

**Submission
No 7**

**12TH REVIEW OF THE EXERCISE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF
THE MOTOR ACCIDENTS AUTHORITY**

Organisation: Youthsafe

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10 August 2011

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

Dear Mr Clarke,

**Re: Twelve Review of the MAA and the MAC
and Fifth 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 'Twelve Review of the MAA and the MAC and Fifth Review of the LTCSA and the LTCSAC'.

Youthsafe is a not for profit organisation and the lead agency 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 2011/12 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 are 16-20 years which includes 20 per cent of all participants in the Scheme. This is followed by the age group of 21-25 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 2011/12 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 currently make up 12.2 per cent of the population, and 14.2 per cent of licence holders, but cause 27 per cent of all injury crashes, which account for 21 per cent of all claims costs.'

This is compared to other age groups as follows:

- Those aged between 26-49 years make up 35.1 per cent of the population and 45.7 per cent of licence holders, but cause 47.4 per cent of injury crashes. These crashes account for 47.2 per cent of all claims costs.
- Over 50 year olds make up 30.1 per cent of the population and 38.9 per cent of licence holders, but cause 25.2 per cent of injury crashes, their crashes accounting for 31.6 per cent 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 under Section 206 of the Motor Accidents Compensation Act 1999 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 '*Major projects and initiatives*' in the MAA 2010-11 annual report that proposed major projects include:

- *Invest in targeted research and grants to assist the reduction in road crash injuries and injury severity*

It is noted that in the MAA 2011-12 annual report that the Authority embarked on a new strategy for the funding of injury prevention measures and education. Under the heading 'Prevention' the report states:

- *In December 2011 the MAA finalised a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NSW Centre for Road Safety (CRS), now part of Transport for NSW. In 2011-12 the MAA committed \$2.29 million to the CRS for projects and initiatives that specifically target the CTP scheme's most vulnerable road users.*
- *At 30 June 2012 \$0.93 million was allocated to the CRS with an additional \$1.36 million committed for projects that commenced in 2011/12*

As the CRS is the lead Government agency for road safety in NSW, Youthsafe supports the MAA / CRS funding partnership as an effect means to ensure funds for injury prevent programs and initiatives are use in a strategic and efficient way.

However, whilst the financials of the MAA 2011-12 annual report clearly identify the partnership grant of \$930,000 to the NSW Centre for Road Safety, the 2011-2012 annual report of Transport for NSW makes no mention of any financial contribution from the MAA.

Youthsafe believes that the MAA should ensure the intent of their legislative responsibilities to fund injury prevention measures and education are meet by insisting that Government agency who receive financial contributions for road safety from the MAA provide detailed financial break up to allow greater transparency.

The MAA reports on grants and sponsorship with a youth focus, such as the 'Arrive Alive' program, and presentations by 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 aside from the CRS funding partnership the MAA road safety grants for young people continue to focus on one off events and sponsorship of sports people to present to young people at schools about road safety. These are unlikely to 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.

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

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