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ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY

In 2008, the State Government released its 12-year road safety strategy, *Towards Zero*. *Towards Zero* set out the ambitious target of 11,000 fewer people killed or seriously injured (KSI) by 2020, which is a 40% reduction from the baseline period of 2005-2007.

Modelling shows the potential to save 2,200 people from KSI crashes over the life of the strategy if safe road use is improved through education and enforcement. One important element in safe road use is the consistent use of restraints.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

From 2012 to 2017 on average 30 people who were not wearing seatbelts or restraints were killed in Western Australia (WA). This is even though 98% of the population report always wearing seatbelts when in the front seats and 95% report always wearing seatbelts in the rear seats.¹

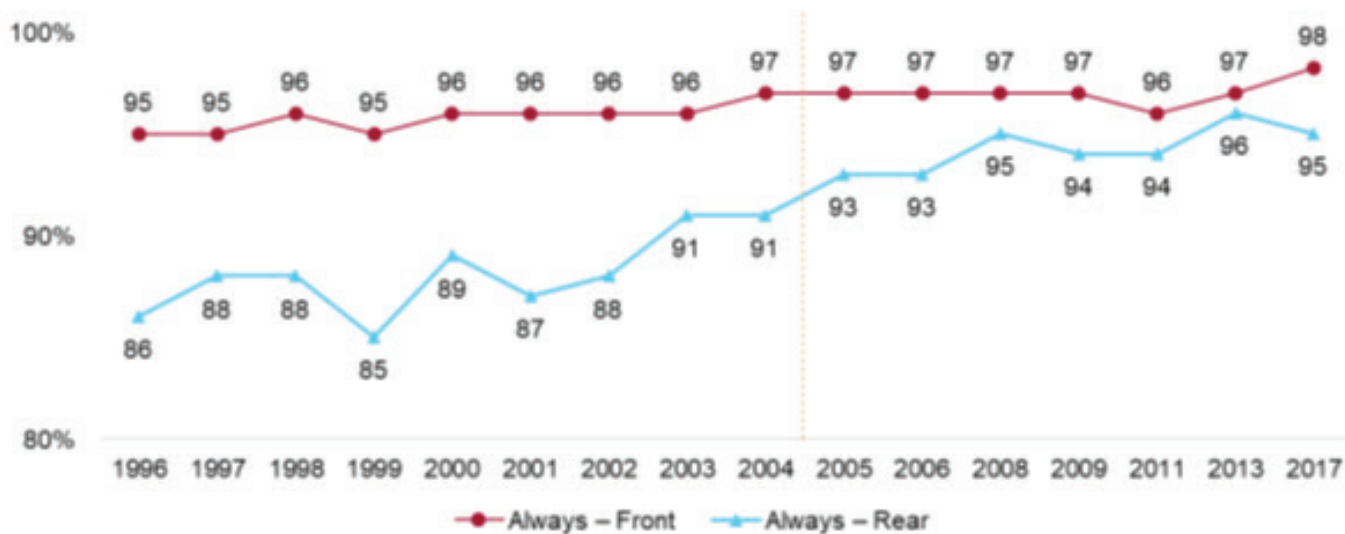


Figure 1: Community Attitudes to Road Safety – 2017

This disparity exists because:

- Failure to use restraints can be indicative of other risk-taking behaviours while driving.
- Although failure to use restraints is rare, if there is a crash the vehicle occupant is at great risk.

Research into factors influencing the severity of motor vehicle crashes found that not using restraints increased the odds ratio of a fatal injury by a factor of 4.7.²

Failure to use restraints is particularly prevalent in regional areas. In the five-year period between 2013 and 2017, 2.7% of people KSI in metropolitan Perth were not using restraints; in the same period 8.2% of those KSI in regional Western Australia were not using restraints. Proportions were very high in some regions, with 17% of those KSI in Goldfields-Esperance and 19% of those KSI in the Kimberley not using restraints. Indigenous Western Australians are recognized as a group particularly unlikely to use restraints.³

¹Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, Community Attitudes to Road Safety, 2017 Survey Report, June 2018, p. 78.

²Yubian Wang and Wei Zhang, 'Analysis of Roadway and Environmental Factors Affecting Traffic Crash Severities', Transportation Research Procedia, 25 (2017), pp. 2117-2125.

³Yvonne LM Helps, et al, *Aboriginal People Travelling Well: Issues of Safety, Transport and Health*, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, October 2008.

WHAT IS THE SUPPORTING RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE?

