

Pedal cycle helmet use Position Paper

Background

There is strong evidence that bicycle helmets offer head protection to cyclists if they crash or fall off their bicycle. Findings from systematic reviews confirm that wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury – including severe brain injury - in bicyclists of all ages by as much as 88%¹.

Cycling is an activity that is not only enjoyable but has been linked to direct and indirect health gains, and so as a public health activity should be encouraged. However, it can also be a dangerous activity for inexperienced riders, or for riders in unsupportive road environments.

The AIPN recognises that:

- It does not take a large force to cause serious injury to a human head. Even from a standing height, a head coming into contact with a concrete footpath or road surface will be seriously injured.
- There is strong evidence that bicycle helmets prevent head injury in the event of a crash.¹
- Multiple studies have documented the rise in helmet wearing rates with introduction of helmet legislation.²⁻⁴
- Bicycle helmet legislation is effective at increasing helmet wearing rates and decreasing injuries.⁵
- There exist performance standards to which all bicycle helmets must comply. It is illegal to sell bicycle helmets in Australia that are not certified to the Australian Standard (AS/NZS 2063). Most places that sell bicycles will also sell affordable bicycle helmets that fully comply with the Australian standards.
- There is evidence that children are more likely to wear helmets if their parents do as well.⁶

AIPN acknowledges that:

- There is public debate about whether cycling rates decrease when helmet legislation is introduced. There is little reliable evidence about the impact of helmet legislation on cycling rates; however several studies have suggested that it has no or little impact over the long term.⁷⁻⁹ Cycling rates are increasing in capital cities across Australia.⁷
- There are factors other than helmet use that impact on cycling participation such as concerns about safety, cycling infrastructure and urban planning, and more research is needed to understand what impact each of these factors have on cycling participation.

- There is an argument that helmet wearing increases risky riding behaviour but this is not supported by strong evidence.

AIPN recommends that:

- Given the effectiveness of bicycle helmets in reducing head injury in the event of a crash, they should be encouraged for all cyclists, both on and off road.
- Legislation requiring use of cycle helmets for all cyclists including children is effective at increasing helmet wearing rates and should be in place in all Australian jurisdictions.
- Appropriate educational programs, social marketing and police enforcement is necessary to support cycle helmet legislation and should be appropriately resourced.
- Resources should be made available for improved and supportive cycling environments, including cycle ways that take cyclist safety into account.

References

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