



Coalition Against Sunbeds

Position paper on a Ban
on Sunbed Use in Ireland

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The Coalition Against Sunbeds urges the Government to progress legislation to ban sunbeds.



Why should the Government ban sunbeds now?

A ban will save lives and costs to the State.

- An estimated 5.4% of melanomas are attributable to sunbed use, outlined in a 2016 European Commission report.
- In 2022, 1,463 people were diagnosed with melanoma; we estimate that 79 (5.4%) of those diagnoses could be attributable to sunbeds.
- We estimate that the costs of treating melanoma in Ireland in 2022 to be between €337,251 and €9,715,815, depending on staging.

A ban on sunbeds must be implemented because:

- Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland.
- Sunbeds are linked to the development of skin cancer.
- There is no safe level of tanning; a tan is a sign of damage to skin.

Sunbed bans work.

- Sunbeds have been banned in Australia (2015), Brazil (2009) and Iran (2008).
- Sunbed bans are cost-effective.

Skin Cancer in Ireland

- 12,698 people were diagnosed with melanoma (1,463) and non-melanoma skin cancer (11,235) in 2022.
- Skin cancer cases will increase: 172% more people will be diagnosed with melanoma and 182% more people will be diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancers by 2045 (compared to 2015).
- 270 people die of skin cancer in Ireland each year.

Sunbeds and skin cancer

Sunbeds (ultraviolet-emitting tanning devices) are Group 1 carcinogens, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), putting them in the same category as asbestos and tobacco.

Sunbed use carries 'a specific risk for melanoma, independent of skin type and of solar exposure.' The European Union's 2016 independent Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER) recognises the association with sunbed use and the increased risk of cutaneous melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer.

The EU's SCHEER report outlined that an estimated 5.4% of melanomas are attributable to sunbed use. Based on this estimate, we calculate that 79 melanomas out of 1,463 diagnoses in 2022 could be attributed to sunbed use.

No safe level of exposure to ultra-violet rays despite standards on sunbeds

The EU SCHEER report reminds us that 'there is no safe limit for exposure to UV radiation from sunbeds', which can damage DNA in skin. The World Health Organization warns that UV light emitted from sunbeds is as strong as the 'midday tropical sun' and some tanning beds have 'UVA intensities well above anything experienced in nature'.

While some European Union Directives and guidelines exist, they do not remove the risks of sunbed use to human health:

- The Low Voltage Directive makes provisions for ensuring that electrical equipment (including sunbeds) remain within voltage limits.
- Voluntary standards exist for sunbeds, including ultraviolet radiation emission limits.
- The Scientific Committee on Consumer Products (SCCP) outlines a limit for effective irradiance of 0.3 Watt/m².

However, as the World Health Organization states, **'no limits on irradiance or dose can be given to protect the health of users over any part of the UV spectrum'**.

The Sunbeds Working Group, led by the Department of Health, makes clear that a 0.3 Watt/m² irradiance limit for sunbeds equals a UV index of 12 – higher than the UV index experienced in Ireland.

A UV index of ≥ 11 is classed as an 'extreme hazard', a UV index of 9 is the maximum recorded in Ireland since the year 2000, and at a UV index of ≥ 3 people are advised to avoid being outdoors at midday.

Skin cancer has many costs – both personal and financial

A cancer diagnosis brings a great deal of distress to a person and their loved ones.

A ban on sunbeds would lead to significant savings to the State.

Depending on the stage at diagnosis, treating a person for melanoma can cost the State between €4,269 (Stage IA) and €122,985 (Stage IV), as outlined in Table 1.

Stage 1A	Stage 1B	Stage 2A	Stage 2B	Stage 2C	Stage 3A	Stage 3B	Stage 3C	Stage 4
€4,269	€6,313	€15,130	€15,291	€14,905	€92,762	€102,951	€113,655	€122,985

Table 1: costs of treating skin cancer in Ireland.

