

23 August 2021

Joint Select Committee on Road Safety Members
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety,

RE: Inquiry into Road Safety

On behalf of Injury Matters, congratulations on your appointment to the Committee and your commitment to identify measures that can be taken to reduce trauma and deaths on Australian roads.

Injury Matters is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to preventing and reducing the impact of injury within the Western Australian community. Working towards our vision of safer people and places, we raise awareness of injury by providing education, training, advocacy, and support for those affected by injury. We utilise the latest available data, research, community input and evaluation to ensure our safety initiatives are evidence-informed and appropriate for the community. Given the burden that road trauma places on the WA community, road safety is a key pillar of our injury prevention and recovery support activities. More information about our programs and services can be found at www.injurymatters.org.au.

In recognition of the vital role that the Inquiry has in investigating and identifying opportunities to improve Australia's road safety outcomes, please find below measures that align to the Inquiry.

Post-crash care

Post-crash care is a critical component of road safety, as road crashes are associated with significant psychological distress, with research studies in Australia indicating that 8-29% of road traffic crash survivors develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹ The provision of high quality, accessible post-crash services for those affected by road trauma, is an important measure to enhancing the quality and life of those affected. Continued investment in post-crash care, particularly mental health support services, is a priority issue that requires further consideration nationally.

Injury Matters' delivers Road Trauma Support WA, a free state-wide service, funded by the Road Trauma Trust Account with contract management provided by the WA Road Safety Commission, providing information, resources, support, and counselling to Western Australians affected by a road traffic incident. With road traffic incidents affecting individuals, directly and indirectly, involved in the incident and the inability to put a time limit on trauma, Road Trauma Support WA provides support to individuals regardless of when the incident occurred or what level of involvement the person had in the incident. The value of the Road Trauma Support WA service is reinforced by the provision of 815 counselling instances during the 2020-21 financial year and 85.7% of the 2021 annual survey respondents indicating that the counselling sessions helped them with their issues and/or concerns (n=42).²

Despite the value of the current service, the provision of additional funding would provide opportunities to improve the service, including increasing the accessibility of the service for young people in WA and providing additional training to first responders.

Develop a referral pathway to enable automatic referrals for post-crash support

Despite the World Health Organization describing mental health care as a key component of the post-crash response³, there is no nationally automated referral pathway for mental health support following a road traffic crash. Awareness-raising activities are an important approach to empowering individuals to access healthcare services and therefore Injury Matters conduct a range of awareness-raising activities to build knowledge of services in WA, however automated referral pathways would ensure that individuals who require support are aware of the services available to them in a timely manner.

Following a serious road traffic incident there can be a variety of emergency, medical and financial professionals providing care to the individual/s involved in the incident. Therefore, the development of automated referral pathways across a variety of government departments and agencies, including police, hospitals and insurance providers and the implementation of a system to enable the automatic referral of individuals to post-crash support services would be beneficial. This would ensure that all Australians involved in a serious road traffic incident, and their broader support network, are aware of support services available to them to prevent long-term psychological impacts.

Injury Matters advocates for the introduction of a national post-crash referral pathway, similar to that administered in Victoria by the Transport Accident Commission, where anyone impacted by road trauma can be automatically contacted with varying levels of support to offer assistance with their recovery following a crash. Injury Matters are a national leader in post-crash care and invite further discussion to inform government policy to contribute to road trauma support.

Reporting of road crashes within the media

Generating awareness of the frequency of road traffic incidents via media coverage is valuable to building community members knowledge of the harms that can be associated with using our roads, however the way that the incident is reported can contribute to additional trauma among individuals involved in a road traffic incident. Work conducted via the Mindframe program has led the way in ensuring that best practice principles are applied to communication and media coverage about suicide, mental ill-health, alcohol and other drugs, however no equivalent initiative exists in regards to road safety.

Research supports that since the introduction of Mindframe's national guidelines there has been an improvement in the nature and quality of mental health reporting across newspaper, television and radio channels.⁴ If the equivalent was to be developed and enforced regarding media coverage of road traffic incidents it would provide direction on what language should be used when reporting road traffic incidents, which is informed by the latest evidence and industry standards.

