Local Government
Improving sun protection across the community

This resource guide has been prepared to help you identify opportunities for Local Government leadership in improving sun protection practices across the community, particularly through the council integrated planning framework.\(^1\)

**How is your community affected?**

Australia has among the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Two in three Australians (two in three men and three in five women) will develop some form of skin cancer before the age of 70.\(^2\) Almost all skin cancers are caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or other sources, such as solaria.

- Skin cancer costs the Australian health system around $300 million annually: more than any other cancer.\(^3\) Every year 1,700 Australians die from skin cancer.\(^4\)
- Melanoma is the fourth most common cancer in Australia.\(^5\) In 2007 in NSW, melanoma was the most common cancer in males aged 25 to 54 years and in females aged 15 to 29 years.\(^6\)
- There is a higher rate of melanoma in NSW coastal areas, particularly the far north coast region.\(^7\)
- The national (projected) figure for non-melanoma skin cancer (basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma) is 434,000 new cases every year.\(^8\)

Due to its prevalence, skin cancer affects every community in NSW. The good news is that by reducing exposure to the sun’s UV radiation, the vast majority of skin cancers can be prevented.

**How is this relevant to Local Government?**

Local councils have a deep knowledge of their communities and can influence outcomes through their unique roles in planning and service provision at the local level. As the tier of government closest to local communities, council leadership on this issue can complement the role of other government agencies and non-government organisations in providing localised solutions to the problem of excessive sun exposure and skin cancer risk.

Councillors are responsible for overseeing a range of recreational opportunities, facilities, open spaces and events where community members are exposed to the sun. Comprehensively addressing sun protection will enhance the health and wellbeing of everyone in the community, and it will ultimately reduce skin cancer rates. It will contribute to making your Local Government Area a healthy, sun-safe and family-friendly place to be. Councils can improve sun protection practices by increasing natural and built shade in public spaces through better planning and design, and by encouraging sun-safe behaviours of their residents, visitors and council employees.
How can councils help?
Through their many roles and responsibilities, councils already make a major difference to community health and wellbeing. Councils can also make significant contributions towards improving sun protection across the community, and this will minimise future social, financial and health costs of skin cancer:

- **As a planning authority**, a council makes decisions about the built and natural environment that affect the availability of shade.
- **As a service provider**, a council can implement management systems across its range of services, facilities, open spaces and events to improve sun-safety and the availability of shade.
- **As a community leader**, a council can nurture a social environment that is supportive of sun-safety. A council can implement community education and support initiatives to promote sun-safe behaviours.
- **As an employer**, a council can actively support the health and wellbeing of its staff and by doing so, increase employee health and improve work productivity.

An integrated approach
Your council is encouraged to take a strategic approach toward addressing sun exposure and skin cancer risks affecting your community. This can be progressed by consulting the community. Ask community members what they think, how are they affected, and what they believe would help to address the issue. Priorities and objectives relating to health and wellbeing in the Community Strategic Plan can be the catalyst to progressing strategies and activities across the broader planning framework that encourage sun-safe behaviours and improve the availability of shade.

As outlined in the Planning and Reporting Guidelines produced by the NSW Division of Local Government, the four dimensions of ‘the quadruple bottom line’ of social, environmental, economic and civic leadership all lend themselves to broad objectives that will pave the way for activities and initiatives to increase people’s capacity to be sun-safe.9

By way of example, the Community Strategic Plan could include the objectives:

- **to promote the health and wellbeing of our community**
- **to reduce preventable diseases and promote healthy lifestyles in our community**

A corresponding strategy could be:

- **to reduce skin cancer risk across the community by improving sun protection opportunities through community programs and council workplace initiatives, and by increasing available shade in public places through improved design and function.**

Relevant Community Strategic Plan objectives and strategies can then be translated into programs, projects and activities that will improve the social and physical environment, making it easier for people to be sun-safe. These activities and initiatives can be included in the Delivery Program and Operational Plans.

Skin cancer costs the Australian health system around $300 million annually: more than any other cancer.3 Every year 1,700 Australians die from skin cancer.4
Actions councils can take

The following questions will help you with reviewing what your council is currently doing to improve the health and wellbeing of the community in relation to sun protection and shade provision. There are also suggested activities and initiatives to help you implement and measure relevant objectives and strategies contained in the Community Strategic Plan. Your council can adopt a variety of measures that can significantly improve community wellbeing in your Local Government Area.

