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UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 12.01 AM AEDT, SUNDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2026

15 November 2026

Generational sun safety gaps revealed in new Cancer Council Australia poll

Call for all Australians to build sun protection into daily life as Cancer Council Australia marks 45 years of 'Slip! Slop! Slap!'

New polling released today by Cancer Council Australia reveals that every generation of Australians has its own gap in sun safe knowledge or behaviour.

The YouGov survey findings for National Skin Cancer Action Week (15-22 November) come as Cancer Council Australia marks 45 years since Sid Seagull first shared 'Slip! Slop! Slap!'.

The results show a significant gap in understanding essential tools like the UV Index persists across all age groups, with nearly half of Australians (48%) reporting only basic or limited knowledge. Each generation, however, demonstrated unique sun safety strengths and weaknesses.

Gen Z were the most likely to say they had become more deliberate about sun protection over the past year (55%) but were also the most likely to report pressure to have a suntan. More than one in four (27%) said influencer suntanning content made them want a tan, and 26% said they feel pressure from friends, family or social media to have a tan during the warmer months.

Among those who seek sun safety information, Millennials were the most likely to look for scientific evidence or research when checking sunscreen or sun protection information online (38%, compared with 26% of Gen X and 27% of Baby Boomers), yet less than half (49%) have an adequate or strong understanding of the UV Index, and just 11% have a strong understanding, compared with 23% of Gen Z and 19% of Gen X. Gen X and Gen Z were the most likely to report an adequate or strong understanding (both 54%), although the gap between generations is small.

Among Australians who use sunscreen, Baby Boomers were the most likely to say they had not used it at all in the previous eight months (17%), compared with 5% of Gen Z, 4% of Millennials, and 7% of Gen X.

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Cancer Council Australia CEO Jacinta Reddan said the research showed sun safety messaging remained essential across every age group.

“This research shows that every generation has its own sun safety blind spot. While Australians are broadly aware of their skin cancer risk, many still have knowledge gaps that could increase their exposure to harmful UV radiation.

“We know that exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun is the main cause of skin cancer, and research has found that 50% of lifetime UV exposure happens before age 20[1], showing that sun protection habits established today can help lower your risk of skin cancer tomorrow. Studies also tell us that children are 12 times more likely to use sunscreen and three times more likely to wear a hat when they see their parents do it first, further emphasising that the benefits of sun-safe habits can last a lifetime, especially when introduced early.

“Australians of every age can benefit from regular reminders to protect their skin. Sun safe habits last a lifetime, and after 45 years of Sid Seagull, we want every generation to keep passing them on.”

The President of the Australasian College of Dermatologists, Dr Adrian Lim said:

“The skin cancers dermatologists diagnose today are often the result of sun exposure from decades ago. So, while it's encouraging to hear that younger people are using sun protection, there is a worrying trend reemerging around tanning. There’s no such thing as a safe tan. A tan is your skin’s response to UV damage, not a sign of health. And at every age, we encourage Australians to get to know their skin and if they notice any changes, to promptly visit their GP who may refer them to a dermatologist.”

Chair of Cancer Council’s National Skin Cancer Committee, Sally Blane, said Australians are encouraged to utilise the UV Index as a tool to guide when to use sun protection.

“Knowledge of the UV Index is an important tool to inform when to protect yourself from skin cancer, yet many people still do not fully understand what it means or when they need protection. UV radiation cannot be seen or felt — it can damage skin even on cool or overcast days. Checking the UV Index daily helps Australians know when levels are high enough to cause harm and when to reach for sun protection.

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"Fortunately, skin cancer is almost entirely preventable, and all generations can ensure they are protecting their skin from UV overexposure by making sun protection a daily habit."

Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime and 2,000 Australians die from skin cancer every year.

Cancer Council Australia encourages all Australians to check the UV Index using the free SunSmart Global UV app and use all five forms of sun protection whenever it reaches 3 or above.

For sun protection advice, visit cancer.org.au.

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About National Skin Cancer Action Week

National Skin Cancer Action Week (15 – 22 November) is an essential yearly reminder to everyone that whenever the UV Index is 3 or above to make sure you: Slip on sun protective clothing; Slop on broad-spectrum, water-resistant SPF50 or SPF50+ sunscreen; Slap on a broad-brimmed hat; Seek shade and Slide on Sunglasses. This year marks 45 years since Sid Seagull first introduced Slip! Slop! Slap!

- More information about National Skin Cancer Action Week is available on our website: National Skin Cancer Action Week 2026 | Combatting Australia's 'national cancer' | Cancer Council Australia
- Link to Little Sid Seagull competition: https://www.cancer.org.au/nscaw2026/win-little-sid-seagull
- Media assets are available here.

About the research

Independent research was conducted online by YouGov on behalf of Cancer Council Australia between 15-22 September 2026 among a nationally representative sample of 1,060 Australian adults aged 18 years and over. Results were weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the Australian population.

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About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working with the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to reduce cancer's impact by:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice