

Submission to the Parliament of New South Wales Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety

Terms of reference: Reducing trauma on local roads in NSW with specific reference to:

- the role of local roads in road safety and trauma;
- the effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdictions;
- opportunities for improving road safety planning and management on local roads, including through the Local Government Road Safety Program and Community Strategic Planning;
- the role of local communities and their representatives in identifying and delivering road safety initiatives to reduce trauma on local roads;
- other relevant matters.

The George Institute for Global Health is a not-for-profit global medical research institute established and headquartered in Sydney, with major centres in China, India and the UK, and an international network of experts and collaborators. Our mission is to improve the health of millions of people worldwide by using innovative approaches to prevent and treat the world's biggest killers: non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and injury. Our work aims to generate effective, evidence-based and affordable solutions to the world's biggest health challenges. We research the chronic and critical conditions that cause the greatest loss of life and quality of life, and the most substantial economic burden, particularly in resource-poor settings.

The George Institute is a **leading injury research centre** and its Injury Division is a designated WHO Collaborating Centre in Injury Prevention and Trauma Care. The Injury team investigates solutions to prevent the world's most significant injury problems and transform injury and trauma care globally. Harnessing the power of governments, markets and communities through research, advocacy and thought leadership, we are at the forefront of innovations to reduce the burden of injury.

The George Institute currently leads over 30 injury-related projects in Australia, India, Bangladesh, China, Uganda and South Africa, including developing Australia's National Injury Prevention Strategy, and a specific focus of projects that aim to deliver tangible reductions in road trauma worldwide.

As our overall strategic aim is to reduce the burden of injury, we support any move towards the reduction of trauma on local roads in New South Wales.

The role of local roads in road safety and trauma

- **The burden of serious injury and fatalities on local roads are high:**
 - Over 50% of crashes and 40% of all road deaths in Australia occur on local roads, and over half of road fatalities happen on rural and remote roads (AustRoads, 2016);
 - The risk of being seriously injured is 1.5 times higher on local roads than on state roads (AustRoads, 2016).
- **Local roads contribute to significant inequity in road trauma:**
 - Mortality rates increase with increasing remoteness. Transport-related injury deaths are five times higher in very remote areas compared to urban areas, at 3.6 deaths/100,000 versus 17.9 deaths/100,000 (Henley & Harrison, 2019);
 - Rates of life-threatening injury is increasing on average by 3.7% each year in rural and remote areas (Henley & Harrison, 2015);
 - Fatality rates are 4 times greater for rural and remote residents of NSW compared with metropolitan residents (Transport for NSW, 2012);
 - Mortality rates for road crashes are higher in lower socioeconomic areas, with child mortality rate as high as 11 times greater for children in remote areas compared to those in major cities (Ombudsman NSW, 2019);
 - Fatal road crash rates are 2.3 and 1.9 times higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and very remote regions than for other Australians living in those regions (Henley & Harrison, 2013).
- **Poorer quality of roads and higher speeds contribute to higher fatality rates in rural and remote areas:** The large fatality rates per population in rural and remote areas compared with urban areas can be attributed in part to poorer road standards, higher speeds and poorer enforcement of road rules (Australian Transport Council, 2010).

The effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdictions

- **Ineffectiveness in current practice:** The ongoing contribution of local roads to the road trauma problem and large inequities in the burden of road trauma demonstrate ineffectiveness of current practices, specifically in addressing these existing inequities.
- **Failure to implement Safe Systems:** Increased recent focus on the 'Safe System' is beneficial but as noted by Woolley (2018) there is clear evidence across Australia of failures in the implementation of what is known to work and this warrants further investigation. Examples of poor implementation include poor infrastructure and speed limits in rural areas being too high given the quality of road infrastructure.
- **Poor resourcing:** The impact of poor resourcing of local governments, particularly in rural and low socioeconomic areas results in insufficient expenditure on local road networks.

Opportunities for improving road safety planning and management on local roads, including through the Local Government Road Safety Program and Community Strategic Planning

- **Reducing inequity in road trauma requires acknowledgement and commitment:**
 - Road safety planning and management should acknowledge and specifically target existing inequities in road trauma;
 - There needs to be clear focus on and commitment to implement evidence-based countermeasures and treatments to address highest priority gaps in local road safety systems.

- **Potential opportunities to achieve improvements include:**
 - Greater reach of the Local Government Road Safety program across local government areas in NSW, particularly in rural and remote, and lower sociodemographic regions;
 - Targeted action to increase awareness of the evidence-base for effective action, and implementation methods across local government councils in NSW, particularly those in the rural and remote, and lower sociodemographic areas;
 - Targeted calls for funding to address high priority issues in high priority areas.

The role of local communities and their representatives in identifying and delivering road safety initiatives to reduce trauma on local roads

- **Local communities and representatives are well-placed to identify and deliver relevant initiatives with likely high levels of acceptance in their local areas, however:**
 - There are barriers to involvement of local communities in areas with the greatest need;
 - The most significant local problems need to be understood and addressed, especially among local communities in areas of highest need.
- **Effective action by local communities and their representatives to address road trauma on local roads likely requires increased levels of 'road safety literacy' across NSW communities:**
 - Local communities and their representatives may need greater understanding of how and what works to reduce road trauma;
 - Achieving effective action may require more effort to co-design implementation of countermeasures known to be effective.

Other relevant matters

- **There is a need for novel approaches:** Stagnation in declines of road trauma generally across Australia indicate a need for new approaches to address the road trauma problem:
 - Road trauma is a clear public health problem and innovations may be delivered by using approaches used in other public health areas.
- **There are limitations in viewing the Safe System as a concept alone:**
 - Adoption of the 'Safe System' concept alone has not been enough – there is a need to understand how to effectively deliver a truly safe system;
 - There are many countermeasures known to be effective that are not being implemented on local roads;
 - There is a need to focus on delivery or implementation of the safe system as a system. There are many approaches being adopted across other areas of public health incorporating systems science and implementation science methods that may provide much needed innovation in addressing road trauma;
 - Examples include the development of **health systems science** incorporating systems and **implementation science** to study and improve health care delivery in response to targeted calls for research funding;
 - Enhanced delivery of safe road systems at the local level to see reductions in road trauma may benefit from similar approaches arising from similar calls for targeted funding.
- **Increased health literacy is acknowledged as a critical requirement for addressing health, and health inequities in other areas of public health:**
 - There may be significant benefit by adopting a similar approach to increased road safety literacy among those delivering local road safety programs;
 - A critical foundation for increased road safety literacy is sharing evidence of effectiveness of road safety interventions and increased understanding of how and why they work;
 - Greater emphasis on user/consumer centric and/or co-design of local road safety programs and countermeasures may assist.

References

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