

Submission
No 6

**INQUIRY INTO THE EXERCISE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF
THE MOTOR ACCIDENTS AUTHORITY AND THE
MOTOR ACCIDENTS COUNCIL - ELEVENTH REVIEW**

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The Hon David Clarke MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Law and Justice
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Clarke,

**Re: Eleventh Review of the MAA and the MAC
and Fourth Review of the LTCSA and the LTCSAC.**

Thank you for inviting Youthsafe to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Law and Justice in relation to the 'Eleventh Review of the MAA and the MAC and Fourth Review of the LTCSA and the LTCSAC'.

Youthsafe is a not for profit organisation and the peak body in NSW for prevention of serious unintentional injury in young people. Youthsafe's primary focus is young people aged 15 to 25 years, but we also have some involvement with the 12 to 15 year age group as this is the period during which risk taking behaviour in adolescence begins to develop. Youthsafe addresses injury prevention wherever young people are at risk of injury, including on the roads,

in workplaces and in sport, recreation and other social settings. Youthsafe holds full accreditation having been assessed as complying with all required Quality Improvement Council standards for community organisations in Australasia.

Given Youthsafe's focus on injury prevention, our submission primarily relates to the review of the MAA and MAC, particularly the road safety and injury management functions.

Young people - vulnerable road users:

Despite road safety advances in recent years, young people continue to be over-represented in road trauma statistics and road trauma remains a major cause of death and disability amongst young people, particularly young males. The vulnerability of young road users is reflected in the 2009/10 annual report of the LTCSA which states the following in relation to those with serious injuries participating in the scheme:

'The age group with the strongest representation is 16 to 20 years which includes almost 20 per cent of all participants in the Scheme. This is followed by the age group directly above (21 to 25 years) with over 12 per cent of participants.'

This translates to 32% of those seriously injured on NSW roads and supported by the LTCSA falling within Youthsafe's population of interest.

The 2009/10 annual report of the MAA is also an indicator of the significance of young drivers in contributing to road trauma:

'People aged between 17-25 years make up 12.8 per cent of the population, 14.4 per cent of licence holders, but cause 19.0 per cent of all injury crashes, which account for 21.7 per cent of all claims costs.'

This is compared to other age groups as follows:

- 26-54 year olds make up 40.9% per cent of the population, 55.1% per cent of licence holders and cause 45.5% of injury crashes accounting for 43.5% of all claims costs.
- Over 55 year olds make up 25.5% of the population, 29.3% of licence holders and cause 19.6% of injury crashes accounting for 16.6% of all claims costs.

Why young people are at risk on the roads:

There are many good reasons why young people are vulnerable road users. Youthsafe has previously highlighted several factors that increase the risk of injury to young people in general and on the roads in particular:

- The adolescent brain, which is still developing and maturing until the mid twenties, particularly the prefrontal cortex responsible for reasoning, self control and making better judgements.
- New levels of independence and responsibility that come with adolescence, including starting to drive.
- Inexperience with activities that may impact on the safety of young people on the roads eg use of alcohol or drugs.
- A greater propensity amongst young people to experiment and to seek thrills.
- The strong influence of peers during adolescent years.
- Belief structures amongst young people that they are unable to control risk, particularly young people from lower socio-economic groups.
- Expectations in society generally that young people take risks and are not responsible for the outcomes of risk taking behaviour.
- The frequently busy lifestyles of young people which can contribute to fatigue eg the combination of study, work and social activities.
- Attitudes and patterns of behaviour related to safety which are influenced at an early age by parents/family and local community.

Risk factors for young drivers in particular also include:

- Inexperience in driving with its high demands for multi-tasking and learning to identify hazards and make decisions.
- High exposure, including the overall amount of time young people spend driving as well as exposure to hazardous conditions such as night time driving, rain etc.
- What motivates young people to drive - often it is considered a form of entertainment rather than just a means of getting from one place to another and, for some youth sub-cultures, sense of identity can also be strongly linked to a vehicle.

Other possible societal and cultural influences include:

- A greater likelihood that young people will use older vehicles with fewer safety features.
- A society that revolves around use of a motor vehicle as the preferred mode of transport.
- Young people who are generally highly mobile but with limited alternative transport options.
- Parents who generally have busier lifestyles today and who may be less able or less willing to assist in transporting young people.

MAA and road safety:

Youthsafe is familiar with the MAA's legislative responsibilities to provide funding for measures for preventing or minimising injuries from motor accidents and safety education and commends the MAA for significant achievements in these areas in the past. We also see under '*Future Directions*' in the MAA 2009/10 annual report that proposed major projects include:

- *Continuing to invest in research and other grants that will lead to reduction in road crash injuries and injury severity, in partnership with Centre for Road Safety.*

- *Improving health and social outcomes for people injured in road crashes through applied research in health and rehabilitation services and better practice guidelines.*
- *Establishing a new joint research centre to improve health care, rehabilitation and recovery outcomes for injured people in partnership with the Lifetime Care and Support Authority and WorkCover NSW.*

However we note in the MAA's 2009/10 annual report a drop in funding for *'Rehabilitation, road safety grants and sponsorships'* from \$25,787,000 in 2009 to \$6,655,000 in 2010. It is unclear what implications this may have for road safety initiatives, but it suggests there could be a significant decrease in commitment to this area.

The MAA reports on activities with a youth focus, such as the *'Arrive Alive'* program, support for Youth Week and YouthRock and presentations by sports people and wheelchair basketball players in schools. However achieving change in young road user safety is complex, particularly given the range of risk factors that come with being young. Research into adolescent brain development in recent years is also giving some insights into risk perception and risk management in young people, as well as approaches to learning relevant to the adolescent brain. This necessitates a multi-strategic and co-ordinated approach to road safety for young people. It would seem that reported MAA road safety programs for young people that focus on one off events and sponsorship of sports people to present to young people at schools about road safety do not adequately take into account the complexities, nor take full advantage of the potential for the MAA to influence road safety for young people.

Effective strategies that assist in preventing road trauma in the first instance are an invaluable investment, particularly for young people who represent a significant proportion of those seriously injured on the roads requiring lifelong care and support. Youthsafe is therefore of the view that the MAA should continue to direct appropriate funding to the high priority area of injury prevention in young people

on the roads. Further, it is important that the funding be used to support a multi-strategic approach which is co-ordinated with other stakeholders and incorporates 'whole of community' principles to comprehensively address the range of risk factors for young people on the roads and the complexity of road safety for this age group. Intervention strategies should also be evidence based and considered, taking into account up to date research in the field and issues associated with practical application. The MAA's stated intentions to support research and collaborate with other bodies, such as the Centre for Road Safety RTA, suggest appropriate directions for the MAA, but it is not evident from publically available information what strategies the MAA is putting in place.

Youthsafe would be very interested in the Committee exploring with the MAA how proposed road safety directions are to be implemented and the MAA's financial commitment to road safety.

To conclude Youthsafe would like to reinforce with the MAA that the following points are considered critical to the MAA's ongoing role in road safety for young people:

- Young road users must continue to be recognised as a high priority group for injury prevention.
- MAA's approach should be multi-strategic, co-ordinated with other stakeholders and incorporate 'whole of community' principles to comprehensively address the range of risk factors for young people on the roads and the complexity of road safety for this age group.
- Intervention strategies should be evidence based and considered, taking into account up to date research in the field and issues associated with practical application.

Youthsafe would be interested to discuss with the MAA ways in which we could collaborate on effective road safety strategies for young road users.

I look forward to the outcome of the review. Please contact me if you would like further information or discussion about the issues raised. My contact details are as follows:

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Yours sincerely



Anne Deans
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