



# **COTA Victoria & Seniors Rights Victoria**

## ***Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users***

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**May 2023**

*COTA Victoria is supported by financial assistance from the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments.*

## About Us

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged over 50 in Victoria. For over 70 years, we have led government, corporate and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing in the state.

Today, our focus is on promoting opportunities for and protecting the legal rights of people 50+. We value ageing and embrace its opportunities for personal growth, contribution, and self-expression. This belief drives benefits to the nation and its states alongside communities, families, and individuals.

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) is a key service of COTA Victoria and the primary state-wide service dedicated to advancing the rights of older people, and the early intervention into, or prevention of, elder abuse in our community.

SRV has a team of experienced advocates, lawyers, and social workers who provide free information, advice, referral, legal advice, legal casework, and support to older people who are either at risk of or are experiencing elder abuse. SRV supports and empowers older people through the provision of legal advice directly to the older person.

## Executive Summary

COTA Victoria and SRV welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users.

We are concerned by the increasing number of people, particularly older people, being killed on the road post-pandemic, and the anecdotal feedback we are hearing from older Victorians of poor driving behaviour in the community. However, we see a lot of these issues as continuing trends that existed prior to the pandemic, such as the inability to reduce pedestrian deaths which predominantly affect older people. These are influenced by long-term factors, such as infrastructure design. However, the increasing number of older drivers aged over 70 dying in 2023, in comparison to 2020-22, suggests that further support is required. We recommend:

- Increased investment into older driver education programs to support increased availability for older Victorians – to support the return of older drivers to the road.
- An advertising campaign to support greater awareness of pedestrians, particularly older pedestrians, by drivers, and the increased risk of accidents, fatalities and hospitalisations through dangerous driving.
- That the next iteration of Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-51 incorporates greater commitment to address population ageing and the needs of older people.
- That a 'positive ageing' lens be used to inform road safety design and urban infrastructure in regard to older pedestrians going forward, including greater direct engagement with older Victorians.
- Re-consideration of the recommendations from the *Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll* final report by the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee and how they have been advanced since the report's publication, in particular Recommendation 25.

## Submission

### More lives lost, as older Victorians return to 'normal' life

There is evidence of a change in road safety behaviours through the number of lives lost in recent years. For instance, there has been an increase in the lives lost on the road every year since the pandemic in 2020. While the initial pandemic reaction saw reduced use of roads due to restrictions around travelling, and should represent an all-time low, there were still 211 road deaths and it was only the third lowest on record.<sup>1</sup> There was a more substantial increase in lives lost in 2021 (234), followed by only a slight increase in 2022 (240).<sup>2</sup>

Early evidence from this year highlights that this is a continuing trend. The number of people killed on Victorian roads is currently up 31 per cent on at the same time in 2022, with over 116 people already killed on our roads, with this increase driven by an increased number of deaths for drivers and passengers in vehicles.<sup>3</sup> Most concerning for COTA Victoria and SRV is that the number of people aged over 70 killed on the roads is up 64 per cent on 2022, and well ahead of the five-year average.<sup>4</sup> This is indicative of 2023 being more deadly than 2022.

However, this appears partly to be because some older Victorians are beginning to return to a more pre-pandemic lifestyle. The drop in lives lost on the road in 2020 was primarily due to older people – that year saw a 31.9 per cent decrease in the number of people over the age of 50 being killed on Victorian roads – in comparison, the number of people aged under 50 dying on Victorian roads only decreased by 11.1 per cent.<sup>5</sup> This aligns with the experience of organisations such as ours in supporting older people, who have found that some older people have taken longer to return to post-pandemic behaviours as they have taken precautions for their health. The statistics support this; in 2023, the same number of drivers aged over 70 (13) have died as did in the entirety of 2022 – yet that 2022 total was less than half that of 2017 (27).<sup>6</sup>

This would suggest that the current increase in lives lost is a post-pandemic correction. But analysis suggests that this is part of longer-term trend that we will see greater deaths of older people on Victorian roads as the population ages. Given this demographic challenge, there is a need to focus on injury mitigation strategies and crash risk reduction for this growing cohort of road users, of which education is a key example.<sup>7</sup> COTA Victoria and SRV have previously called for greater investment in driver awareness programs, which can be inaccessible due to cost, which is only likely to be a greater factor with current cost of living pressures.<sup>8</sup>

**Recommendation 1: We recommend that there is increased investment into older driver education programs to support increased availability for older Victorians – to support the return of older drivers to the road.**

