

**DISEASE SPIRALS**

\$8m skin cancer ads 'to cut costs'

| Cathy O'Leary

WA cancer experts want the Federal Government to spend \$8 million a year on a mass media campaign about sun protection to stem the increasing cost of skin cancers.

They will tell a parliamentary inquiry in Perth this week that almost one million non-melanoma skin cancers alone were expected to be treated next year nationally.

The Cancer Council's submission calls on the Government to spend \$32 million over four years on the campaign and to consider measures such as subsidised sunscreen to make it cheaper and more accessible.

It says Canberra spent \$6 million in 2006-07 on the first media campaign for skin cancer but the money was stripped back in 2009-10 and since then State governments mostly funded prevention campaigns.

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Terry Slevin

Cancer Council WA director of education and research Terry Slevin said skin cancer treatment now cost well over \$1 billion a year in Australia and there was a need for education.

"It's an ongoing game and it's not something you do once and forget," he said. "We've got good evidence it does make a difference and can result in big changes in behaviour.

"We know it's tough economic circumstances but the truth for the Government is that if they don't make a modest investment now, it's going to cost a lot more down the track."

WA Liberal Steve Irons, who is chairing the inquiry, said there was no doubt skin cancer was a major health issue that needed continuing resources to prevent, diagnose and treat.

He did not have skin cancer statistics for 2011 yet but the last big Federal public campaign was in 2009, so there was no indication yet of the effect from that lack of campaigns.

"The figures coming through show our younger population are getting the message, but baby boomers are still causing a blowout in diagnoses," Mr Irons said.

He said it was suggested it could be worthwhile to screen some age groups for skin cancer in the same way as bowel and breast cancer checks.

Another issue raised was that growing awareness about sun protection seemed to have triggered a big industry in costly vitamin D testing.