1,463 people were diagnosed with melanoma in Ireland in 2022.

We estimate that 79 people (5.4%) were diagnosed with melanoma in 2022 due to sunbed use and that the costs to the State for treating melanoma in that year could range between €337,251 and €9,715,815, depending on staging.

Sunbed use in Ireland

Gill Costelloe, a patient advocate diagnosed with Stage 4 melanoma says:

"I used sunbeds when I was younger and now I'm paying the price because I'm living with stage 4 melanoma, which is a terminal cancer [...] Thankfully I'm doing a lot better 4 years on, but I will now be on cancer treatment for the rest of my life. There was very little education when I was younger about the dangers of sunbeds, but we now know that they are very harmful. I fully support the Coalition Against Sunbeds because we know what damage sunbeds do and we simply cannot sit and watch any more people die from using sunbeds."

The Healthy Ireland 2022 report revealed that almost 1 in 5 (18%) people have used a sunbed at some point in their life. Other studies have shown that as many as 2 in 5 people in Ireland have ever used a sunbed.

Furthermore, 3% of people aged 15+ (approximately 120,000+ people) said they use sunbeds regularly or from time-to-time.

Children and young people access sunbeds

Sunbed use before the age of 35 increases the risk of developing melanoma.

It is against the law for a person aged under 18 to use sunbeds, but 1 in 20 (5.2%) children aged 10-17 have used a sunbed. Additionally, almost 1 in 4 current sunbed users (22.9%) are aged 15-24.

Research from 2025 on attendance at Irish pigmented lesion clinics (for suspected skin cancer) showed that 1 in 4 patients surveyed, who reported sunbed use, were aged under 18. The earliest reported use of a sunbed in this study was age 13.

Commercial use of sunbeds in Ireland

Infringements of the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014

In 2026, the Department of Health's Sunbeds Working Group recommended a ban on commercial use of sunbeds.

Ireland has already implemented a range of measures to restrict the use of sunbeds and discourage use via the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014, including a ban on use by people under the age of 18. The 2014 Act also outlines conditions on use, i.e. that information must be provided to prospective sunbed users, which must be signed by potential clients.

However, there are too many breaches of the legislation demonstrating that the prohibition on the use of sunbeds by children in Ireland is not effective:

- 5.2% of children aged 10-17 have reportedly used a sunbed.
- 2 in 3 adolescents using sunbeds did not have eye protection when using a sunbed (64%).

A range of other breaches to the Act have been recorded in recent years. Between 2023, 2024 and 2025, there were 975 recorded breaches of the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014.

These infringements include the use of eyewear, provision of health information, warning signs, marketing practices, etc.

Sunbed bans work in other countries

Sunbeds have been banned in Australia (2015), Brazil (2009) and Iran (2008).
Sunbed bans are cost-effective, even when the costs of public health campaigns accompanying the legislation, enforcement costs and tanning industry losses are considered.

Overview: Australia's sunbed ban

The Australian ban on sunbeds was introduced in 2015.

The ban:

- applied only to sunbeds for commercial use; personal use at home permitted.
- included a buy-back scheme, which was implemented in some parts of Australia.
- had strong public support.

Impact:

- expected public health impact: 31,009 melanomas averted (-3.7%).
- expected economic impact: gains of productivity of AU\$516 million.
- no reported significant unintended consequences.

Conclusion

There is no safe level of sunbed use. Sunbed use can lead to skin cancer and other skin damage.

No number of frameworks for regulating the UV emitted by sunbeds will ever change the basic facts that sunbeds are unsafe to human health.

Similarly, we know that the existing legislation in Ireland is not sufficient in curbing sunbed use amongst children and adolescents, or in stopping other infringements to the law.

The ban on sunbeds in Australia shows us the success of such a decisive action in the interest of public health.

The Government of Ireland has recognised the harms associated with sunbed use. It must now progress a ban on sunbeds.