<sup>1</sup> ABC. (2022). Year-on-year increase in road deaths as government urges Victorians to consider public transport. ABC News. 1 January 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-01/increased-death-toll-on-victorian-roads/100734312> (12 May 2023)

<sup>2</sup> Transport Accident Commission. 2023. Lives Lost – Annual. TAC. Retrieved from: <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/lives-lost-annual> (12 May 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Transport Accident Commission. 2023. Lives Lost – Year to Date. TAC. Retrieved from: <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/lives-lost-year-to-date> (12 May 2023)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Transport Accident Commission. 2023. Searchable road trauma statistic. TAC. Retrieved from: <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/online-crash-database> (12 May 2023)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Koppel, S., Fitzharris, M., Newstead, S., D'Elia, A., Budd, L., & Charlton, J. (2020). Development and Analysis of A Comprehensive Data System to Understand the Occurrence, Severity and Risk Factors of Older Road User Crashes. MUARC. Retrieved from: [https://www.monash.edu/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/2990766/MUARC-Baseline-Older-Road-User-MUARC-Report-351.pdf](https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2990766/MUARC-Baseline-Older-Road-User-MUARC-Report-351.pdf) (12 May 2023)

<sup>8</sup> COTA Victoria. 2019.

## People are partaking in more dangerous driving – which is impacting pedestrians

This issue goes deeper than just road toll statistics. This is demonstrated through calls to our COTA Information Line. In recent months we have been hearing from older people that are concerned about:

- Poor driving skills<sup>9</sup>
  - Drivers not looking through their mirrors
  - Drivers not using indicators
  - Drivers not observing ‘keep clear’ directions and blocking intersections
- Risk-taking behaviour<sup>10</sup>
  - Speeding
  - Going through amber lights turning to red
  - Traveling too close to the vehicle in front
  - Mobile phone use of drivers

This increase in dangerous driving is having an impact on pedestrians in particular. In 2022, 52% more pedestrians lost their lives on the road than in 2021.<sup>11</sup> The increase to 44 pedestrian deaths last year was a big reason why the number of lives lost on Victorians roads increased, with deaths in vehicles actually dropping compared to 2021.<sup>12</sup>

This nexus of aggressive driving and increased danger for pedestrians, particularly older pedestrians, is highlighted by what we have heard from older people. Those who have contacted us have raised concerns around drivers not stopping for pedestrians at corners, while passengers disembarking from trams have felt endangered by cars and bikes not stopping and trying to pass the stopped tram.<sup>13</sup>

We have also heard from older people that are concerned by illegal use of e-scooters, particularly driving and parking on footpaths and other pedestrian thoroughfares. While COTA Victoria does not oppose the extension of the e-scooter trial, we are keen to see commitment to ensuring the safety of older pedestrians.

**Recommendation 2: We recommend that there is an advertising campaign to support greater awareness of pedestrians, particularly older pedestrians, by drivers, and the increased risk of accidents, fatalities and hospitalisations through dangerous driving.**

## The struggle to reduce pedestrian deaths continues a trend that existed pre-pandemic

While far more people die in vehicles than pedestrians, the trends surrounding pedestrians have proved more pervasive.

For instance, Melbourne has become far safer for motorists over the past two decades, as demonstrated by statistics – 113 drivers and passengers died in 2002, but only 33 died in 2022, with a

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<sup>9</sup> Based on information collected on private calls to the COTA Information Line from older Victorians in 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Transport Accident Commission. 2023. Lives Lost – Annual. TAC. Retrieved from: <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/lives-lost-annual> (12 May 2023)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Based on information collected on private calls to the COTA Information Line from older Victorians in 2023.

long-term overall trend of declining deaths. But pedestrian deaths have remained stubbornly high and the 33 killed in 2022 was the highest number since 2011.

So, while there does appear to have been a change in road safety behaviour post-COVID, it is also a continuation of some trends that existed prior. This is particularly dangerous for older people, who account for a significant proportion of pedestrians killed.

