

Cancer Council ACT uses Census data to tailor its SunSmart programs

Striving to achieve its vision of a cancer-free future, Cancer Council ACT uses Census data to target the right demographic groups with education and prevention initiatives.

Cancer Council ACT provides a variety of services for people in the region affected by cancer. This includes advocacy, local cancer research funding, access to its information and support phone line, and prevention programs like SunSmart.

The SunSmart program uses age, education and ancestry data from the Census to target settings where it can have the most impact on reducing future skin cancer rates in Canberra. This includes places like childcare centres, schools and workplaces.

Cancer Council ACT Chief Executive Officer Sandra Turner said skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia. At least two in three people are diagnosed before the age of 75.

"While anyone can develop a skin cancer, including a deadly melanoma, and everyone needs sun protection, the risk appears to be significantly higher among certain demographic groups," Ms Turner said.

"Census age and ancestry data offers us a better understanding of the age breakdown and ancestry of the Canberra population so we can tailor our SunSmart Program.

"2016 Census data tells us there are more than 90,000 Canberrans aged 55 plus. We know many have had years of sun exposure, making them very susceptible to UV-related skin damage and skin cancer, including melanoma.

"Early detection is so important and skin cancer is the most preventable type of cancer.

"We need to reach a large cohort of Canberrans to share a very simple but important early cancer detection public health message."

Similarly, Ms Turner said the SunSmart Early Childhood and School Programs are critical components in early intervention efforts to reduce future skin cancer rates in the ACT.

"According to the 2016 Census, roughly one in five Canberrans are aged under 14 years, and there were approximately 38,500 children attending a pre-school or primary school every day in the ACT.

"Preventing skin cancer starts early in life. By rolling out our early intervention and detection awareness to early childhood services and primary schools, 38,500 young Canberrans are being SunSmart at least five days a week from about the age of one to 12 years. This significantly reduces the risk of skin cancer.

"The Census gives us a snapshot every five years to help plan future programs, assess needs, and ensure we work with the right people, in the right places, at the right time," she said.