

## **An Open Letter to Government Members of WA Parliament**

### **Cut skin cancer risk. Turn off commercial UV radiation machines now.**

**As of 1 January 2015, Western Australia will be the only state in Australia without a ban on commercial solarium operations.**

Solaria, sunbeds or tanning booths are machines that expose people to extreme levels of ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Excess levels of UVR contribute to skin cancer risk, and Australians have the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. In 2009, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified solaria as 'carcinogenic to humans'.<sup>1</sup>

Solaria are allowed to emit levels of UVR up to three times as strong as the summer midday sun.<sup>2</sup> However, a recent study found that 15% of solaria exceed this level – some emitting up to six times more UVA than summer sun.<sup>3</sup>

One in six melanomas in Australians aged 18 to 29 years would be prevented if sun beds were shut down.<sup>4</sup> In WA from 2008 to 2012, 81 cases of melanoma were diagnosed in people aged 15 – 29.<sup>5</sup> Each year about 281 melanoma cases, 43 melanoma deaths, and 2,572 cases of squamous cell carcinoma due to solarium use could be prevented, saving the health system around \$3 million.<sup>6</sup>

Solarium use for boosting Vitamin D levels is not safe or justifiable. The UVR exposure from solaria is far in excess of that necessary to maintain Vitamin D and would be an extremely poor, even dangerous, remedy to the issue.

There is no published evidence that proves exposure to commercial sunbeds is safe, or even safer than in home use. The time and the intensity of exposure determine level of skin damage.

Eighty percent of Melbourne operators allowed underage teenagers to access solaria, contrary to the rules. Almost half of the surveyed operators granted access to people with very pale skin, who are also banned from solarium use. Just 10% of operators surveyed were fully compliant with all conditions of the regulations.<sup>7</sup> A 2006 review of the WA Solarium industry also found very poor compliance with the rules at that time.<sup>8</sup>

The proposed ban, as it will operate in all other Australian states, will not ban in-home solaria. There are no reliable estimates of the number of private sunbeds in WA homes. We strongly recommend against private use of solaria. This issue has not been a barrier to the commercial ban elsewhere. The Government can ban commercial solaria – which we suggest accounts for the majority of solarium exposure for Western Australians. To miss this opportunity because private sun beds are not controlled, makes no sense.

We will monitor sunbeds in private homes through our regular surveys. If there is evidence of these machines creating a major concern, we'll work with government to tackle that problem.

The impact of a ban on small business will be minimal. Of the 28 solarium operators in WA in 2012, none relied solely on sunbeds for their income. All offered other services.<sup>9</sup> It seems time they focused their business interests elsewhere rather than adding to the already enormous skin cancer burden.

**As Members of WA Parliament, YOU have a public service responsibility to act on this matter. We hope you do.**

- <sup>1</sup> El Ghissassi F, Baan R, Straif K, Grosse Y, Secretan B, Bouvard V, et al. [A review of human carcinogens--part D: radiation](#). *Lancet Oncol* 2009 Aug;10(8):751-2
- <sup>2</sup> Standards Australia, Standards New Zealand. [Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2635 \(Solaria for cosmetic purposes\)](#). Sydney, Australia; 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Gies P, Javorniczky J, Henderson S, McLennan A, Roy C, Lock J, et al. [UVR emissions from solaria in Australia and implications for the regulation process](#). *Photochem Photobiol* 2011 Jan;87(1):184-90
- <sup>4</sup> Cust AE, Armstrong BK, Goumas C, Jenkins MA, Schmid H, Hopper JL, et al. [Sunbed use during adolescence and early adulthood is associated with increased risk of early-onset melanoma](#). *Int J Cancer* 2011 May 15;128(10):2425-35.
- <sup>5</sup> WA Cancer Registry. Threlfall TJ, Thompson JR (2014). Department of Health, Western Australia, Perth.
- <sup>6</sup> Gordon LG, Hirst NG, Gies PH, Green AC. [What impact would effective solarium regulation have in Australia?](#) *Med J Aust* 2008 Oct 6;189(7):375-8
- <sup>7</sup> Makin JK, Hearne K, Dobbins SJ. [Compliance with age and skin type restrictions following the introduction of indoor tanning legislation in Melbourne, Australia](#). *Photodermatol Photoimmunol Photomed* 2011 Dec;27(6):286-93
- <sup>8</sup> Environmental Health Directorate, WA Dept. of Health. A Survey of the Solaria Industry Western Australia. October 2006  
[http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/1484/2/a\\_survey\\_of\\_the\\_solaria\\_industry\\_in\\_wa.pdf](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/1484/2/a_survey_of_the_solaria_industry_in_wa.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> Cancer Council WA. Solarium tanning services in Western Australia. 2013 Perth