

# Dermatology Students Embrace Sun Smart Initiatives to Expand Program Reach

## BACKGROUND

Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S. It's estimated that 800 people in Nevada will be diagnosed with melanoma in 2023, in addition to thousands of cases of basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas diagnosed each year but not required to be reported to cancer registries.<sup>1</sup>

While Nevada has one of the lowest incidence rates for melanoma in the U.S., coming in 47th, it ranks 26th among states for rate of deaths from melanoma. Melanoma incidence has been increasing nationwide and has tripled since 1975.<sup>2</sup>

Prevention is the most effective way to reduce skin cancer, including wearing sunscreen and protective clothing, seeking shade, and avoiding peak sun exposure hours. Early detection is another method of reducing deaths from skin cancer. As with many cancers, finding the disease early when it's easiest



to treat yields the best outcomes. For skin cancer, this means being aware of one's own skin and changes, such as new spots or growths, that should be evaluated by a dermatologist. Regular skin checks by a clinician can help to find pre-cancers or early-stage skin cancers that can be removed.

## CHALLENGE

Sun Smart Nevada is the only organized effort for reducing skin cancer in Nevada. There is also a shortage of healthcare providers in Nevada. This shortage limits or eliminates access to skin checks and skin cancer screening for many and can extend wait times for appointments to check unusual skin growths that may be cancerous.

In 2021, Nevada had 89 licensed physicians who specialized in dermatology. That totals out to 2.8 licensed dermatologists per 100,000 Nevadans, far below the national rate of 4.4 per 100,000.<sup>3</sup> On average, dermatologists in Nevada see approximately 13,000 more patients per physician than the U.S. average-- that's a 36% larger patient load. Nevada needs an additional 61 dermatologists to meet the national average based on the current population.

Nevada Cancer Coalition's Sun Smart Nevada program was established in 2015--following the Surgeon General's Call to Action on Skin Cancer in 2014--with a goal of educating people about skin cancer prevention and reducing skin cancer incidence and deaths statewide. Education through Sun Smart Nevada relies, in part, on the efforts of educators and volunteers willing to share the message about skin cancer prevention.



## OPPORTUNITY

Both University of Nevada, Reno and Las Vegas have established medical schools with burgeoning dermatology student interest groups. NCC's Sun Smart Nevada program provides those medical students with structured opportunities to work in their respective communities through outreach, K-12 education, and hands-on learning activities alongside dermatology professionals.

## ACTIVITY

NCC's prevention programs manager first met with dermatology-interested medical students from University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine in 2016. At first just one student actively volunteered with NCC at outreach events, then more became involved, steadily increasing and expanding into many other activities. By July 2019, the group had grown to include multiple students from Reno and word spread to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Medicine.

Medical students from both schools participated on NCC's Prevention Task Force and began organizing skin check clinics for school faculty and staff as well as community members. They learned how to provide Sun Smart Schools presentations in K-12 classrooms and at school assemblies. NCC trains medical students to give presentations on prevention tools, coordinates educational sessions featuring local physicians, and offers internships to stimulate continued interest in dermatology and skin cancer prevention and early detection.



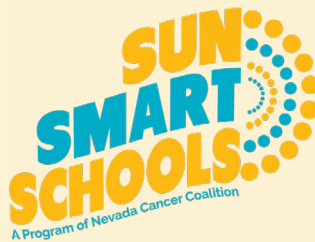
**University students have increased Sun Smart Nevada's reach and effectiveness, despite a stall during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**50**

undergrad/graduate student  
volunteers since 2016

**87**

people screened at three  
skin check clinics



**595**

tracked student volunteer  
hours over two years

**1,777**

K-12 students educated by  
med students since 2019

## OUTCOME

Since NCC began working with dermatology-interested medical students in 2016, at least four have gone on to professional dermatology residency programs. The first skin cancer screening clinic led by UNR dermatology students was held in 2019 with future events put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNR skin check clinics resumed in 2022, with three more planned for 2023. UNLV students are planning their first skin check clinic for 2023. Each clinic has the potential to screen up to 50 individuals, expanding access to screening for people who may not have insurance coverage.

Medical students have also conducted dozens of classroom and community presentations reaching students in grades K-12 with skin cancer prevention and sun safety materials. Surveys completed before and after the presentations show an increase in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to sun safety.

Citations:

- 1 American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts and Figures 2023, accessed 1/24/23 at <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2023/2023-cancer-facts-and-figures.pdf>.
- 2 American Cancer Society. Cancer Statistics Center, accessed 1/24/23 at <https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/#/>.
- 3 Packham, J., Griswold, T., Terpstra, J., Warner, J. Physician Workforce in Nevada 2022, accessed 1/24/23 at <https://med.unr.edu/statewide/reports-and-publications>