



JOINT SUBMISSION

Learnings from government responses to COVID-19 and road safety

Issues:

The thirteen undersigned organisations from transport and medical fields, have a dedicated interest in road safety and wish to make this joint submission to draw the Council's attention to learnings from government responses to COVID-19 and road safety.

The Office of Road Safety within the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications is currently developing the next National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) to take effect from 2021. We understand the Council will be asked to consider policy priorities, milestones and targets for the next Strategy, before the final Strategy and first Action Plan will be considered at the Council's final meeting of 2020.

We commend the Commonwealth, state and territory governments on their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and wish to draw Ministers' attention to the positive lessons and opportunities that can, and should, be applied to other public health crises. This includes their urgent application to the next NRSS.

We strongly urge Ministers to make it a priority to ensure the mechanisms that have been central to Australia's COVID-19 response, in particular national cooperation on data collection, aggregation and real-time reporting, are embedded in future road safety strategies.

Priorities and themes:

As Ministers are already aware, road trauma is a public health crisis. Close to 1,200 Australians are killed and around 44,000 are hospitalised due to road trauma every year. The true human impact of these injuries is revealed in an estimated 2,700 people who suffer brain injuries, 5,900 who suffer limb fractures and 10,000 who suffer soft tissue injuries every year.¹

Prior to the travel impacts of the bushfires and restrictions imposed by COVID-19, progress in reducing these numbers had stalled; and the Council would be aware that data is still not collected for benchmarks set by governments almost ten years ago.

One of the great successes of Australia's response to COVID-19 is that, within a matter of weeks, there has been an ability to collect and provide almost real-time, standardised data at a granular level on a wide range of indicators. The Department of Health's reporting of aggregated data from states and territories across a range of measures has been truly commendable. It has meant the public has access to real-time data on indicators such as infection rates, recovery and death data, hospitalisation, ICU admissions and testing undertaken. Unfortunately, as seen in the chart below, it is in stark contrast to the collecting and reporting of road safety data, despite governments across Australia having committed to these indicators being key measures of the NRSS signed almost ten years ago.

¹ <https://www.vaccinesforroads.org/global-impact-of-injuries/>



Data collected and reported at a national level COVID-19 v Road Safety			
COVID-19: What we measure [#]		Road safety: What we <i>cannot</i> measure	
Daily number of reported cases, including analysis of national rate of increase	✓	Number of serious injuries resulting from road crashes*	X
Current status of confirmed cases: cases; deaths; cases recovered, broken down by jurisdiction	✓	Number of people hospitalised as a result of road crashes	X
Current cases admitted to hospital, broken down by jurisdiction	✓	Number of people recovered after being hospitalised as a result of road crashes	X
Current cases in intensive care units, broken down by jurisdiction	✓	Data on the state of the road network, including safety ratings	X
Total tests conducted and percentage positive, broken down by jurisdiction	✓	Publicly available geospatial data on traffic crash locations, including any clusters of crashes	X
Cases in aged care services: recovered; deaths – broken down by jurisdiction	✓	Enforcement data on traffic offences, including speeding; drink and drug driving; distraction	X
Cases by age group and sex	✓	Enforcement data on testing undertaken, including speed detection; BAC and drug testing; mobile phone detection	X
Deaths by age group and sex	✓	Licensing data, including numbers of licence holders; licence disqualifications; recidivist offenders	X
Cases by source of infection	✓	Number of deaths from crashes where speed was a contributory factor*	X
Public health response measures: cases under investigation, broken down by jurisdiction	✓	Mean free speeds at designated sites across the network*	X
Median age of cases and median age of deaths	✓	Percentage of vehicles speeding by vehicle type and offence category*	X
Trauma management capacity, including staffing, infrastructure and equipment	✓	Percentage of new vehicles sold with key safety features*	X

[#]Commonwealth Dept of Health reporting updated every afternoon based on the data received from states & territories.

*Agreed in 2011 by Commonwealth, state & territory governments as key indicator in the NRSS 2011-2020.

Australia has placed timely data collection, aggregation and reporting at the forefront of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe there are some fundamental principles which have guided Australia's data response which should be applied to road safety and embedded in the next NRSS:

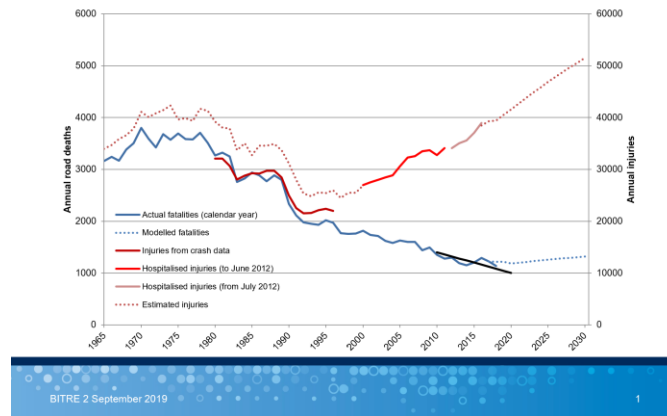
- Governments are unambiguous that the data is essential to respond to the situation.
- Governments release data and modelling to the public for transparency.
- There is strong communication on the link between the data and decision-making.
- The Commonwealth continues to paint and explain an overall picture even if there are gaps from jurisdictions – it does not cease reporting on something because not all data is present.
- Government decision-makers are keeping an open mind to evolving knowledge on the situation – they admit they don't have all the answers yet and have an expectation that the data will continue to improve over time to assist with management of the situation.

The focus and unity of purpose of collective levels of government on setting key goals to “flatten the curve” – and to routinely report and monitor the success of that “flattening” – should also have a parallel application to addressing road safety. While Commonwealth, state and territory governments have committed to both flattening the curve and reporting on progress for COVID-19, the same is not the case for road safety. The chart below shows the federal government's own projections on road fatalities and injuries to 2030 as presented to its Road Safety Roundtable in September 2019.

Between now and 2030, the federal government's own projections show a surge in hospitalised injuries from road crashes to over 50,000 Australians injured every year, along with a projected steady increase in the more than 1,000 Australians killed annually, not a decline or “flattening”.



Long term trends and projections for road deaths and hospitalised injuries



We strongly urge Ministers to ensure the next NRSS adopts the principles and mechanisms central to Australia's COVID-19 response, and therefore prioritises the consistent collection and timely reporting of data, along with co-operation by all levels of government, driven by national leadership and coordination.

Yours sincerely

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