

## MEDIA RELEASE DECEMBER 2017

### **Employers getting better but millions of workers still exposed to risk of workplace sun damage**

The 2017 SHARC Report (Skin Health Australia Report Card) has found that over two million employees who work outdoors are not being provided with any sun protection by their employers.

The SHARC Report is based on a national population survey of skin health commissioned by the Skin & Cancer Foundation Inc in Melbourne.

The 2017 SHARC Report found that 45% of respondents are required to work outdoors sometimes, regularly or all the time. That is equivalent to eight million adult Australians. Despite this large figure, 57% of outdoor workers say their employers do not supply sunscreen, 66% do not supply protective clothing and 80% do not provide sunglasses.

Of concern, 28% of employees working outdoors were provided no protection at all by their employers. There has been improvement on the last three years – down from 44% in 2014 - yet there are still over two million employees whose employers are not providing any sun protection. Employers are potentially open to significant workers' compensation claims if their staff develop skin cancers or melanoma.

Associate Professor Chris Baker, a consultant dermatologist at the Skin & Cancer Foundation Inc, and Immediate Past President of the Australasian College of Dermatologists, said while employers were getting better, all employers should be adopting sun safe practices given the health risk to employees and their potential legal exposure.

“Two million employees left to fend for themselves for sun protection is unacceptable. Employers should be aware of their duty of care to staff when it comes to sun protection. They should consider providing, as appropriate to the work place conditions, a suite of options: sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, long-sleeved tops.”

Andrew Farr, Workplace Law Partner at PwC shared the view that the lax approach by many employers to sun protection was concerning.

“Given Australia’s robust Work Health and Safety standards and laws, I would hope to see more employers realising that it’s their responsibility to ensure that outdoor workers are protected from risk, and that includes sun damage and sunburn,” said Mr. Farr.

“Ideally, comprehensive sun protection would be provided to outdoor workers. It is important to stay compliant, minimise any liability to your business and do the right thing by your employees and their families. The technical definition of ‘comprehensive sun protection’ differs from state to state, so every employer should know their obligations to staff who work outdoors.”

While employers can and should help in Australia’s fight against skin cancer and melanoma, Associate Professor Bakers says it is ultimately down to each individual to be responsible for their skin health.

“That responsibility comes in many forms; be it protecting your skin from irritation, asking your employer to provide you with appropriate sun protection, or choosing an occupation appropriate for your skin health.”

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Sun damage isn't the only skin health issue employers ought to be considering. If the results of this year's SHARC Report are any indication, it seems that more Australians are in fact considering their skin when looking for work. 33% of survey respondents said that a skin condition had 'a little' to 'extreme' influence on their choice of occupation. That is the highest the figure has ever been during the four years of the survey and started out at just 19% in 2014.

Additionally, 12% of survey respondents, or equating to about two million Australians, have had to miss work in the past year because of a skin condition, and of those, nearly three in ten missed eleven to fifteen days because of that condition. This illustrates the economic impact of skin disease and a reason for employers to think and do more about their employees' skin health – especially when it comes to sun protection.

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*Copies of the 2017 SHARC Report can be downloaded from the Skin & Cancer Foundation Inc's website at [www.skincancer.asn.au](http://www.skincancer.asn.au)*

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