

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PERSONAL CHOICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

OPENING STATEMENT

Firstly, thank you to the Honourable Select Committee on Personal Choice and Community Safety for inviting Injury Matters today to attend this hearing.

At Injury Matters we lead the way across WA in preventing injury and supporting recovery by providing programs and services to the community.

We were driven to make a submission to the Select Committee as we are supportive of the implementation and enforcement of any legislation that goes to reduce the incidents and occurrence of injury in the community. And I would like to reinforce our position that governments play a key role in public health measures even in areas where measures appear to restrict personal choice.

As the fourth most common cause of both death (2007 to 2011) and hospitalisation (2008 to 2012) in Western Australia, injury is a public policy priority that needs coordinated action across all areas of government and the public sector. One action that supports a coordinated response is via the passage of legislation through Parliament that goes to remove risk and increase community safety.

As part of our submission we prepared a Position Statement endorsed by a raft of partners including the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA, Royal Life Saving WA, WA Poisons Information Service and the Paraplegic Benefit Fund to name just some of the supporting organisations.

The Position Statement highlighted the importance of governments' role in society to legislate to ensure that all members of society have the opportunity to live long and happy lives. Additionally, the Statement argued we live in a complex and modern society that needs regulation and that the notion of reducing regulation in support of individual freedom ignores this reality.

Injury across the age span can be predicted and prevented through coordinated evidence-based policies, programs and legislation. Ongoing investment in legislation and regulation is imperative to improving the lives of Western Australians and critical for reducing the cost and burden of injury in WA.

In regards to the three (3) Terms of Reference, I would like to re-iterate a couple of points from our submission ...

Regarding e-cigarettes – Injury Matters believes that if the popularity and access to e-cigarettes were to increase in Western Australia without legislative intervention and regulation, injuries from e-cigarettes would undoubtedly increase in both occurrence and severity.

Nicotine is an extremely toxic substance, with liquid nicotine used in e-cigarettes posing a serious risk for young children in our society. The effects of exposure range from relatively mild, including irritation of the eyes and skin, nausea and vomiting, to severe life-threatening illness, and in some cases, death.

Regarding Bike Helmet Laws - Injury Matters puts forward that bicycle helmet laws are of critical importance in the reduction of road trauma and do not impinge upon individual's personal liberties. Not wearing a bicycle helmet may be the difference between minor injury and a serious or fatal head injury. A 2017 Australian literature review of studies assessing bicycle helmet effectiveness to mitigate serious injury in a crash or fall, found that bicycle helmet use reduced the odds of;

- head injuries by 51%
- serious head injuries by 69%
- fatal head injuries by 65%.

In 2017, three of the seven cyclists who were killed on WA roads were not wearing a helmet at the time of the crash.

Regarding Pool Fencing - Injury Matters is supportive of reducing the drowning risk to young children and their families through the implementation of pool fencing regulations in WA.

The fact that WA has the highest rate of pool ownership as well as the strictest pool barrier legislation in the nation – one can conclude that pool fencing does not hinder, restrict or impact on pool users' wellbeing or enjoyment. On the contrary, it ensures that pools are a safe and enjoyable addition to a household.

Regarding Other Measures - Injury Matters supports health-driven, evidence-based legislation and policies and supports appropriate regulations that reduce injury across the community.

Sadly, all too often, poor and ill-informed individual choices result in family members, communities and governments having to pick up the pieces and support recovery. Injury prevention interventions such as legislation aimed at reducing harm are uniquely cost-effective and represent significant value for money.

Injury Matters trusts this inquiry will recognise that sensible regulation via legislation results in better and fairer cost-effective and long term health, social and injury free outcomes for West Australians.