The five main functions of a seatbelt are to:

- Cause the occupant to decelerate at the same rate as the vehicle in a crash
- Spread the force of the impact over the stronger parts of the occupant's body (pelvis and chest area)
- Prevent the occupant colliding with the interior parts of the vehicle
- Reduce the risk of being thrown from the vehicle
- In modern cars, seatbelts are designed to work together with the airbags. In a crash, the seatbelt slows the speed of the occupant so they impact safely with the airbag.

In a crash, a person who is not restrained by a seatbelt will continue to travel forward at the speed the vehicle was travelling until something stops them. This could be the steering wheel, dashboard, windscreen, the seat in front of them or another person in the vehicle. In some crashes, the person may burst through one of the windows and be partially or fully ejected from the vehicle, exposing them to other dangers. They might hit fixed objects or be run over or crushed by their own, or another, vehicle. Even if the vehicle is fitted with an airbag, the force at which an unrestrained occupant strikes the airbag can cause serious injuries.

Ensuring that all vehicle occupants are restrained is outlined as a strategic direction in the *National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020* and in the WA strategy, *Towards Zero*.

WHAT ARE THE COUNTERMEASURES?

Legislation and Enforcement

Mandatory fitting and use of seatbelts in front seats was introduced in WA in 1969 and in 1971 this law was extended to all positions.

Failure to use seatbelts is taken seriously in WA, with penalties ranging from a minimum of \$550 to \$900 with the loss of 4 demerit points.⁴

Failure to wear restraints is classified as a Category A traffic offence – one likely to cause crashes or to exacerbate the outcomes of crashes. Western Australia Police Force dedicate at least 90% of enforcement to Category A offences, which include drink and drug driving, dangerous and reckless driving, speeding, unauthorised driving, use of mobile phones and failure to use restraints or wear helmets. In 2016-17, 97.8% of WA Police Force enforcement addressed these Category A offences.

Community Education

Market research is undertaken over a range of road safety topics including restraint use. This research includes attitude/behaviour segmentation, and campaign awareness tracking. Community tracking specific to WA indicates most people always wear seatbelts and that 53% believe the likelihood of being caught for not wearing seatbelts is high. On the other hand, the 2018 tracking indicates a slight decrease in the proportion who agree that it is OK not to wear a seatbelt (92% in 2018, down from 95% in 2015).⁵

⁴Road Traffic Code 2000, Sections 232 to 235A.

⁵Kantar Public, WA Driver Segmentation 2018, Seatbelt Workshop, September 2018.

In line with the high levels of compliance, most community education in this area concentrates on specific messages for at-risk groups. The Commission supports the School Drug Education and Road Aware (SDERA) Keys for Life program which prepares young people for safer driving, provides education on road safety and allows Year 10-12 students to begin the process of getting driving licenses. The Road Safety Commission also funds locally relevant advertising aimed at Indigenous groups and created by an Indigenous media company.

Vehicle Safety

The Commission supports the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) which has provided crash test information on vehicles sold in Australia since 1993. This program tests how well vehicles protect adult and child occupants, using different sized crash tests dummies that are properly restrained.

To encourage vehicle manufacturers to provide seatbelt reminder systems to all seats in the absence of regulation, ANCAP allocates extra points for seatbelt reminder systems in their assessment for safety ratings. All new vehicles for sale in Australia can only attain an ANCAP 5-star rating with SBRS fitted to all seating positions.

Car occupants of vehicles that are equipped with seatbelt reminder systems more often wear their seatbelts than occupants of vehicles without seatbelt reminder systems. Seatbelt reminder systems detect occupants and their seatbelt use in several seating positions and then generate a series of alarms to alert the occupant/driver if they are not belted.

The Commission promotes ANCAP: <http://www.ancap.com.au>

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOCUS?

The Commission will continue to promote the safety benefits of wearing restraints on our roads through:

- Education and awareness of seatbelt restraints for both drivers and passengers.
- Education of the road rules relating to seatbelt restraints.
- The promotion of safe vehicles with vehicle safety features.
- Opportunities to increase awareness of and compliance with restraint use in regional and remote WA.
- In particular Aboriginal road users who are overrepresented in KSI crashes, as identified in regional and remote national and state road safety research.

WA Police Force will continue to enforce wearing of restraints as a Category A Traffic Offence.

References

Helps, Yvonne, et al, *Aboriginal People Travelling Well: Issues of Safety, Transport and Health*, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, October 2008.

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Yubian Wang and Wei Zhang, 'Analysis of Roadway and Environmental Factors Affecting Traffic Crash Severities', *Transportation Research Procedia*, 25 (2017), pp. 2117-2125.