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Far from just cosmetic, skin issues are affecting our quality of life

The 2017 SHARC Report (Skin Health Australia Report Card) has found that over four in ten Australians believe that a skin condition affects their quality of life.

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 - or just over nine million Australians - said they experienced a skin condition. The five most common being itchy skin, acne, eczema, sun spots and psoriasis.

43% of adult Australians surveyed reported that a skin condition had a small to extremely large effect on their quality of life. That means about 8.6 million Australians have a skin condition that is impacting their life in some way.

This is the highest recorded result in the four years the SHARC Report has been published.

“The SHARC Report uses specialist tools to assess the effect of skin conditions on different areas of life. These range from being embarrassed about visible skin changes, avoiding activities or events to choice of clothing because of a skin issue,” said Associate Professor Chris Baker, a consultant dermatologist at the Skin and Cancer Foundation Inc, and Immediate Past President of the Australasian College of Dermatologists.

Respondents were asked if a skin condition had ‘no effect,’ ‘a small effect,’ ‘a moderate effect,’ ‘a very large effect,’ or ‘an extremely large effect’ on various daily activities, leisure time, professional time and their personal relationships.

“A number of significant and concerning results arose from these questions. For instance, 42% of respondents were embarrassed or self-conscious because of their skin. And that has been a steady increase over the four years of the report,” said Associate Professor Chris Baker.

20% of respondents also reported that a skin issue influenced their social and leisure activities. This was higher for younger age groups: 33% for 18 to 24 year olds, and 37% for 25 to 34 year olds. A significant proportion of 25 to 34 year olds – 44% – also reported that a skin issue affected the clothes they wore, well above the national average of 28%.

Skin issues also created problems with a partner, close friend or relative for 15% of respondents, and even caused sexual difficulties for 11%. Again, it was 25 to 34 year olds who were particularly affected at 29%.

“It is noteworthy that these numbers are increasing and that skin conditions are having an impact on the daily lives of so many Australians. Furthermore, we are finding that more and more Australians are unhappy with the way their skin looks. 36% said they were unhappy with that, up from last year’s result of 32%,” said Associate Professor Baker.

“People tend to underestimate the importance of skin health. The SHARC Report reveals the profound impact skin conditions are having on the lives of literally millions of Australians and the need for individuals and policy makers to prioritise skin health,” said Associate Professor Baker.

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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

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