Road Safety
2018

Introduction
Every day, on average, three people die on Australian roads and a further 90 are seriously injured – two permanently.

According to the research, since data on the road toll began in 1925, there have been more than 189,000 deaths on Australia's roads.[1] The cost of road trauma to the Australian community is tragic and widespread. The annual economic cost of road crashes in Australia is estimated at $27 billion per annum[2], and the social impacts are overwhelming.

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.[3]

Risk-taking behaviours also account for too many lives lost and harmed on Australian roads. Medical practitioners, along with paramedics, ambulance officers and nurses, frequently witness 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.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) is committed to advocating for improvements in the way Australians drive, the cars they drive, and the roads they drive on.

In Australia, we have managed to substantially reduce road trauma, especially in the past few decades with the introduction of preventive measures such as random breath tests, seat belts, and improved automobile technology. 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, including for pedestrians.

The AMA also supports new technologies that make cars safer and reduce road accidents, and wants to see more investment in improving the safety of Australian roads.

By making drivers more responsible, more aware and more conscious of their behaviour and its consequences, and by providing safer vehicles on our roads, the AMA believes we will see further reductions in preventable road fatalities and injuries.

AMA Position

- The AMA supports the *National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020*, which aims to reduce the annual numbers of deaths and serious injuries by at least 30 per cent by 2020.[4]
- Australians should be driving the safest cars on the safest roads.
- Reducing road accidents and road trauma requires investment by governments, industry, and the community.

- A driver's licence is a privilege, not a right, and drivers who breach road rules should face meaningful sanctions, restrictions or licence suspension.
- The use of mobile telephones and electronic devices, including navigational devices, by drivers is a distraction and a major cause of accidents, trauma and death. Laws must be strictly enforced and meaningful sanctions must apply to drivers who text or use mobile devices.
- Zero tolerance of P-plate and L-plate drivers who use mobile or electronic devices, or breach any road rules, should be enforced, including loss of licence for up to one year.
- 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 log book regulations.[5]
- Pedestrians and cyclists using headphones and earpieces, or using mobile devices, pose a serious safety risk and are a factor in motor vehicle accidents.
- Fundamentals of road rules, including responsibility of pedestrians, must be formally instilled from a very young age through nationwide standards of education to young people about road rules.
- Preventive measures, such as random breath and drug tests, seat belts, and speed cameras, will substantially reduce road trauma in Australia.
- Enforcement of speed limits and greater compliance, especially around school zones and hospitals, is needed to reduce road accidents and road trauma.
- Driver fatigue is one of the top three contributors to Australia's road toll, and governments and stakeholders need to reinforce the dangers of driver fatigue. With drink driving, Australia has laws and systems in place to stop and apprehend those over the limit, and licences are cancelled as a result. The development of legislation regarding driver fatigue is desirable and consideration needs to be given to how this could occur.
- New automobile technologies, such as vehicle safety assist technologies (SAT), Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB), which reduces rear-end accidents, and lane keep assist (LKA) can prevent car accidents or minimise the effects and subsequent injuries and associated costs of car accidents. These sophisticated technologies will lead the way in reducing road trauma and should be incorporated into new cars[6].
- Mandatory use of approved helmets for motorcycle and bicycle riders, and the wearing of appropriate protective clothing, will save lives and reduce road trauma.
- The growing popularity of e-bikes (bicycles fitted with an electric motor to provide power-assistance) requires both increased education and training and also appropriate regulations for their use and interaction on public roads.[7]
- Motor vehicles should be separated from cyclists through dedicated bicycle lanes for cyclists.
- 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 endorses *Assessing Fitness to Drive: medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines. A resource for health professionals in Australia (October 2016).*[8]
- All States and Territories must adopt uniform criteria for assessing the functional ability of older drivers, as the discrepancies between jurisdictions are problematic.
- 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.

- 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 or motorcycle.

- 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.

- Investment in safer roads is critical. This includes sealing dirt roads and reducing speed limits on rural and undivided roads to reduce accidents.

- 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.

- Heavy vehicles, trucks and buses make up only three per cent of the vehicle fleet but are over-represented in accident statistics.[9] 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- The AMA supports the establishment of a national advisory body, with appropriate expertise, to provide ongoing advice to governments about the important and complex issues of driverless automobiles, including road safety, infrastructure, data collection and privacy, intellectual property, standards, legal responsibility, and their impact on existing laws and legislation.

References

[1] https://infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety/

[2] https://infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety/

[3] See: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs358/en/ [and] www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/96781e47a4d2d886ca2570ec0073f6a9!OpenDocument [and] http://www.youngdriverfactbase.com/key-statistics

[4] http://roadsafety.gov.au/nrss/files/NRSS_2011_2020.pdf

[5] http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/learners-admit-to-cheating-on-their-required-75-hours-of-supervised-driving/news-story/a18273da73f1be27d384f4ef38cefb15

[6] See: 'Study confirms effectiveness of Autonomous Emergency Braking', https://www.ancap.com.au/media-and-gallery/releases/study-confirms-effectiveness-of-autonomous-emergency-braking

[7] For further information, see: http://monash.edu/research/explore/files/33966117/24939805.pdf

[8] See: http://www.austroads.com.au/drivers-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive

[9] http://roadsafety.gov.au/nrss/files/NRSS_2011_2020.pdf