

POSITION STATEMENT

Road User Safety

2023

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Preamble

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is committed to advocating for improvements in the way Australians drive, the vehicles they drive, and the roads they drive on. Australia has managed to substantially reduce road trauma in past decades, with the introduction of preventive measures such as random breath tests, seat belts, and improved vehicle technology.ⁱ

However, the cost of road trauma to the Australian community is expensive and widespread, with road trauma incidents having an impact on the lives of many Australians. Since data on the road toll began in 1925, there have been more than 189,000 deaths on Australia's roads, with 1,200 people dying every year.ⁱⁱ In 2022, there were 1,194 road crash deaths. This is an increase of 5.8 per cent from 2021.ⁱⁱⁱ The annual economic cost of road crashes in Australia is estimated at \$27 billion per annum^{iv}, and the social impacts of road trauma on communities must also be acknowledged.

Road accidents are predominantly the result of:

- speeding;

- fatigue;
- driver distractions;
- disobeying road rules;
- reckless driving;
- alcohol and substance abuse;
- non-use of seat-belts, restraints and helmets;
- unsafe roads;
- unsafe vehicles;
- inexperienced driving; and
- inadequate law enforcement.^{vivii}

To improve road safety further in Australia, and further reduce road trauma, the AMA supports new technologies that make vehicles safer, and wants to see more investment in improving the safety of Australian roads.

The AMA supports measures that change driver behaviour and change the culture and mentality about speeding and driver distraction, especially with mobile devices. There needs to be far greater emphasis on driver fatigue and tougher enforcement of the laws governing road use. These laws should include the expectations of pedestrians using the road and encompass new technologies such as electric mobility (e-mobility) devices. E-mobility devices encompasses a range of personal mobility devices, including e-scooters, e-bikes, e-skateboards, hoverboards and e-unicycles.

Medical practitioners, along with paramedics, ambulance officers and nurses, frequently witness the health consequences of road trauma. They see when road safety is ignored and when avoidable accidents occur – accidents that take lives and cause serious injuries. The AMA believes further reductions in preventable road fatalities and injuries are possible if governments, industry, and the community work together to make drivers more aware of their behaviour on roads, and its consequences, as well as by providing safer environments for all road users.

AMA Position

1. The AMA calls on governments to:

- 1.1. Implement the *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030*, which includes key priorities for action and targets to reduce the annual number of fatalities by at least 50 per cent and serious injuries by at least 30 per cent by 2030.^{viii}
- 1.2. Invest in reducing road accidents and road trauma, which must be a collaborative process with industry and the community, using a Safe System approach^{ix}
- 1.3. Establish a national advisory body, with a continuous quality cycle of funded data collection and analysis, providing an evidence base for experts, including health experts, recommendations regarding improved safety and risk mitigation.

The national advisory must be able to provide ongoing advice to governments about the important and complex issues of evolving vehicle technology, including road safety, infrastructure, data collection and privacy, intellectual property, standards, legal responsibility, and their impact on existing laws and legislation.

- 1.4. Improve the collection, analysis and reporting of national road accident data, as a top priority of governments, to better understand the causes of crashes, and the health cost of road trauma, and reduce road trauma. This data collection must include a 'minimum dataset' that describes what data is required to support public health injury surveillance.^x
- 1.5. Invest in safer roads including sealing dirt roads and reducing speed limits on rural and undivided roads to reduce accidents.
- 1.6. Support and fund preventive measures, such as random breath and drug tests, seat belts, and speed cameras, that will substantially reduce road trauma in Australia, this is a role for all levels of Government.
- 1.7. Support community-led road safety initiatives, such as Black Spot programs, and identification of local traffic issues, which have the potential to reduce road fatalities and injuries.
- 1.8. Enforce speed limits and compliance, especially around school zones and hospitals to reduce road accidents and road trauma. Roads with unrestricted speed limits pose serious risks to all road users. Speed limits play an important role in reducing injuries and fatalities on our roads.
- 1.9. Reinforce the dangers of driver fatigue, noting it is one of the top three contributors to Australia's road toll, and particularly relevant to professional drivers, especially truck drivers. The development of legislation regarding driver fatigue is desirable and consideration needs to be given to how this could occur.

2. Assessing fitness to drive

- 2.1. The AMA endorses Assessing Fitness to Drive: medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines. A resource for health professionals in Australia (June 2022).^{xi}
- 2.2. All States and Territories must adopt uniform criteria for assessing the functional ability of older drivers, as the discrepancies between jurisdictions are problematic.
- 2.3. Medical practitioners should assist older drivers in assessing their ability and confidence to drive and provide advice on when to retire from driving. This may require medical examinations or assessments of drivers beyond a specified age.
- 2.4. Road safety public information campaigns encouraging older drivers to liaise with their medical practitioners about their fitness to drive will assist in encouraging older people to recognise when they are no longer safe to be driving a vehicle..
- 2.5. Medical practitioners are encouraged to inform and advise patients if prescribed medication, drugs or treatments, or their medical conditions, makes them unsafe and/or unfit to drive. Doctors should document this advice and clearly inform patients that the responsibility lies with them if they choose to drive.

3. Vehicle safety

- 3.1. A driver's license is a privilege, not a right, and drivers who breach road rules should face meaningful sanctions.
- 3.2. The fundamentals of road rules must be formally instilled from a very young age through nationwide standards of education to young people about road rules.

- 3.3. Greater controls need to be applied to L-plate drivers to ensure they meet their supervised driver training requirements, are supervised by a competent and experienced driver, and comply with logbook regulations.
- 3.4. The use of mobile telephones and electronic devices, including navigational devices, by drivers is a distraction and a major cause of accidents. Laws must be strictly enforced, and meaningful sanctions must apply to drivers who text or use mobile devices.