**Translating community priorities into action**

- **Which ‘health and wellbeing’ objectives and strategies in the Community Strategic Plan have relevance to reducing the risk of preventable diseases and to fostering healthy lifestyles across the community?**

- **Specifically, which objectives and strategies have relevance to increasing the levels of sun protection and shade provision for the community?**

**Taking action**

A starting place is to consider suitable activities and initiatives that flow from the Community Strategic Plan and can be included in the Delivery Program, or promoted to other agencies. Cancer Council is a relevant stakeholder in the community that may be engaged in consultations to develop the Community Strategic Plan and to put relevant objectives and strategies into action. Contact your nearest Cancer Council office (see back page).

**Plans of Management for community land**

- **How is your council planning improvements to shade provision in its Plans of Management for community land, in particular parks, reserves and open spaces? What should be included in the future?**

**Taking action**

Council can insert into its policy and/or process for reviewing and preparing Plans of Management the requirement that shade provision is explicitly considered. When Plans of Management are due for review, identify ways to incorporate shade improvement initiatives such as more natural shade (trees) and built shade (sails, awnings).

Your council can conduct an audit of the amount of shade available on all community land across the Local Government Area. The audit information will provide a baseline assessment and help to identify specific sites that need an increase in shade options. Shade provision improvements can then be incorporated into the relevant Plan of Management for the identified sites, enabling actions and resource allocation as part of the overall Plan.

**Resources and further information**

For information about shade design, planning and conducting shade audits, visit www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart to order or download the booklet The Shade Handbook and various shade information sheets that cover a range of settings relevant to Local Government.
Provisions for Development Control

How can contracts and hire agreements for council-owned kiosks, groups who use facilities and open spaces, and council-supported events incorporate sun protection conditions or considerations?

Taking action
Councils are required by the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 to consider the public interest when assessing development applications, including considerations for public health and safety.

Councils may consider the preparation of a Development Control Plan that covers public health issues generally, or sun protection issues more specifically.

Sun-safe lease and hire agreements

How can contracts and hire agreements for council-owned kiosks, groups who use facilities and open spaces, and council-supported events incorporate sun protection conditions or considerations?

Taking action
Require that event organisers and community and sports groups leasing council facilities and spaces state how sun-safety will be addressed at their event, by including relevant questions on hire forms. Addressing sun protection as a component of safety management can be an explicit condition of hiring council spaces.

Encourage or require operators of council kiosks at pools, parks, sportsgrounds, beaches and pools to retail sun protection products, such as sunscreen, hats and sunglasses.

Resources and further information
Education and services to the community

Which community services offered by your council can incorporate programs and initiatives that educate and support members of the community to be sun-safe, and how can council raise awareness of the risk of skin cancer?

Taking action

Undertake local initiatives that raise the community’s awareness of sun protection measures and the importance of detecting skin cancer early by regularly checking the skin and speaking with a GP about skin cancer.

As part of your council’s community service programs, include initiatives that support and help community members to lead sun-safe lifestyles. Display sun-safety and skin cancer prevention information at council premises and public spaces (including libraries, community centres, swimming pools, sportsgrounds and beaches).

Other measures can be taken:

- Install signs or integrate into existing signage a reminder for the public to be sun-safe.
- Install free sunscreen dispensers at supervised sites.
- Distribute information about how to hold a sun-safe event or activity to sporting and community groups which use council spaces and facilities.
- Make regular ‘sun-safe reminder’ announcements at facilities and events with a public address system.
- Include in Mayoral columns and other council publications health messages related to sun-safety, and promote council’s commitment to improving sun protection levels in the community, the initiatives being undertaken and the partnership with Cancer Council.
- Have council-branded portable shade marquees that could be freely loaned to community and sports groups. Marquees can be made available for regular sporting fixtures on council grounds and used for community events that are held or sponsored by your council.

Resources and further information


SunSmart children’s services

What policies and practices are in place for council-operated children’s services that ensure sun-safe practices are being followed?