Those killed while walking are likely to be older; up to December 2022, people aged over 70 accounted for 227 of the 646 deaths (35 per cent) in Melbourne since 2002.<sup>14</sup> In the last five years alone, over one third (36 per cent) of those killed are aged over 70, while one in four (24 per cent) are aged above 80.<sup>15</sup> In comparison to the population, only 11.5 per cent of Victorians are aged over 70.<sup>16</sup> This is aligned with academic research, which finds that older people are more susceptible to death and hospitalisation as pedestrians partly due to greater frailty from ageing.<sup>17</sup> This trend looks set to continue – in 2022, people over 70 accounted for 31.8 per cent of pedestrian deaths, but just 16 per cent of all lives lost on the road.<sup>18</sup>

Part of the reason that pedestrian road deaths, particularly regarding older pedestrians, remain high in Victoria is because the state is not designed to support ageing well – and older Victorians are paying for this with their health and, in some cases, their lives. As an example, the design and infrastructure of Melbourne, where most pedestrian deaths occur, puts older pedestrians in harm's way. A lot of pedestrians and cars are brought together in a confined space, with inadequate or unclear separation between vehicles and pedestrians, which is leading to poor outcomes, particularly at intersections, where older people are disproportionately involved in crashes.<sup>19</sup> There are a range of issues because of a lack of design consideration of older people, including danger around tram stops that lack pedestrian protection from both cars and trams, as well as pedestrian crossing times being too short for some older Victorians with physical issues to get across in time. Speed also remains a major issue. For instance, analysis has found that reducing speed limits, particularly on outer urban and rural roads, is likely to have particular benefits for older road users, as many speed limits lead to impact severities that are beyond the tolerances of an older road user.<sup>20</sup>

We need a fundamental rethinking of how we support walking if we are to protect older Victorians, which requires changes in the strategies, plans and processes that drive and govern road building and surrounding urban design. These issues must be subject to increased direct meaningful consultation with older Victorians themselves, with opportunities for practical co-design. COTA Victoria and other seniors' organisations are well placed to advise on and support this kind of engagement with older people.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Transport Accident Commission. 2023. Pedestrian statistics. TAC. Retrieved from: <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/summaries/pedestrian-statistics> (12 May 2023)

<sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistic. 2023. Region summary: Victoria. ABS. Retrieved from: <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=ste&rgn=2> (12 May 2023)

<sup>17</sup> Koppel, S., Fitzharris, M., Newstead, S., D'Elia, A., Budd, L., & Charlton, J. (2020). Development and Analysis of A Comprehensive Data System to Understand the Occurrence, Severity and Risk Factors of Older Road User Crashes. MUARC. Retrieved from: [https://www.monash.edu/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/2990766/MUARC-Baseline-Older-Road-User-MUARC-Report-351.pdf](https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2990766/MUARC-Baseline-Older-Road-User-MUARC-Report-351.pdf) (12 May 2023)

<sup>18</sup> Transport Accident Commission. 2023. Searchable road trauma statistics. TAC. Retrieved from: <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/statistics/online-crash-database> (12 May 2023)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

**Recommendation 3: We recommend that the ongoing update of Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-51 incorporates more specific commitment to address population ageing and the needs of older people. This should support the development of roads to meet the needs of an ageing population across coming decades.**

**Recommendation 4: We recommend that a 'positive ageing' lens be used to inform road safety design and infrastructure in regard to older pedestrians going forward, including:**

- Greater direct engagement and co-design with older Victorians.
- Increasing use of pedestrian separation from cars and traffic.
- More time to enable older Victorians to cross the road at crossings.
- A greater emphasis on highlighting and protecting pedestrians in road design.
- Increased use of reduced speed limits in areas where pedestrians and traffic mix.

### Missed opportunities

While there is anecdotal evidence of a change in road behaviour, it appears to be a continuation of issues that existed prior to the pandemic.

These issues have also been examined before, and not long ago. The *Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll* by the same standing committee was only released just over two years ago, with the inquiry occurring during the pandemic.

Some of the key points that we raised in our submission to that inquiry in 2019 are still relevant, particularly around older pedestrians – yet our contribution was only noted around older drivers in the final report, which largely failed to make recommendations to improve the experience and safety of pedestrians on Victoria's roads. These recommendations should be reconsidered in light of the trends identified here.

However, the report's 36 recommendations did identify a number of areas that could be improved. These were largely supported by the Victorian Government in their official response, with most recommendations supported or supported in principle. Yet, it is unclear what action has taken place to advance or implement these identified areas of improvement. For instance, while the Victorian Government supported in full Recommendation 25, around conducting research on road trauma involving drivers aged over 60 years, it is unclear what progress has been made in this area since.

**Recommendation 5: We recommend consideration of the recommendations from the *Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll* by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and how they have been advanced since the report, in particular Recommendation 25.**

### Conclusion

COTA Victoria and SRV support this inquiry and are keen to see it support the delivery of safer roads for older Victorians, both in and out of the car. With Victoria getting older, we can't afford to not prioritise positive ageing in transport, particularly roads. We believe our insights and recommendations will support the Committee to identify how we can better support older Victorians on our roads as we continue to recover from the pandemic response.