New statement and guidance for consumers on direct-to-consumer genetic testing

New publications recommending Australians exercise caution when ordering direct-to-consumer genetic tests were released today by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

The publications include a new NHMRC position statement and an accompanying information resource for consumers. They come in response to the increased availability and falling costs of genetic tests for the public.

NHMRC CEO Professor Warwick Anderson said the resources offered valuable advice and hoped they would help Australians make informed decisions about purchasing such tests.

“Given phenomenal advances in genetic technologies, more and more companies are offering direct-to-consumer genetic tests. These are being taken up by an increasing number of people who are curious about their ancestry or interested in learning about their predisposition to certain health conditions,” Professor Anderson said.

“However, consumers should be aware of the implications of using genetic tests which may preclude the advice or involvement of their doctor,” he said.

“Direct-to-consumer genetic tests are often offered by companies based overseas which may not meet Australian standards for quality and reliability for medical laboratory testing.

“Consumers should be cautious about the accuracy of some of these tests and be mindful that while genetic testing may offer an indication of predisposition to a particular health condition, results should not be treated as a definitive diagnosis.

“Ultimately, the NHMRC advises that consumers exercise caution and consult their doctor or a genetic counsellor to understand the potential risks, benefits and limitations of genetic testing, or how to interpret the results of a genetic test,” Professor Anderson said.

Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing: A Statement from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Understanding Direct-to-Consumer Genetic DNA Testing: An information resource for consumers underwent public consultation from 22 April to 3 June 2014.

They were developed by NHMRC’s Human Genetics Advisory Committee. Both documents are available from the NHMRC website: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/your-health/genetics-and-human-health/genetic-testing-and-applications/direct-consumer-dtc-dna-tests

CONTACT:  NHMRC Media Team  |  0422 008 512  |  media@nhmrc.gov.au