

**Media Release**

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## **From dogs sniffing cancer to alternative therapies: Cancer Council bust the myths**

New Cancer Council data shows common cancer myths

- 2 in 3 or 67% of Australians agree that animals can sniff out cancer
- 2 in 5 (40%) Australians believe that alternative therapies can cure cancer
- Nearly half (46%) believe sunscreen contains chemicals that are bad for you
- 8% of Australians don't realise you can get skin cancer even if you don't burn

Cancer Council is encouraging Australians to seek health information from credible sources this World Cancer Day (4 Feb) with new research showing common cancer myths are rife amongst Australians.

The research surveyed 1,000 Australians to form a nationally representative sample and found some alarming and potentially dangerous myths about cancer with Megan Varlow, Director of Cancer Control Policy and Cancer Council Australia explaining, "People affected by cancer are particularly vulnerable and we know that misinformation in cancer is rife.

"This is in part due to people looking to sell products or miracle cures but also due to misinformation filtering into the public sphere through unchecked sources like social media and the internet.

"Two in five Australians believed alternative therapies can cure cancer. One of the most misleading myths of modern medicine is that conventional cancer doctors reject "natural" therapies in favour of artificial or "unnatural" cancer treatments. This myth has contributed to the popularity of unproven, alternative cancer treatments.

"We've also seen a rise in companies touting "natural alternatives" as safer when in fact, we can be assured that any products that are available in Australia, from sunscreen to modern medicine have met stringent guidelines to ensure they are safe and effective."

Ms Varlow explained there were some concerning results about Australia's national cancer – skin cancer.

"The survey found that almost one in 10 Australians don't realise that you can get skin cancer even if you don't burn and nearly half of all Australians also mistakenly believe sunscreen contain chemicals that are bad for you. Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world so to see these myths are so prevalent is concerning.

"In Australia UV levels frequently reach extreme and sun damage can occur in just a few minutes, regardless of whether you burn so the message to slip, slop, slap, seek and slide is crucial for all of us.

"Sunscreens sold in Australia should be approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration which means they have meet some of the most stringent criteria in the world to ensure they are safe and effective.

"Products that market themselves as a "safer" alternative to a regular sunscreen may not have been tested by the TGA, so it is impossible to know if they are safe or provide the protection stated on the bottle, and therefore they may not be effective in preventing skin damage."

When examining behaviours, the survey found Australians were equally likely to have changed their behaviour based on something they read online (21.3%) as they were because of government information (22%). Over one in 10 Australia (12%) of Australians believe news they read on social media or articles on the internet are the most trustworthy sources of health information.

“Dealing with a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming and there can be an information overload. What is crucial is that we are seeking information from trusted sources like medical practitioners, the government or trusted charities and health organisations.”

Cancer Council’s website [cancer.org.au/iheard](http://cancer.org.au/iheard) provides information about common myths and their 13 11 20 information and support line is available to help those affected by cancer and their loved one.

“As for animals being able to sniff out cancer, while two in three of Australians (67%) agreed they could, studies have so far been limited and you’re best to seek the advice of your doctor rather than your furry friend if you’re concerned,” Ms Varlow concluded.

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Tegan Brown via the Cancer Council Australia media line: (02) 8063 4109 (diverts to mobile) or email [media@cancer.org.au](mailto:media@cancer.org.au)

\*To check if sunscreen is TGA approved, look for the reference to say it complies with AS/NZS 2604:2012.

## About World Cancer Day 2020

World Cancer Day takes place every year on 4 February and is the uniting global initiative under which the world comes together to raise the profile of cancer in a positive and inspiring way. Spearheaded by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), the day aims to save millions of preventable deaths each year by raising awareness and improving education about the disease while calling for action from governments and individuals across the world.

## Survey Results

### To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Slightly agree		Slightly disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
Animals can sniff out cancer	143	14.3%	237	23.7%	294	29.4%	154	15.4%	94	9.4%	78	7.8%	1,000
Sunscreens contain chemicals that are bad for you	58	5.8%	103	10.3%	302	30.2%	257	25.7%	168	16.8%	112	11.2%	1,000
Alternative therapies can cure cancer	47	4.7%	103	10.3%	254	25.4%	219	21.9%	171	17.1%	206	20.6%	1,000
You can get skin cancer even if you don’t burn	470	47.0%	282	28.2%	173	17.3%	22	2.2%	26	2.6%	27	2.7%	1,000

**Have you changed your behaviour in regard to your health as a result of any of the following? Please select all that apply.**

Value	Percent	Count
Advice from my doctor	53.6%	536
Government advertising or information	21.6%	216
A story I read on social media	14.4%	144
Something a friend told me	18.8%	188
Something I saw in the news	21.6%	216
An article I read online	21.3%	213
Something a health organisation or charity said	16.2%	162
None of the above	27.7%	277
Totals		1,000

**When thinking about health information, which of these sources do you believe is most trustworthy?**

Value	Percent	Count
News I read on social media	5.0%	50
Articles on the internet	6.9%	69
The news	12.7%	127
Information from the Government	43.0%	430
Other health related organisations or charities	32.4%	324
Totals		1,000