

EMBARGOED UNTIL 30th September 2024, 9:00 AM AEST

Improving road safety can help free up our ambulances

An estimated 61,483 Australians were hospitalised due to road crashes in the 2021-2022 financial year. This equates to 168 ambulance trips each day over one year. Additionally, in the 12 months up to August this year, 1,322 were killed during the same period.

Our National Road Safety Strategy (and those of most/all jurisdictions) aims to achieve a 50% reduction in road fatalities and 30% reduction in serious injuries by 2030. People killed and seriously injured has only increased, going backwards rather than towards these targets ⁽¹⁾.

These troubling trends represent huge social costs to our community. Road crash causes place a substantial burden on emergency and health services, with ambulances often tied up dealing with road crashes, leaving less capacity for other health emergencies.

Achieving the national target of a 30% reduction in serious injuries by 2030 would significantly ease this strain, potentially freeing up not only ambulance trips every day, but also hospital beds and other health services. These freed resources could be redirected, enhancing overall healthcare efficiency.

While the human cost is distressing, the financial burden of road crashes is equally concerning. Road crashes cost Australia an estimated \$27 billion annually ⁽²⁾. This translates to approximately \$74 million per day in direct medical expenses, emergency services, rehabilitation, and indirect costs such as lost productivity (social-cost-of-road-crashes).

These numbers beg the question: How much more effective could healthcare be if we reduced the economic cost of road crashes and redirected those funds to more proactive measures? What difference would it make to our communities if ambulance and hospital services were available to address other health issues instead of being used for road trauma?

Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) CEO, Dr Ingrid Johnston said "Every road crash represents not only a personal tragedy but a significant strain on our healthcare system. With over 168 ambulance trips needed every day due to road crashes, our emergency services are under constant pressure. By improving road safety and reducing serious injuries, we can free up these essential resources - ambulances, hospital beds, and medical staff - to address other critical health emergencies, in addition to preventing significant pain and suffering for injured road users and their families and friends".

Key figures from the BITRE report* on the social costs of road crashes show the financial cost per incident:

- \$3.2 million per fatal crash
- \$261,000 per hospitalised injury crash
- \$30,400 per non-hospitalised injury crash (social-cost-of-road-crashes).

If the government could save even a fraction of the \$74 million spent daily on reactive treatment for road crash victims, it could redirect those funds to invest more proactively in healthcare, infrastructure, and preventive road safety measures.

This is not just about saving lives on the road—it's about government investment in road trauma prevention. A whole-of-system approach to road safety, focusing on prevention, would not only protect Australians but also unlock significant financial resources to be reinvested where they are most needed.

"We have ignored the increasing road safety problem for too long. This is a shared responsibility. It is time for governments, industries, and communities to redouble their efforts and work together towards this 2030 goal", Dr Johnston said.

Road safety specialists from around the world, will meet at the 2024 Australasian Road Safety Conference in Hobart, Tasmania from Monday 29 September to Thursday 3 October 2024.

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References:

⁽¹⁾ 1,266 (6.7%) road fatalities in 2022-23FY, 1,310 (3.5%) in 2023-24FY.

⁽²⁾ Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE), *Social Cost of Road Crashes: Final Report, September 2022*(social-cost-of-road-crashes).

About the Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS)

The Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) is the region's peak membership association for road safety professionals, advocates, and members of the public who are focused on saving lives and serious injuries on our roads. The College provides an inclusive, collaborative environment promoting communication, networking, professionalism, and advocacy across all spheres of road safety including policy, advocacy, research, innovation, technologies, and management. ACRS membership includes experts from all areas of road safety including policy makers, academics, community organisations, researchers, federal, state, and local government agencies, private companies, and members of the public. **More Information** ACRS Website: acrs.org.au

