

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**TOUGHER PENALTIES FOR MOBILE PHONE USE WHILE DRIVING**  
*AMA Position Statement on Road Safety 2018*

The AMA is calling for tougher penalties for drivers who text or use mobile phones while driving, including the loss of licence for up to a year for P-plate and L-plate drivers.

Releasing the *AMA Position Statement on Road Safety 2018*, AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said that the AMA is committed to advocating for improvements in the way Australians drive, the cars they drive, and the roads they drive on.

“For this reason, the AMA has, for the first time, released a Position Statement on road safety,” Dr Gannon said.

“Doctors – along with paramedics, ambulance officers, and nurses – see the tragic consequences of road trauma. They see when road safety is ignored and when avoidable accidents occur – accidents that take lives and cause horrific injuries.

“At this time of year, more families are travelling on our roads. Sadly, we have seen terrible tragedies, with 66 people dying in car crashes across Australia this holiday period.

“The AMA is particularly concerned about the use of mobile telephones and electronic devices, including navigational devices, in cars.

“Mobile phones and other devices are driver distractions, and a major cause of accidents, trauma, and death.

“The AMA supports measures that change driver behaviour. We want to change the culture and mentality about using mobile devices in cars.

“Your driver’s licence is a privilege, not a right. Drivers who breach the road rules are putting themselves and others at risk, and must face meaningful sanctions.

“Good habits must be ingrained in new, inexperienced drivers. There should be zero tolerance of provisional and learner drivers who use mobile phones or electronic devices, and penalties should include the loss of licence for up to a year.”

The AMA is also concerned about pedestrians and cyclists who use headphones, earpieces, or mobile devices.

“Using headphones or mobile devices while walking or cycling on or near roads is a serious safety risk, and is a factor in motor vehicle accidents,” Dr Gannon said.

“The AMA is calling for the fundamentals of road rules, including responsibility of pedestrians, to be formally instilled from a very young age through nationwide standards of road safety education.

“On average, three people die on Australian roads every day and 90 are seriously injured – two permanently.

“That represents about 33,900 adults and children every year who are killed or maimed in avoidable incidents, and thousands more who are affected by the trauma of losing a partner, relative, or friend.

“Community-led road safety initiatives, such as Black Spot programs, and identification of local traffic issues have the potential to reduce road fatalities and injuries.”

The AMA is also calling for uniform, national criteria for assessing older drivers. The AMA endorses the joint guidelines issued by Austroads and the National Transport Commission (NTC) in their *Assessing Fitness to Drive: medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines. A resource for health professionals in Australia (October 2016)* publication.

“All States and Territories must adopt uniform criteria for assessing the functional ability of older drivers, as the discrepancies between jurisdictions are problematic,” Dr Gannon said.

“We also want doctors to be more proactive in helping older drivers to assess their ability and confidence to keep driving.

“Doctors should be providing advice on when to retire from driving. This may require medical examinations or assessments of drivers beyond a specified age.”

The AMA *Position Statement on Road Safety 2018* is available at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/road-safety-2018>

## Background

- More than 189,000 people have died on Australian roads since records began in 1925.
- The Department of Infrastructure estimates the economic cost of road trauma is \$27 billion per year.
- About 90 per cent of motor vehicle accidents are caused, at least in part, by human error.
- The major causes of road trauma are: speeding; fatigue; driver distraction; 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.
- Greater enforcement of road rules, including use of mobile devices and speed zones around schools and hospitals, is needed.
- New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, and Western Australia require older drivers to undergo annual medical assessments of their ability and confidence to keep driving.

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