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Response from the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to the *Inquiry into skin cancer in Australia*

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the *Inquiry into skin cancer in Australia*. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) commends the Federal Government for facilitating discussion in this important area.

VicHealth is a pioneer in health promotion – the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. Established by the Victorian Parliament as part of the *Tobacco Act 1987*, our primary focus is promoting good health and preventing chronic disease. We do this by creating and funding world-class interventions and conducting vital research. We produce and support public campaigns and provide expertise and insights to government.

Above all we seek to make health gains among all Victorians by pre-empting and targeting improvements in health across our population, fostered within the day-to-day spaces where people spend their time.

For more information, see the [VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion](#), our key strategic document outlining the work to be undertaken over the next ten years.

VicHealth, in partnership with Cancer Council Victoria, has been a world leader in skin cancer prevention for over 25 years through providing funding for the SunSmart program in Victoria. In this time, we have made some great achievements including:

- While melanoma incidence in Victoria continues to rise, there are now falling incidence rates in men and women under the age of 40, who have grown up with the SunSmart message.
- Since the program began, the percentage of Victorians aged 14-69 using sunscreen on summer weekends has more than doubled, from less than 15% in 1987-88 to more than 34% in 2010-11.
- VicHealth, along with SunSmart and other health organisations, played a considerable role in advocating for legislation to ban commercial tanning units in Victoria. Victoria was one of the first states in Australia to legislate solarium use, which will be introduced in January 2015. Subsequently, there has been a 65% drop in the number of solarium sites in Victoria since solarium legislation was introduced.

- The SunSmart primary school program, which provides schools with sun protection guidelines, policy and curriculum resources, has grown substantially with 90% of Victorian primary schools registered in the program. This is one of the highest participation rates of any public health program in Australia, reaching approximately 430,000 Victorian school children.
- In the workplace, the SunSmart message has reached at least 8,000 participants and significantly improved workers' knowledge about sun exposure as a work place hazard and how to protect themselves from the sun.

The key to these achievements is the use of a combination of individual-directed strategies, mass media campaigns, and advocacy for environmental and policy change. This multi component, community wide approach is well documented to be effective for sustained behaviour change.

VicHealth also contributed to the development of the *Skin Cancer Prevention Framework 2013-2017* in Victoria and supports this whole-of-government approach to skin cancer prevention.

While significant gains have been made in Victoria and other States and Territories, these are limited by the lack of national leadership to prevent skin cancer to date. VicHealth therefore supports the development of a national framework on the prevention of skin cancer and considers this would strengthen the effectiveness of state-based interventions. VicHealth also supports the development of national campaign to increase the understanding of the health consequences of unsafe sun exposure and encourage sun protection behaviours.

