

11 February 2016

Sunbed Consultation
Environmental Health Team
Ministry of Health
PO Box 5013
Wellington 6145

By email: sunbeds@moh.govt.nz

Reducing Harm from Commercial Sunbeds

Dear Sir/Madam

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to provide feedback on the above consultation. The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with more than 5,500 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. Our submission has been informed by feedback from our Advisory Councils and Board.

We strongly concur with the Ministry's assessment that there is "clear evidence and international consensus that the use of sunbeds poses a significant increased risk of skin cancer to users. This risk is heightened for those aged less than 35 years and for those with certain skin-risk types".¹ We note that while the Ministry has considered banning the provision of commercial sunbed services (and banning the importation, manufacture, sale and rental of sunbeds for commercial use), its preferred option is to introduce regulations that will require licensing of sunbed premises and operators, and mandatory operational practices. We are disappointed that the Ministry is not taking a bolder approach with the issue of sunbeds.

¹ Ministry of Health. Reducing Harm from Commercial Sunbeds: Consultation document. Wellington: November 2015. Available from <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/reducing-harm-commercial-sunbeds-consultation-document-nov15.pdf>

The NZMA has previously called for the complete ban on the use of commercial UV tanning services for cosmetic purposes.² While a ban on sunbed services for people under 18 years of age is expected to take effect with the passage of legislation in 2016, we reiterate our view that a complete ban on the provision of commercial sunbed services is the most appropriate option. Given that the Ministry itself acknowledges that the use of commercial sunbeds poses a significant increased risk of skin cancers to users (with skin cancer costing an estimated \$220 million annually to New Zealand) and has no health benefits, we contend that the Ministry should be aiming to “**remove** the risks of harm” to the community, not just “**reduce** the risks of harm”. Accordingly, we support option 4 (ban the provision of sunbed services) in conjunction with option 5 (ban the importation, manufacture, sale and rental of sunbeds for commercial use).

While option 2 (the introduction of regulations that will require licensing of sunbed premises and operators, and mandatory operational practices), represents an improvement on option 1 (the status quo, where only a third of premises are complying with the voluntary standard), it will not produce the maximum benefits to public health. Furthermore, the additional bureaucracy needed to support this option is likely to create yet more costs for the taxpayer, when there are more efficient and less costly options. We note that the proposed approach for enforcing compliance with the regulations involves public health units inspecting premises. The compliance costs involved in the licensing of sunbed premises and the training of sunbed providers are also substantial (eg, \$1,250 proposed annual fee for a sunbed premise licence and \$608 cost to train 1 or more staff at a sunbed site on how to operate a sunbed safely). This training must be renewed every 2 years.

We have concerns at the effectiveness of operator training in terms of reducing actual exposure to sunbeds. While a sunbed operator will be taught how to discern, among other things, which people should not use a sunbed (eg, people with fair hair or freckles), they will only be required to advise such people that it would be unwise to use the sunbed. High risk customers that subsequently offer to pay for a sunbed session will presumably still receive it. And the tax payer will ultimately bear the cost for the treatment of sunbed-related health complications including skin cancer.

Where there are conflicts of interests between the public health of New Zealanders and the profits of private commercial entities, our longstanding position is that public health considerations should prevail. Furthermore, we consider it likely that the health benefits of a complete ban on sunbed services, explained correctly, would incur widespread public support. The Ministry itself alludes to an international precedent for a complete ban. From 1 January 2016, every Australian State has banned all sunbed services for commercial purposes. We urge the Ministry to reconsider its preferred option, and adopt the approach taken by all Australian states, namely, a complete ban on the provision of commercial sunbed services.

We hope that our feedback has been helpful and look forward to learning the outcome of this consultation.

Yours sincerely



Dr Stephen Child
NZMA Chair

² NZMA submission on Health (Protection) Amendment Bill. Available from http://www.nzma.org.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/39303/sub-Health-Protection-Amendment-Bill.pdf