Australia's First Peoples Road Safety

- In Australia, transport-related injury is the second leading cause of fatal injury for First Peoples. Standardised by age, this is a fatality rate 2.7 times greater than non-First Peoples. The serious injury rate is also 1.3 times greater.

- Most First Peoples live in urban areas, although they represent a greater proportion of the population living in remote areas. Serious injury and fatal crash rates increase as remoteness from urban centres increases, which contributes to the fatality and injury statistics[1].

State of the Road A Fact Sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q)

THE FACTS

This Fact Sheet complements the CARRS-Q Rural and Remote Road Safety Fact Sheet.

- Injury is the leading cause of death for First Peoples in Australia, contributing to 15% of the fatality gap between First Peoples and non-First Peoples.

- Road crashes are the second leading cause of fatalities among First Peoples at 23%, behind suicide (33%)[2].

- First Peoples are more likely to die as a passenger (4.8 times), a pedestrian (4.6 times) and a driver (2.5 times) than non-First Peoples[1]. They are also 30% more likely to be hospitalised due to a road crash[2]. This leaves many with serious disability or long-term conditions (e.g., acquired brain injury or spinal cord injury).

- The fatality gap is wide for unintentional crash injuries of First Peoples children aged 0-4 years and 5-14 years. Respective fatality rates are 4.1 and 3.3 times greater for male youth, and 6.4 and 2.3 times greater for female youth, than their non-First Peoples counterparts[2].

- In terms of crash types[1], single vehicle crashes are the most common crash scenarios that result in fatalities for First Peoples as a car occupant (26%).

- When not in traffic, the most common scenario is as a pedestrian hit by a motor vehicle (43%).

- Single vehicle crashes are also the most common crash scenarios resulting in serious injuries:
  - In traffic: as a car occupant (21%);
  - Not in traffic: as a motorcyclist (32%).

Why do Australia's First Peoples experience a high rate of road trauma?

These statistics do not reflect disregard for road safety. First Peoples have similar safety-orientated views as non-First Peoples in Australia, and are more willing to accept personal responsibility for a crash and to show greater concern for other people. Rather, Australia's history of colonisation has led to intergenerational cycles of disadvantage for First Peoples, reflected in many health and welfare statistics. Road safety is no exception[3,4].

The environment

- There are many reasons why most fatal and serious injury crashes occur in rural and remote areas, where there are more First Peoples than non-First Peoples:
  - higher speed roads and poorer road conditions;
  - less protective infrastructure, such as footpaths and roadside or median barriers;
  - more older and unroadworthy vehicles, with limited maintenance options;
  - limited public transport options;
  - greater travel distances;
  - lack of or delayed access to medical facilities and treatments; and
  - lower levels of enforcement compared to urban centres.
- Many of these factors lead to high levels of fatigue and alcohol/drug impaired driving, lower use of seatbelts and helmets, and overcrowding of vehicles[4,6].

Cultural factors

- Motor vehicle laws, policies and practices can conflict with First Peoples laws and cultures. Cultural factors, such as driving to meet kinship obligations, coupled with remoteness and transport disadvantage, are among the reasons First Peoples recognise that they are over-represented in crash statistics[3,5].

- In addition, the long history of First Peoples languages is verbal and visual, not written. English is commonly a second language, else third or more language for many communities. Therefore, literacy needs, including computer-based requirements (such as for driver licences), can also conflict.

Driver education and licensing access

- First Peoples have much lower rates of licensure compared to non-First Peoples, both in urban and remote areas[4,6]. There are limited culturally safe and affordable education, licensing and testing services available.

- First Peoples often lack appropriate supervisory drivers and/or vehicles in which to learn, as well as access to culturally safe learner driver mentoring programs.

- Ways to verify proof of identity and pay back fines linked to driver licences are increasingly available, but First Peoples may not be aware of these[6].

- Programs that are co-designed in partnership with diverse First Peoples communities have shown success in increasing licensure[7], but can also be limited by lack of on-going support[8].

Alcohol impairment

- Alcohol is a common contributing factor in First Peoples road user fatalities and serious injuries, most particularly for pedestrians and rollover crashes[1,4].

- Fewer First Peoples drink alcohol than non-First Peoples, however for those that do tend to drink more, access to culturally safe treatment options for alcohol use disorder can be limited, particularly in remote areas.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Transport disadvantage impacts First Peoples in many ways, not least due to the trauma experienced throughout communities when a serious crash occurs and lives are lost. It also contributes to the vast over-representation of First Peoples in custody. In turn, these impacts limit access to education and employment options, furthering the cycle of disadvantage[6].

Road safety initiatives need to be culturally safe, specific, and co-designed with First Peoples and their communities

- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples highlights the right to self-determination and self-governance, and that Indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are vital for their existence.

- As Australia continues towards Reconciliation, addressing the unequal impact of road safety policies and practices on First Peoples is especially important[3,5,6].

- Recommended initiatives, co-designed and delivered by First Peoples include[4-8]:

  ° road safety education and training programs, particularly relating to correct seatbelt use (including safety seats for children), alcohol risks (including as passengers and pedestrians) and increased self-agency to overcome acceptance of risk as "a rural way of life"[6];

  ° driver mentoring and licensing programs, including via job service networks, and affordable alternative transport options;

  ° increasing access to safe and roadworthy vehicles, particularly highlighting the importance of vehicle registration so that people injured in a crash have access to appropriate insurance schemes;

  ° literacy and social welfare supports to address underlying disadvantage, including in education and employment strategies to address beliefs of "hopelessness"[6] and any state debt linked to licensing;

  ° accessible and affordable alcohol management and treatment programs, including for rural and remote residents;

  ° diversionary programs to reduce unjust incarceration for licence and vehicle related offences; and

  ° robust research for advocacy and advancement based on evidence-based initiatives.

- There also is a general need to increase cultural safety within road safety sectors, including greater employment of First Peoples in governance and service delivery[4,8]. The need to increase cultural safety has been acknowledged in the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030, to better address Closing the Gap "in conjunction with reform priorities, formal partnerships and community control to capitalise on synergies created through shared goals".

CARRS-Q WORK IN THIS AREA

- An analysis of Queensland fatalities and serious injury crash characteristics and management by region using coroners' reports, and linked hospital and relevant database.

- Integrating driver licensing support programs into corrective services for women in Queensland – a scoping study.

- Engaging the voices of Indigenous Australian youth in advocacy to improve road safety and injury prevention.

- Evaluation of the Puuya Approach.

- Understanding the roles of remoteness and Indigenous status in rural and remote road trauma in North Queensland.

- Review of coroners data from rural and remote North Queensland fatal crashes and fatalities.

- Development and pilot of a drink driving program for Indigenous Australian communities in Far North Queensland and Northern New South Wales, 'Hero to Healing'.

- Rural and remote road safety collaborative study: Research and intervention to reduce the economic, medical, and social costs of road crashes in North Queensland.

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CARRS

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STATE OF THE ROAD is a series of Fact Sheets on a range of road safety and injury prevention topics. They are provided as a community service and feature information drawn from CARRS-Q research and external sources. See the reference list for content authors.

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Current as at November 2021