

**Study finds NZ's melanoma rates highest in world – experts call for realistic funding
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Melanoma experts are calling for increased action by the New Zealand government to address this country's world-leading melanoma rates.

A new study has found New Zealand has overtaken Australia as having the highest per capita rates of invasive melanoma in the world. Invasive melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer. The study was undertaken by Queensland researchers and published today in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*.

MelNet¹ spokesperson Associate Professor Tony Reeder of the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine at the University of Otago, says for more than a decade New Zealand has lacked high-level commitment to, and adequate investment in, skin cancer prevention.

“Despite growing evidence that skin cancer prevention initiatives can help avoid melanoma and save lives, governments have not been willing to adequately fund them.

“This is despite skin cancer being identified in 2002 by the Expert Working Group on Cancer Primary Prevention as a priority for *The New Zealand Cancer Control Strategy*.

“Our politicians dropped the ball and unless there is increased funding and a high-level commitment, more New Zealanders than Australians will continue to develop potentially preventable skin cancers.”

Professor Reeder says one example of lack of Government commitment is the failure to ban commercial cosmetic sunbed services in New Zealand. “In stark contrast, Australia acted decisively to protect its population by implementing a comprehensive ban.”

Dr Ben Tallon, speaking on behalf of MelNet and Melanoma New Zealand² says the time has come for the Government to get serious about preventing skin cancer – with a serious commitment to funding prevention strategies.

“The study found that, while Australia's melanoma rates have been declining since 2005, our rates are still increasing and are not expected to start falling until about 2017. The Government is now facing big health bills as increasing numbers of people develop invasive melanoma.

“This study should be a wake-up call. Skin cancer prevention initiatives are highly cost effective³ and an important public health investment. It's an investment the New Zealand Government must make.”

Professor David Whiteman, one of the study researchers, was a Cancer Society funded plenary speaker at the Melanoma Summit 2015 in Auckland.

¹ MelNet is a network of professionals working together to reduce the incidence and impact of melanoma in New Zealand. For more information, see: <http://melnet.org.nz/>

² Melanoma New Zealand is a charity whose mission is to prevent avoidable deaths from melanoma and alleviate anxiety among those affected by it. For more information, see: <http://melanoma.org.nz/>

³ <http://melnet.org.nz/news/2015/health-and-economic-benefits-of-investing-in-skin-cancer-prevention>