

10 June 2022

WA Firearms Reform Committee  
303 Sevenoaks Street,  
Cannington, WA, 6107

Dear Minister Paul Papalia and WA Police officials,

**RE: Western Australian Firearm Act 1973 legislation change**

Injury Matters together with a group of supporting organisations congratulate the McGowan Government on your commitment to prioritise community safety and ensure Western Australia is compliant with the National Firearms Agreement during the upcoming structural reform of the Western Australian Firearms Act 1973.

Injuries resulting from illegal firearm use can be detrimental to the health of a community and the injured individual, with physical and mental ramifications having the potential to cause long term physical and psychosocial injury.<sup>1</sup> There is no denying that firearm-related harm is a growing global concern and it is time for preventative action.

Firearms cause significant harm in WA, with 19 firearm-related registered deaths in 2020, 16 due to intentional self-harm and three due to assault, resulting in over 493 years of potential life lost.<sup>2</sup> Additional public safety concerns are evident in relation to violent altercations, with firearms involved in 160 reported crimes across the state in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Of growing concern is the prevalence of licenced guns in WA, which has increased by 60% over the last 13 years despite the number of WA firearm licensees remaining stable. We note that there are legitimate reasons to possess and use a firearm, however one firearm in the hands of a person with malicious intent can cause harm to the WA community. A tightening of the Firearms legislation is required.

Despite no structural reform, amendments made to the Act over the last five decades have taken significant steps to improve firearm safety across the state. In particular, we would like to acknowledge recent activities regarding strengthening the Western Australia Police Force's enforcement capabilities, tightening legislation regarding the manufacturing of firearms and the recommencement of the National Firearm Amnesty.

**Support for proposed amendments**

Leveraging off this momentum, we support the proposed upcoming reforms regarding;

- strengthening the practical and theoretical training requirements for people to obtain a firearm licence,
- enhancing the requirements for the security, storage and transportation of legitimately owned firearms,
- mandating disqualifications for people convicted of serious criminal offences,
- provisions to allow WA Police to revoke gun licences from those convicted of family violence offences, and
- working with firearm dealers, clubs and ranges to refine mandated reporting processes.

## **Additional recommendations**

To further support the significant steps already taken, we would like to take this opportunity to present the following recommendations to continue to improve firearm-related community safety in WA.

### **Recommendation 1: Tighten firearm, ammunition and parts licensing requirements.**

This reform provides a significant opportunity to ensure firearm holders have a genuine reason to hold a firearm. Therefore, legislation should be tightened regarding the identification of firearm licensees, the use of property letters to demonstrate a genuine reason for obtaining a firearm, antique firearms possession and restrictions on the number of firearms and quantity of ammunition a licence holder can obtain.

### **Recommendation 2: Improve requirements for firearm and ammunition repossession and disposal.**

There is a need to stipulate how long an individual has to dispose of firearms and ammunition if their licence is revoked or not renewed. Additionally, improving WA Police procedures regarding securing firearms from deceased estates and non-licence holders in a timely manner will improve community safety.

### **Recommendation 3: Improve monitoring systems to reduce the risk of firearm-related harms in the community.**

We advocate for better monitoring systems to identify risk and reduce harm from firearm-related activities to the Western Australian community. This can be achieved via improving existing ownership monitoring systems and implementing a risk-based regulatory framework.

### **Recommendation 4: Consider a range of multifaceted approaches to create a safer WA.**

Firearm regulation is a proven effective intervention in preventing firearm-related injuries<sup>4-6</sup>, however a multifaceted approach is needed to create a safer WA. To complement upcoming legislative changes the WA community would also benefit from;

- community education and safety campaigns to promote safe firearm ownership,
- ongoing data capturing and analysis,
- the distribution of ongoing safety information to firearm license holders,
- increased support available to improve safety compliance within WA shooting and recreation clubs,
- increased resourcing for services supporting victims of firearm-related incidents, and
- ongoing mental health support for the police force and other occupations who have regular access to firearms.

The Australian Government's successful regulation of firearm ownership has global recognition, due to its contribution to significantly reducing the incidence of mass shootings,<sup>7</sup> suicide<sup>4</sup> and homicide rates in Australia.<sup>8</sup> Now it's WA's turn to lead the way.

We value the opportunities provided to date to participate in consultation activities and look forward to future discussions regarding the firearm legislative changes and creating a safer WA.

Yours sincerely,



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