

## **INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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# YOUNGdrivers

annual road safety index

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**Technology  
drives young  
people to  
distraction**



This is the seventh annual *AAMI Young Drivers Index*. It is published to inform and educate the community about trends and issues related to young drivers. In recent years, the Index has focussed on topics including speeding, drink driving and fatigue. In 2007, the *AAMI Young Drivers Index* focuses on the role

technology plays in contributing to young drivers' poor driving habits. Sweeney Research conducted a telephone survey of 2380 men and women drivers, aged 18 years and older, in the following locations around Australia:

- Adelaide
- Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton
- Batemans Bay, Bega and Ulladulla
- Brisbane
- Canberra
- Central Queensland
- Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie
- Darwin
- Geelong
- Gold Coast
- Hobart
- Launceston
- Melbourne
- Newcastle and Gosford
- North Queensland
- Regional South Australia
- Sunshine Coast
- Sydney
- Tamworth
- Toowoomba and Darling Downs
- Wagga Wagga and Griffith
- Wollongong and Nowra

This research is supported by an in-depth analysis of car insurance claims lodged in 2006 by AAMI customers in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

Terms of reference: in this Index, the term 'young drivers' refers to drivers aged 18-24 years and the term 'other drivers' refers to those aged 25 or older.

## Young drivers sending – but not getting – the message

Australians of all ages have embraced mobile telephones as a means of immediate, convenient communication.

However, one of the flow-on effects of our rapid uptake of this technology has been an increase in the number of people using mobile phones while driving to talk, and increasingly text message. This dangerous practice has the potential to reduce driver reaction times and increase the risk of an accident. But despite severe infringement penalties and widespread publicity of the dangers of using mobile phones while driving, it is still an alarmingly common practice.

With young people adopting technology at a rapid rate, AAMI's research shows they are particularly likely to use their mobile phone while driving a car. While 36 per cent of drivers aged over 25 have sent or received a text message while driving, it seems the message is still not getting through to young

drivers, with three-quarters (75 per cent) admitting to sending or receiving a text message while driving.

## Don't take your eyes off the road

Another factor giving young drivers cause to take their eyes off the road is the rise in popularity of MP3 players. With the ability to shuffle and sort thousands of songs, video and photographs, these miniature devices are a distraction waiting to happen.

While only seven per cent of drivers aged over 25 said they had been distracted from driving while fiddling with an MP3 player, more than twice as many (20 per cent) young drivers said they had been distracted while using this technology.

But the more traditional car stereo can also prove a diversion from the task at hand for music-loving young drivers, with 58 per cent admitting they have sometimes lost concentration while changing the CD, tape, or radio station

## One-fifth (20 per cent) of young drivers have been distracted by an MP3 player while driving

while driving, compared to 38 per cent of older drivers who have experienced this distraction.

## Young drivers – they're fast...

Speed is known to be a major contributor to car accidents, and, as an age group, young drivers are over-represented in our road toll, with drivers aged 15-24 twice as likely to die on our roads as the rest of the population<sup>1</sup>. Despite these alarming statistics, almost one in five drivers under 25 (18 per cent) say they exceed the speed limit "most of the time", compared to seven per cent of other drivers who admit to being a regular lead foot.

And although the police and speed cameras would disagree, more than one-third (36 per cent) of young drivers believe that travelling at five or 10 kilometres over the posted speed limit does not actually constitute speeding, and 19 per cent say they often ignore restricted speed limits, such as on suburban roads, outside schools and for roadworks, compared to nine per cent of drivers aged more than 25. So it comes as no surprise that young drivers are more likely to have been fined for speeding in the last two years than older drivers (26 per cent compared to 19 per cent).

# 75%

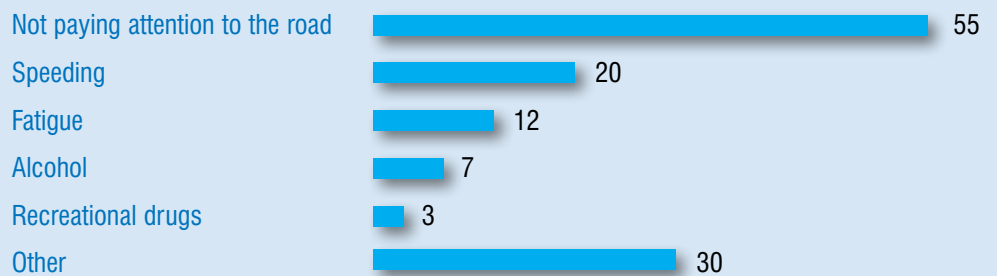
Three-quarters of young drivers admit they have taken their eyes off the road to send or receive a text message while driving

<sup>1</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics



**30%** One-third of young drivers have been so angry with another driver that they tailgated them

### Young driver crashes – what causes them?



### ...and furious

While speed alone is dangerous, the level of danger increases when speed is coupled with aggression, and it seems young drivers are much more likely than others to exhibit signs of road rage. One-quarter of young drivers (26 per cent) admit to being impatient behind the wheel, compared to 17 per cent of older drivers. This aggression often manifests in the form of verbal abuse or rude gestures – something of which 64 per cent of young drivers say they have been guilty.

