

# DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

9 November 2021

## SunSmart Messaging

### Intro

Australia is world-renown for our outdoor lifestyle, sporting activities and sun-drenched summers. Exposure to sunshine and Vitamin D has many positive outcomes for our mental health and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, however, there many disadvantages if we don't practice sun-safe behaviours and activity.

Australia, together with New Zealand, lead the world in skin cancer rates— despite it being one of the most easily preventable forms of cancer.

Many of us here in the Assembly will have grown up in the 1980s with the Cancer Council's 'Slip, Slop, Slap' sun-safety messaging.

Today, it's been further extended to become 'Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek and Slide':

Slip on sun protective clothing,

Slop on SPV30+ sunscreen,

Slap on a hat - one that protects your face, head, neck and ears,

Seek shade or shelter, and

Slide on some UV protection sunglasses to block out the sun.

It's catchy, and it's effective - Our kids are excellent at practicing it!

Our schools are excellent at sun smart practices, to the extent that children are unable to go outdoors during school hours in the playground if they don't have a hat between August and May.

And, often, children are the ones reminding their parents and caregivers on weekends to slip, slop, slap.

However, somewhere along the way, it seems that – while we remember the message – we often neglect to practice it.

## Research

I was contacted recently by a constituent who's undertaken research in this space in the ACT.

Dr Vangelis Kanellis is a lecturer at the ANU College of Health and Medicine as well as a Medical Registrar and Honorary Dermatology Registrar at the Canberra Hospital. Him and his wife, also Dr Kanellis, conducted research that sought to understand the efficacy and effect of sun-smart awareness and practices by parents and primary caregivers at a public playground in the ACT.

They undertook their research in the 2019 summer, asking parents and caregivers about their perspectives on the importance of sun smart messaging and behaviour. The findings identified that:

- nearly one-third of caregivers at that playground were not wearing sunscreen;
- nearly three-quarters were not wearing a sun-safe hat for their entire period of time at the playground;
- over 80% believe it is important to model sun smart behaviours;
- 93% stated a desire for government-supported sun safety messaging at playgrounds to reinforce and support good sun-safety practices by parents/adults and the child/children in their care.

There is clearly work to be done here!

## Skin cancer

There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and melanoma.

The main cause of skin cancer – the cause of over 95% of them – is a result of over-exposure to UV radiation.

We all know that UV radiation emits from the sun, as well as artificial sources such as solariums. Australia has banned the use of solariums because research has shown that people who use them have a higher risk of developing skin cancer. This is one preventative measure we, as a nation, have taken; and that's great!

However, unfortunately, most areas of Australia experience high levels of sun-related UV radiation year-round.

The World Health Organisation notes that higher UV radiation levels are associated with countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, located in low latitude zones and that long-term, repeated UV radiation exposure is a major risk factor for skin cancers.

Compounded to this, some members of our community are at greater risk of developing skin cancer than others, including:

- those with fair or freckled skin;
- people who have light-coloured or red hair and light coloured eyes;
- people who work or otherwise spend extended periods of time outdoors; and
- those with a family history of skin cancers.

The Cancer Council notes that around two in three Australians will be diagnosed with some form of skin cancer before the age of 70.

That's way too many people, for what can be an effectively preventable form of cancer.

Further, Sun Smart Australia reports that around 2,000 Australians die from skin cancer each year, and that Medicare records indicate the treatment of more than 100 skin cancers every hour across the country.

The cost to the nation's health system is estimated to be more than \$700 million annually.

While skin cancers are often diagnosed in those aged over 40 and can sometimes develop very quickly – in as little as six weeks – activities which lead to cancer can be the result of behaviour undertaken when a person is much younger.

Melanoma is the most common cancer affecting 18–35-year olds; those who are most likely to be standing around ACT playgrounds, supervising children.

Cricket is another example where people, often in this age group, are exposed to UV radiation for lengthy periods of time and must take extra caution to ensure they practice sun smart behaviour.

### Prevention

The good news here is that skin cancers are one of the most easily preventable forms of cancer.

And, theoretically, I think most of us are well aware of what we *should* be doing to reduce our risk. Including, as adults, to model good behaviour for our children.

But research indicates that, in practice, we're not always very good at it; despite knowing that we should be, and despite thinking it important that we practice sun smart behaviour.

Research further indicates that improved messaging, aimed at adults – including parents and caregivers in and around children's play spaces, where they're often spending long periods of time exposed to UV radiation – can help to support behavioural change and positive health outcomes.

The 2020-21 ACT Budget has committed significant funding for upgrades to various playgrounds across the ACT.

I'm particularly pleased to have recently seen the funding commitment, and final designs for the Duffy shops – including playground space – in my electorate.

During community consultation, one of the most important issues raised was the need for shade cover at the playground.

I'm really pleased to see this included in the final designs, and I know the community are too. Thank you, Minister Steel, and your hard-working team in the Transport and City Services Directorate for delivering exactly what the community has requested.

Shade cover certainly ticks one of those five boxes of slip, slop, slap, seek and slide; and will go a long way towards helping prevent unnecessary skin cancers in our community.

### Motion

Madame Speaker, I bring this motion to the Assembly today to call on the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to explore opportunities to convey more sun smart and sun safety messaging in ACT playgrounds, aimed at parents and primary caregivers.

The ACT is a progressive jurisdiction and leads the way with so many positive initiatives.

Let's start leading the way in a reduction of skin cancer rates among members of our community. Let's do more to convey those really important messages about sun smart and sun safety behaviours; and let's work with key stakeholder organisations to help spread those messages together – organisations like the Cancer Council, SunSmart, our sporting bodies and groups and others.

We have many talented local artists in our community who can develop murals, posters and other forms of signage, to provide important messages and reminders to help prevent skin cancer.

Improved sun smart messaging will help individuals in our community and will provide a broad public health benefit for dermatology and skin cancer prevention strategies.

Thank you.

## Ends

### Closing Speech

Thank you, Madame Speaker; and to my colleagues for your support of this motion.

I believe it is a timely motion, and timely to be talking about the effects of UV radiation and skin cancer, as we head into our summer months.

It's easy to become complacent, to forget the harsh effects of the Australian summer that we love so much, and for which we are the envy of many parts of the world.

But let's not become complacent about our long-term health and wellbeing.

Our younger generations are pretty good at preventative actions to help reduce their chances of developing skin cancer later in life.

And, often, this is at the hand of their parents and caregivers – schoolteachers ensuring that children aren't in the playgrounds without a hat, and parents slopping sunscreen on the arms of a child at a local playground.

But what about those parents and caregivers looking after themselves and practicing good role model behaviour.

I think we, the members of this Assembly, have a responsibility to help adults in our community, who are often too busy helping their dependants, to adopt improved sun smart and sun safety practices.

I look forward to seeing artwork and murals conveying sun smart and sun safety messaging for adults at playgrounds across the ACT.

Thank you.