

Indigenous Road Safety



- Indigenous Australians are 3 times more likely to be fatally injured in a road crash.^{1,2}
- Indigenous young people are particularly vulnerable road users, with their road injury rate (26 per 100,000) twice the national average for non-Indigenous youth (13 per 100,000).³
- Indigenous people sustain higher rates of serious injuries and casualties as passengers or pedestrians.⁴

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

THE FACTS

This fact sheet complements CARRS-Q's *Rural and Remote Road Safety Fact Sheet*.⁵

- Road crashes are a leading cause of death among Indigenous Australians. Indigenous crashes are typically more severe in terms of injury outcomes and social cost.
- Indigenous road users are 30% more likely to be hospitalised due to a road crash than non-Indigenous Australians, leaving many with serious disability or long-term conditions, such as acquired brain injury or spinal cord injury.¹
- Indigenous casualties are more likely to be a passenger or pedestrian⁴, while non-Indigenous casualties are more likely to be drivers or riders.
- Apart from the direct physical effects of road crashes, there are also the psychological effects, as families try and cope with the death or disability of a family member.⁶
- The quantification of Indigenous road injury has been difficult due to poor reporting of crashes and complexities with the identification of Indigenous Australians in data collections.

Why do Indigenous Australians experience a high rate of road trauma?

In Queensland, Indigenous Australians are up to six times more likely to be involved in a road crash than non-Indigenous Australians.⁷ Characteristics of Indigenous road trauma are different in some ways to road trauma experienced by the general population, being a product of lifestyle, cultural and behavioural factors, as well as environment.

Indigenous road safety programs need to be culturally specific and developed in consultation with Indigenous communities.

The core issues identified as contributors to the higher crash risk of Indigenous Australians include:

- **Alcohol impairment and misuse:** A large proportion of Indigenous road crashes are characterised by alcohol involvement, particularly fatal single-vehicle roll-over incidents and pedestrian fatalities. Drink driving in remote areas is found to be identified with high range blood alcohol concentration (BAC) ($\geq 0.15\text{g}/100\text{ml}$).⁸ For Queensland Transport data recorded 2001/02 to 2005/06⁹, data comparisons found that:-
 - In 'major cities', 'inner regional' and 'outer regional' areas, 17.5% of Indigenous drivers and riders in all injury crashes were over the legal BAC limit, compared to 3.8% of vehicles controlled by a non-Indigenous Australian.
 - In 'remote' and 'very remote' areas, this increased to 31.5% and 7.4% respectively.
- **Cultural factors:** Kinship obligations, manifested in situations where a younger person was requested by a senior family member to drive after drinking, have been identified as a primary factor for young people drink driving in remote communities.¹⁰

- **Risky pedestrian behaviour:** Indigenous Australians sustain consistently higher rates of pedestrian injuries than non-Indigenous Australians, across all ages, sexes, and categories of remoteness.⁴ Indigenous pedestrians who are struck by a vehicle often have high BAC's. Queensland data comparisons showed that:⁹
 - of the 175 Indigenous people killed or hospitalised as a pedestrian, 53.7% were under the influence of alcohol.
 - of the 2,176 non-Indigenous people killed or hospitalised as a pedestrian, 20.2% were under the influence of alcohol.
- **Non-wearing of seat belts or helmets** has a major impact on casualty severity in serious crashes. An Australasian Transport Safety Bureau (2004) analysis of coronial data indicated that almost 70% of Indigenous car occupants or motorcycle riders were not wearing a seatbelt or helmet.
- **Overcrowding and illegal seating positions in vehicles:** Lower vehicle ownership rates contribute to the incidence of Indigenous road crash casualties. Over one quarter of fatal and serious injuries were the result of single vehicle rollover crashes and this may be due to overcrowding in vehicles.¹¹
- **Non-compliance with road laws and unlicensed driving:** Unlicensed driving is a significant factor in the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system. Queensland data comparisons showed that:⁹
 - In 'major cities', 'inner regional' and 'outer regional' areas, 23.6% of Indigenous vehicle controllers involved in all injury crashes were unlicensed,

compared to 3.2% of non-Indigenous vehicle controllers.

- In 'remote' and 'very remote' areas, this increased to 38.5% and 4.6% respectively.
- **Barriers in the licensing process and road safety education:** Less than 40% of people living in predominantly Indigenous local government areas have a valid driver's licence, compared to 90% in non-Indigenous local government areas.⁹ Barriers include testing issues, limited access to driver education and training due to cost and service availability and lack of roadworthy vehicles to conduct training.
- **The environment:** There are higher rates of fatalities and injuries in regional and remote areas compared with urban areas where approximately 70% of Indigenous Australians live. They are therefore exposed to these risks more often. Identified factors contributing to higher fatality and injury rates among the Indigenous population include poorer road conditions, lack of and delayed access to medical facilities and a reluctance to use them, reduced levels of enforcement, poor use of restraints, overcrowding of vehicles, increased road hazards, travelling longer distances and higher speed limits.
- **Unroadworthiness of vehicles:** As a substantial proportion of the Indigenous population reside in rural and remote areas, they rely more than most Australians on motorised transport. Vehicle age, choice, and lack of maintenance are major contributors to rural and remote road trauma.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A range of drink driving and licensing education and support programs have been implemented within Indigenous communities.

- The Australian Transport Council's National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020¹² has a strong mandate for addressing Indigenous road safety with key recommendations of:
 - Substantially improved access to graduated licensing;
 - The development and implementation of programs to increase the opportunities for driving practice for disadvantaged learner drivers in Indigenous communities; and
 - The implementation of education campaigns to meet the road safety needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- To fulfil these recommendations, more road safety research with Indigenous communities is urgently needed to inform the development of community-based strategies and programs.
- Robust evaluations are required for the existing road safety strategies and programs in Indigenous communities.

CARRS-Q'S WORK IN THIS AREA

- Development and pilot of a drink driving program for Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland and Northern New South Wales, 'Hero to Healing' (<http://www.carrsq.qut.edu.au/herotohealing/>).
- A profile of first drink driving convictions among young Indigenous Australians and risk factors associated with drink driving recidivism.

- Examination of the barriers to obtaining and retaining a driver licence in remote Indigenous communities and identification of strategies to improve licensing rates (<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/9393/>).
- Rural road safety literature review into Indigenous road safety issues (<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/8874/> and <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/7948/>).
- Comprehensive review of hospital and crash databases and examination of journey and crash experiences to identify and validate personal reports of trip characteristics, behaviour/s and retrieval factors contributing to serious traffic related injuries in Indigenous drivers and passengers.
- Research phase of Queensland's Indigenous Licensing Project and assistance in the development and delivery of a new mobile driver education program delivered by the Queensland Police Service.
- Development of a handbook for road safety professionals working in the Indigenous context - '*Inside communities, outside the box: Practical tips for working with and researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*'.
- Rural and remote road safety collaborative study: Research and intervention to reduce the economic, medical and social costs of road crashes in North Queensland (<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/26539/>).

CARRS-Q's Indigenous road safety research publications can be accessed at QUT ePrints (<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>) by searching 'Indigenous road safety'.

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

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CARRS-Q is a joint venture initiative of the Motor Accident Insurance Commission and Queensland University of Technology

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