival rates have improved by nearly 4%.² Improvements in survival could be associated with earlier detection and diagnosis, however survival rates vary considerably by stage at diagnosis. For people diagnosed at Stage I (thin tumours and localised disease), the 5-year relative survival rate for melanoma is nearly 100%, but only 26% when diagnosed at Stage IV (metastatic disease).⁵ As such, further improvements in detection and treatment options are needed to reduce the substantial morbidity and mortality associated with the advanced disease.

Keratinocyte cancers

Incidence

KCs are the most common cancer in Australia and are estimated to account for more cancer cases than all other cancers combined.⁶ However, data on KC incidence are not routinely collected on any state and/or territory cancer databases, apart from Tasmania, meaning the actual number is unknown. A national registry for KC would help to accurately identify the extent of the disease and track progress against national cancer control efforts.

Analysis of Medicare data for KC treatments during 2011-2014 estimated the age-standardised rates for BCC and SCC were 770 (per 100,000) and 270 (per 100,000) person-years respectively.⁶

Between 1997 and 2010, the total number of treatments for KCs increased by 86%, from 412,493 to 767,347.⁷ It was also estimated that the number of KC treatments would increase by a further 22% between 2010 and 2015.⁷

Although KC incidence has been increasing, KC excision rates declined significantly among men and women younger than 45 years in the period from 2000-2011.⁸ This suggests incidence rates for KCs are decreasing in young Australians. However, there must be ongoing national investment in prevention and early detection of skin cancer to maintain the improvements made in raising awareness of sun protective behaviours and attitudes, and encouraging early detection, particularly among the younger generation of Australians.

Mortality

In 2022, there were estimated to be 791 deaths from KC (533 men and 258 women) in Australia,² predominantly from metastatic squamous cell carcinoma (SCC).

During the period 1971 – 2021, KC age-standardised mortality rates have remained relatively stable, from 1.9 deaths per 100,000 to 2.1 deaths per 100,000 persons.²

Economic impact

In 2018-19, health system expenditure for the diagnosis, treatment and pathology of skin cancer was more than \$1.6 billion.⁴ It was estimated that melanoma costs the Australian health system \$357 million, and KCs \$1.3 billion.⁴

Skin cancer is the most expensive cancer to treat in Australia – more than breast, prostate or lung cancer.⁴ Ongoing national investment in prevention, early detection and treatment is needed.

ACD Statement – Impact of skin cancer in Australia

References

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This statement is also available online. For more topics, visit dermcoll.edu.au or scan the QR code.

About us

Dermatologists are doctors who are the medical specialists in skin health. The Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD):

- Trains and supports dermatologists
- Advocates for better skin health for our communities
- Sets the clinical standard in dermatology



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