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## Media Statement

### **NEW LINK IN PROTECTION AGAINST PROSTATE CANCER**

A team at the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research has discovered that miners who took part in their study were less likely to develop prostate cancer than men working in other occupations.

Lead author of the paper, published in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Jennifer Girschik said her team's findings could offer a vital step to help unravel clues about prostate cancer, one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in Western countries.

In Australia, one in three men will develop the disease before they reach 75 years old.

"We found that men working as miners could be about 65 per cent less likely to develop prostate cancer than men in other industries," she said.

"While it's a great clue that takes us a step closer to the mysteries behind this disease, we are still yet to understand why the miners in our study could be at lower risk.

"The decreased risk we identified may have something to do with whether miners work underground or above ground, but we will need to do further investigations to understand this.

"Because many miners who work underground spend long periods in the dark, their melatonin levels might be sustained for longer.

"Melatonin is a hormone created at night, triggered by darkness, to help induce sleep – and it's already known to have anti-cancer properties.

"Ours is the first study to suggest this biological mechanism could lead to a reduced risk of prostate cancer in miners."

Ms Girschik said a growing number of studies had explored the possible link between occupation and prostate cancer, but no link had so far been confirmed.

"It's still early days for this study and miners should by no means become complacent about their risk of prostate cancer," she said.

"All men, including miners, need to be vigilant about their health and continue to have regular medical checks – it's still the best way to catch problems early and protect against prostate cancer."

WAIMR acting director Professor Peter Leedman congratulated the group on their new discovery and looked forward to follow-up investigations.

"This investigation introduces a new link to the causes and protections against such a common cancer in our community," he said.

"It's fantastic to see our team looking into novel, unique ideas that could unlock a new direction for research into a cure for serious disease."

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