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AMA submission to Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Toppling Furniture Safety Review

Director
Toppling Furniture Safety Review
Consumer Product Safety Division
Australian Competition & Consumer Commission

Submitted via email: TopplingFurniture@accc.gov.au

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The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is making a submission to this consultation to highlight the public health imperative for improved safety and education to mitigate avoidable death and injury from toppling furniture.

AMA supports improved safety

The AMA notes that at least 28 deaths have been associated with toppling furniture since 2000, with an average of 900 injuries per year requiring medical treatment.¹ Children under five years of age are identified as being most at risk, along with a higher prevalence of accident and injury experienced by older people. These incidents are entirely preventable, and the AMA supports ACCC consideration of additional measures to protect consumer safety.

Proposed regulatory options

The AMA supports the proposed combination of mandatory safety standards and consumer information standards in the consultation paper. We do not support maintaining the current status quo.

The AMA supports Option 5(B) in the consultation paper, which introduces the broadest range of regulatory and information measures to prevent furniture toppling. These include:

- Permanent warning labelling affixed to furniture
- Safety information in assembling instructions
- In-store warnings regarding toppling hazards

¹ ACCC [Toppling Furniture Consultation Paper](#), April 2022, p.iii

- Provision of warnings about toppling hazards online
- An anchor device supplied or integrated into the design
- Meet minimum stability requirements

While we support the above measures, we note that these can only be applied at a point of sale where new products are being purchased. The AMA suggests that further consideration also must be given to how to reach consumers with non-affixed, non-anchored furniture at home to ensure that the safety information is distributed broadly and beyond those who are purchasing new furniture.

The scope of new measures could also consider retailers who sell second hand furniture, and other online second-hand trading places such as Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree.

Protecting child health and preventing avoidable injuries

The ACCC modelling estimates that 14 fatalities and almost 10,000 injuries will occur over the next 10 years under the current status quo (meaning - no action taken by government).²

Losing a loved one, especially a child is an unquantifiable cost to a family, coupled with the grief that the accident could have been avoided. Treatment of injuries and emergency department presentations also comes at a cost, putting additional strain on the public hospital system. The AMA supports introduction of simple regulatory and public information measures to reduce the public health impacts of toppling furniture.

In February 2022, the AMA [put child health in the spotlight](#), joining with other peak health and welfare groups to call for targeted policy and investment to support child health and wellbeing. The group is calling for the newly elected government to establish a Child Health Taskforce to identify priority initiatives around health and the social determinants. This call to action is attempting to bring experts together in partnership with government to tackle some of the most complex intersectional issues impacting on child health, including climate change, mental health, food security and poverty.

The AMA welcomes the opportunity for this comparatively simple intervention that can save young lives, prevent injuries and protect health and wellbeing.

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² ACCC [Toppling Furniture Consultation Paper](#), April 2022, p.9