

## The evidence for education and policy

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services has conducted systematic reviews of community interventions to reduce exposure to ultraviolet light. In a report published in October 2003, the authors assess the evidence for setting-specific, target population-specific and community-wide initiatives. <sup>1</sup>

The method applied to this review included the development of a conceptual model to show the relationship of the intervention to relevant intermediate outcomes (for example, knowledge, attitude and beliefs, and intentions regarding sun-protective behaviours) to the implementation of relevant sun protective behaviours and to the assumed relationships of improvements in sun protection behaviours to skin cancer prevention.

The conceptual model focused on the following key health outcomes:

- Sunburn or nevi (lesions or pigment-forming skin cells that can be a risk factor for melanoma.
- Sun protective behaviours including avoiding peak sun, covering up and sunscreen use.

Because of epidemiologic studies indicating that sunscreen use by itself could be harmful if it increased a person's total sun exposure time, sunscreen use alone was not accepted as an established indicator of better health. In order to qualify as a recommended intervention sunscreen use had to be paired with one other of the health outcomes.

As a result of this analysis the Task Force recommended two interventions. Both of these fall into the setting-specific category:

1. Educational and policy approaches in primary schools to change children's covering-up behavior which included wearing protective clothing.

2. Educational and policy approaches in recreational or tourism settings to change adults' covering-up behaviors.

The report acknowledges that there were limitations in this assessment. Some of the studies reviewed had many components that couldn't be evaluated in isolation making it difficult to know what contributed to behavior change. The limited evidence for many of the studies provides an opportunity for further evaluation, research and learning from these interventions.

The authors suggest that communities should strive to develop comprehensive programs that include a wide range of activities. These activities should be appropriate for their community's resources, for those who live in that community and for that setting. The authors acknowledge, however, that this assessment provided insufficient evidence on community-wide multi-component interventions which include a combination of individual, media campaigns, and environmental and policy changes. It appears that longer term and more intensive comprehensive community wide programs had more positive outcomes overall. The examples included in this assessment were all Australian.

## Reference

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventing skin cancer: findings of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services on reducing exposure to ultraviolet light and Counseling to prevent skin cancer: recommendations and rationale of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. *MMWR* 2003;52 (No. RR-15): 1-16.