4. Pedestrian safety

- 4.1. Sharing the road is everyone's responsibility, and all road users, including pedestrians, must be educated on the fundamentals of road safety. This allows them to be able to take responsibility for their actions on shared roads.
- 4.2. The use of headphones, earpieces and mobile devices by pedestrians and cyclists on the road must be recognised as a factor in vehicle accidents, as they pose a serious risk to safety.

5. E-mobility device safety

- 5.1. E-mobility devices have become a more environmentally friendly and convenient transport option for many Australians. With their growing popularity the safe use of these new vehicles must be taken seriously, as they pose specific injury risks.
- 5.2. E-mobility device legislation and regulation across jurisdictions must be consistent, and current to evidence-based public safety recommendations. These laws must also be modified in the Australian Road Vehicle Standards laws^{xii} and the Australian Road Rules (model law).^{xiii}
- 5.3. Mandatory use of approved helmets for motorcycle, bicycle, and e-mobility device riders. This must include wearing of appropriate protective clothing, and use of equipment that is up to current safety standards, including notification systems such as horns, lights, and reflectors.
- 5.4. The introduction of e-scooter hiring services, and increased use of e-scooters around Australia, requires increased education and training, improved pathways and infrastructure, and the appropriate regulations for their design, use and interaction on public roads.^{xiv}
- 5.5. All vehicles should be able to coexist, with dedicated lanes created for cyclists and mobility device users on the road to ensure safer usage.
- 5.6. An evidence based safe maximum speed limit should be applied to all e-scooters sold or hireable in Australia, in accordance with the speed limit that is safe for use on shared paths and roads, that users are able to control sensibly.^{xv}
- 5.7. The AMA believes that a drug level of zero, and blood alcohol level in line with current road use legislation, should be properly enforced for all e-mobility device users.
- 5.8. The AMA also recommends that a National public safety campaign is issued on the health and safety risks of improper e-mobility device use, and the benefits of safe use.^{xvi}

6. Heavy vehicle safety

- 6.1. Heavy vehicles, trucks and buses make up only three per cent of the vehicle fleet but are over-represented in accident statistics.^{xvii} The AMA supports measures to improve heavy vehicle

roadworthiness, including advanced braking requirements and other safety technologies to improve the safety of heavy vehicle drivers.

- 6.2. Regulation of heavy vehicles (and their drivers) has been implemented overseas, and Australia may benefit from increased regulation of heavy vehicles and their drivers, particularly long-distance drivers.
- 6.3. Bus drivers must be regularly assessed on current road and bus safety rules. They should receive relevant training on road safety procedures for heavy vehicles, just as truck drivers should.
- 6.4. All passengers on chartered and medium-long distance bus trips must wear seatbelts, these vehicles must have appropriate safety-standard seatbelts installed, and their use enforced by the driver.
- 6.5. Seatbelts during bus transportation of children should be mandatory, regardless of the length of trip, or type of bus.

7. New technologies

- 7.1. New automobile technologies, such as child presence detection (CPD), vehicle safety assist technologies (SAT), Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB), which reduces rear-end accidents and is being developed for motorcycle, cyclist and pedestrian triggered braking, and lane keep assist (LKA) can prevent vehicle accidents or minimise the effects and subsequent injuries and associated costs of vehicle accidents. Sophisticated technologies will lead the way in reducing road trauma and should be incorporated into new vehicles.^{xviii}
- 7.2. Autonomous vehicles potentially offer greater safety for road users; however, no technology will prevent road accidents completely. Automated vehicle programming and technology should not remove the responsibility for decision-making from the driver.
- 7.3. Every person who drives a vehicle, regardless of the technology and level of automation, must be a validated licence holder, and legally qualified to drive that class of vehicle.

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ⁱ International Transport Forum (2021) *Australia: Road Safety Country Profile*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/australia-road-safety.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ National Road Safety Strategy (2021) *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/nrss>

ⁱⁱⁱ BITRE (2022) *Road Trauma Australia- Annual Summaries*. Retrieved June 2023 from: https://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/ongoing/road_deaths_australia_annual_summaries

^{iv} National Road Safety Strategy (2021) *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/nrss>

^v WHO (2022) *Road Traffic Injuries*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs358/en/>

^{vi} AIHW (2022) *Traffic Accidents*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/transport-injuries>

^{vii} The George Institute (2023) *Young Driver Factbase*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <http://www.youngdriverfactbase.com/key-statistics>

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- ^{ix} National Road Safety Strategy (2023) *Fact Sheet: Vision Zero and the Safe System*. Retrieved November 23 from: <https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/nrss/fact-sheets/vision-zero-safe-system>
- ^x AIHW (2023) National Minimum Dataset for Injury Surveillance: NHMDS (Injury Surveillance) Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/national-minimum-dataset-for-injury-surveillance/summary>
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- ^{xiii} NTA (2023) *Australian Road Rules*. Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.ntc.gov.au/laws-and-regulations/australian-road-rules>.
- ^{xiv} Mitra, B., Heald, E., Sri-Ganeshan, M., MacSuibhne, E., Edwards, E., & Cameron, P. A. (2023). Electric scooter-related trauma, alcohol and other drugs. *EMA - Emergency Medicine Australasia*, 35(2), 353-356. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1742-6723.14170>
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- ^{xviii} ANCAP (2023) *How is car safety changing?* Retrieved June 2023 from: <https://www.ancap.com.au/how-is-car-safety-changing>