While half (50 per cent) of young drivers say the best response to road rage is to signal an apology to the other driver and concentrate on their own driving, only one-third (33 per cent) say they would actually respond in this way, while 20 per cent confess they would be most likely to retaliate with their own offensive gesture or by yelling at the other driver.

But some drivers take their road rage to

the extreme, becoming so angry with the actions of another motorist that they tailgate them, putting both vehicles at high risk of having a rear end crash that causes property damage, injuries and even death. Almost one-third (30 per cent) of young drivers admit to tailgating, compared to 19 per cent of older drivers.

But dangerous driving behaviour is not always the result of driver anger – many young drivers say they have been put in danger by a driver who simply wanted to show off. Almost three-quarters of young drivers (73 per cent) have been a passenger in a car where the driver drove dangerously to show off, as opposed to 60 per cent of older drivers.

### Different strokes for younger folks

Most older drivers (94 per cent) believe it should be compulsory for young drivers to undertake a safe driving course, and

it seems young drivers are aware of their own inexperience on the roads, with 80 per cent supporting the need for mandatory driver education.

But when it comes to having restrictions imposed on them during the first few years of their driving experience, young drivers are not always in favour. While 72 per cent of older drivers believe young drivers should be restricted to carrying only one passenger between 11pm and 5am, only 37 per cent of younger drivers supported this concept. And the idea of removing young drivers from the road by implementing curfews between midnight and 5am, when fatalities are more likely to occur, was supported by two-thirds of older drivers (69 per cent) but only one-third of younger drivers (35 per cent).

Young drivers are also less likely to believe that there should be zero tolerance and immediate licence suspension if they are caught speeding, with 59 per cent agreeing, as opposed to 87 per cent of older drivers.

**Young drivers would be most likely to think twice about leaving their contact details if they damaged a parked car**

## Wake up sleepy driver

Young drivers continue to risk their lives by driving when they are tired.

One-fifth of young drivers (20 per cent) say they have momentarily fallen asleep at the wheel. While this figure is alarming, it seems that older drivers are, in fact, more prone to dozing off while driving, with 26 per cent admitting to falling asleep while driving at some stage.

However, young drivers are least likely to stop for a powernap if they feel tired while driving – almost half (46 per cent) of young drivers would continue on their journey despite being tired, compared to one-third (30 per cent) of drivers aged over 25.

**Young drivers are least likely to stop for a powernap if they feel tired while driving – almost half (46 per cent) would continue on their journey despite being tired**

## Own up to it

It seems hitting an empty parked car in a deserted car park or street presents quite a dilemma for many young drivers. Almost one-third (30 per cent) said they would think twice about leaving their contact details if they damaged a parked car, while older drivers seem to be more likely to take responsibility for their actions, with only 14 per cent saying they would fail to own up.

**73%** Almost three-quarters of young drivers have been a passenger in a car where the driver drove dangerously to show off

## Accidents waiting to happen

AAMI's claims data show that younger drivers' car accidents tend to be more serious and cause more damage to their own cars and other people's property, so that when they do make a claim, the cost is far more than for older drivers. While the average cost of a car accident claim is \$2107 for a driver over 25, this figure rises to \$2997 for a driver aged under 25.

### Reasons why young drivers don't use public transport:

It takes too long .....	50%
Convenience/reliability.....	34%
Prefer to take their car.....	23%
No public transport near their home/workplace/education.....	24%
Concerned for safety on public transport .....	11%
Work close to home.....	3%
Cheaper to drive.....	3%

### Admit to speeding:

	Young drivers	Other drivers
Most of the time .....	18	7
About half the time.....	18	10
Some of the time .....	55	67
None of the time .....	10	16

The AAMI Young Drivers Index is prepared with the help of a nationally recognised independent research company, Sweeney Research, which ensures the validity of the survey methodology and findings. The study is based upon a national telephone survey conducted in 2007 using a representative and

statistically valid sample\* of approximately 2380 Australian adults in major population centres and regions across Australia. Except where stated, they survey explores respondents' experiences of crashes over their lifetime. AAMI's research may differ from government and police sources, which

typically examine a 12-month period. Also, smaller or unreported incidents may be captured in AAMI's research and not by others.

\* The confidence interval for this sample size is plus or minus 2 per cent, which means that for the survey sample of 2380, if the observed percentage result is 50 per cent, the chances are 95 in 100 that the range – 48-52 per cent – includes the true percentage of the total population.