Taking action

Ensure all council-operated childcare services have a ‘best practice’ SunSmart policy that is in line with Cancer Council recommendations. Childcare centres and family day care schemes can be confident in their management of sun-safety by joining Cancer Council’s SunSmart Early Childhood Program.

Resources and further information

Fostering a sun-safe workplace

How does council incorporate sun-safety into its occupational health and safety program, in particular for staff working outdoors?

How can sun protection be integrated into all aspects of the employee health and wellbeing program?

Taking action

In order to address duty of care under the NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000, your council can have a comprehensive sun protection policy for employees. Such a policy will outline the responsibilities of both employees and management in managing the risk of sun exposure.

Additional to this, incorporate a range of initiatives into the broader health and wellbeing program of council:

- Regularly provide printed information and training to all staff about prevention and early detection of skin cancer.
- Require worksite supervisors to demonstrate good sun protection behaviour.
- Provide free sunscreen to all staff, not just outdoor workers.
- Ensure all staff events have risk-management processes that minimise sun exposure.

Resources and further information

Visit www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart for a range of brochures and posters suitable for staff. Download or order the booklet Skin Cancer and Outdoor work: A guide for employers, which outlines ‘best practice’ methods for sun-safety risk management and includes a policy guide (select ‘Workplaces’).

Cancer Council values the achievements of councils and would like to share news of your successes across the Local Government sector and the general community. Please send details of your local initiatives to localgovernment@nswcc.org.au
## Information and support

### Cancer Council NSW

- For discussion and advice with undertaking initiatives and for input as a community stakeholder, please contact your nearest Cancer Council office (see back page).

### Area Health Service and Local Government Area data

To help inform your planning, refer to NSW Health publications that report on the health status of the community:


The Australian Bureau of Statistics is a useful source of data about your community: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

### Climate change

Initiatives that improve the level of sun protection and shade provision may also help address the effects of climate change, such as increasing temperatures. The Climate Change Action Pack includes various resources prepared for NSW Local Government. Visit [www.lgsa-plus.net.au](http://www.lgsa-plus.net.au), an initiative of Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW.

### References


Images supplied courtesy of Queensland Health 2008.
Contact details

Cancer Council NSW Head Office
153 Dowling Street,
Woolloomooloo NSW 2011
Ph (02) 9334 1900, Fax (02) 8302 3500
Helpline 13 11 20
cancercouncil.com.au

Metropolitan Sydney
(Central, Northern and Southern Sydney)
Cancer Council NSW
153 Dowling Street,
Woolloomooloo NSW 2011
Ph (02) 9334 1900, Fax (02) 8302 3570
info.metro@nswcc.org.au

Greater Western Sydney
Rotary House, 43 Hunter Street,
Parramatta NSW 2150
Ph (02) 9354 2000, Fax (02) 9687 1118
info.westernsydney@nswcc.org.au

Southern Region
1 Lowden Square, Wollongong NSW 2500
Ph (02) 4223 0200, Fax (02) 4225 1700
info.southern@nswcc.org.au

Hunter Region
22 Lambton Road, Broadmeadow NSW 2292
Ph (02) 4923 0700, Fax (02) 4961 0955
info.hunter@nswcc.org.au

Central Coast
The Hive, Erina Fair, Erina NSW 2250
Ph (02) 4336 4500, Fax (02) 4367 5895
info.centralcoast@nswcc.org.au

North West Region
Shop 2, 218 Peel Street, Tamworth NSW 2340
Ph (02) 6763 0900, Fax (02) 6766 7053
info.northwest@nswcc.org.au

Far North Coast
101-103 Main Street, Alstonville NSW 2477
Ph (02) 6627 0300, Fax (02) 6628 8659
info.farnorthcoast@nswcc.org.au

Mid North Coast
121 High Street, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450
Ph (02) 6659 8400, Fax (02) 6652 1530
info.midnorthcoast@nswcc.org.au

South West Region
1/37 Tompson Street
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650
Ph (02) 6937 2600, Fax (02) 6921 3680
info.southwest@nswcc.org.au

Western Region
75 Kite Street, Orange NSW 2800
Ph (02) 6392 0800, Fax (02) 6361 7425
info.western@nswcc.org.au