

## Bicycle Network ignores helmet safety statistics

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The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) strongly opposes any relaxation of mandatory helmet legislation, following the release of survey results by Australian cycling member organisation Bicycle Network.

The Bicycle Network has announced the results of a review into mandatory helmet laws, conducted in 2017, saying that *Australia's mandatory helmet laws should be relaxed with a five-year trial permitting people older than 17 to choose whether they wear a helmet when riding on footpaths or off-road cycle paths.*

"RACS is concerned with the Bicycle Network's proposal which questions the justification for helmet wearing when not in the vicinity of a vehicle or in 'low-risk situations'.

Overwhelming statistics show a reduction in head injuries by 40 per cent in Victoria after the introduction of helmet legislation in the early 1990s. Helmet use is associated with a reduced risk of head injury in bicycle collisions with motor vehicles up to 74 per cent," said Professor Jeffrey Rosenfeld.

Professor Rosenfeld, Senior Neurosurgeon at the Department of Neurosurgery, Alfred Hospital said that relaxing the legislation would be a backward step.

"Everyone who rides bikes deserves the best protection from injury. This includes helmets and applies to all ages and all situations. RACS will continue to strongly support the compulsory wearing of bicycle helmets based on medical and scientific evidence."

The Bicycle Network has proposed that all states align with the Northern Territory's legislation which states that the wearing of helmets is 'optional' for off-road riding.

Dr John Crozier, Chair of the RACS Trauma Committee says that accidents can happen anywhere, and to anyone.

"The risk is always higher when not wearing a helmet, no matter how old you are or where you choose to ride. Assuming you will not have an accident just because you are older, or because you have chosen a designated bike path, does not mean your ride will be free of an incident.

"Each year, around 40 cyclists die on Australian roads and around 4,800 are hospitalised. If helmet laws are relaxed we could see this figure increase," Dr Crozier said.

"Head injuries are a serious health issue for individuals, their families and the community, and often have long-lasting effects on those who do recover.

"A proposal like this one only emphasises the need for better education in the area of the impact of trauma, and that more needs to be done to recognise and accept the risk of not wearing helmets," he added.

### **About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)**

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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