In addition, policy changes to enforce the ethical reporting of road crashes within the media would include the need to provide readers and listeners with information about support services available and in turn ensure that individuals affected by the road traffic incident can receive the support they require. This can be particularly crucial when media are reporting information on serious road crashes, which unfortunately is a daily occurrence.

Within WA, Injury Matters has encouraged media organisations and government representatives to include information about local support services whenever they are discussing serious road crashes. However, the development and mandating of tailored guidelines would ensure that the reporting of the incident is safe, accurate and would be a valuable opportunity to embed road trauma prevention across Australian Government portfolios and reduce road trauma across the state.

Improving the safety of heavy vehicle operators

Despite heavy vehicles making up 8% of the vehicle kilometres travelled on Australian roads, their involvement in 18% of all road deaths reinforces the need for additional initiatives to be implemented to reduce the incidence of road trauma within this sector.⁵

Funded as part of the National Heavy Vehicle Safety Initiative, Injury Matters has developed and implemented the Mental and Physical Safety (MaPS) on our Roads program over the last two years. This awareness raising initiative aims to improve the mental and physical safety of heavy vehicle operators in WA as a means of improving heavy vehicle safety. To date, Injury Matters has delivered two MaPS on our Roads campaigns, “Your MaP to Recovery: After A Crash” and “Your MaP to a Healthy Lifestyle: Fuel Your Body”, with campaign activities proving to be a valuable asset to WA’s heavy vehicle industry. Given the success of the program in reaching the broad heavy vehicle industry and their interest in the activities provided, the MaPS on our Roads program would be beneficial to other states and presents as a valuable initiative towards achieving Vision Zero that the Committee may wish to inquire into.

Improving heavy vehicle industry regulations

Through the delivery of the Mental and Physical Safety on our Roads (MaPS) program, Injury Matters has gained significant insight into the key barriers that heavy vehicle operators face to optimising their safety on the road and their attitudes towards road safety. Many of these barriers, including; differing state-based regulation, low salaries, a lack of roadside infrastructure and long working hours could be reduced through legislative changes.

We acknowledge that due to the diversity of Australia’s heavy vehicle industry there is no one size fits all policy that improves the safety of heavy vehicle operators. However, due to the unique needs of the heavy vehicle industry we believe there are opportunities for improvements to be made to government policies and across portfolios that affect the heavy vehicle industry to support the elimination of road trauma in Australia.

Holistic approach

Injury Matters supports the Committee’s acknowledgement of the need to identify opportunities to embed road trauma prevention across Australian Government portfolios, agencies and policies. The dedication of two items within the terms of reference to this issue is a vital step in reinforcing that road safety is not just a transport problem, but rather an issue that requires action across the spectrum of government, interagency partnerships and everyday actions by all Australians.

Reflecting this value of a holistic approach to road safety, we reinforce the benefit of the Inquiry in ensuring that opportunities and measures identified reflect and support other activities that are being done across other bodies and in the implementation of current national strategies.

Given the role of the Safe Systems Approach in creating a safer road environment that caters for all users of the road transport system, Injury Matters strongly endorses the Committee’s commitment to integrating Safe System principles within the Inquiry and the inclusion of post-crash care.

Priority population groups

Given a higher incident of road traffic incidents among young drivers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and within regional locations, Injury Matters reinforces the need for additional initiatives to be implemented to reduce the impact of road trauma on these population groups. Community based programs are a valuable asset to increasing awareness and educating these priority populations about risky driving behaviours and supporting individuals to obtain their drivers license.

Should you require any additional information or would like to discuss any of the opportunities included in this submission please feel free to contact Christine Smith, Injury Matters' Recovery Support General Manager on 6166 7688 or csmith@injurymatters.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Sandy Lukjanowski

Chief Executive
Injury Matters

References

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2. Injury Matters. *Road Trauma Support WA 2021 Annual Survey Report*. (2021).
3. World Health Organization. *Post-crash response: Supporting those affected by road traffic crashes*. http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/road_traffic/Post-crash_response_booklet.pdf (2016).
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