

# Population Screening Act: the MoederVlekkenKliniek

No. 2017/11

## Executive summary

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Health Council of the Netherlands



The initiator of the MoederVlekkenKliniek wishes to offer low-threshold screening for skin cancer to people with an average risk of developing this form of cancer. According to the Population Screening Act (WBO) skin cancer screening can only be carried out with a permit from the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS). The Committee on Population Screening of the Dutch Health Council has examined the permit application. The Committee advises the Minister not to grant the permit.

### **Permit application**

The intention is that people would be able to go to the MoederVlekkenKliniek, on their own initiative and at their own expense, for information about the prevention of skin cancer and for screening for skin abnormalities that could indicate skin cancer. At the screening, the skin is inspected with the naked eye and/or a dermatoscope (a strong magnifier with a light source), or by means of *mole mapping* (a digital method). If one or more suspicious skin abnormalities are found, clients are advised to

see their general practitioner to discuss the results, and for further diagnostic measures and/or referral to a dermatologist.

### **Review against WBO requirements**

#### *The WBO definition of population screening*

In accordance with the WBO the screening services offered by the MoederVlekkenKliniek are qualified as population screening. The Committee has reviewed these services against the requirements set by the WBO for all population screening that need a permit. The Committee's advice is based on the evaluation of scientific validity and a risk-benefit analysis.

#### *Scientific validity*

Not enough is known about the sensitivity, the specificity or the positive and negative predictive values of the skin cancer screening that the MoederVlekkenKliniek wishes to offer to the general population. For this reason, the Committee is unable to evaluate the scientific validity of the proposed form of screening.

#### *Risk-benefit balance*

In the light of current scientific knowledge, the risk-benefit balance appears to be insufficiently beneficial. There is no compelling scientific evidence that screening reduces the number of deaths or the burden of disease of skin cancer. In contrast to this, screening is accompanied by risks: false-positive results can lead to further diagnostic tests and unnecessary treatment and feelings of uncertainty; false negative results can lead to unfounded reassurance, and a delay in the diagnostic process and start of treatment. As a result of over-diagnosis, people will be treated for (malignant) skin abnormalities that never caused problems or have led to symptoms.

### **Advice**

The Committee recommends that the permit be denied on the basis of the current state of scientific knowledge, the Committee is unable to evaluate the scientific validity and the risk-benefit balance is insufficiently beneficial.



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