



AUSTRALIAN INJURY PREVENTION NETWORK

Ms Nicola Roxon
Shadow Minister for Health
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Ms Roxon

I am writing to you in my position as President of the Australian Injury Prevention Network (AIPN). The AIPN is the peak national body advocating for injury prevention and control in Australia. It is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation with membership from all sectors of the injury prevention community. The main goal of the AIPN is to work towards the reduction of injury-related harm in Australia for all vulnerable population groups by coordinating the expertise of injury prevention researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

The purpose of making contact with you is to bring to your attention the importance of injury as a health problem. The AIPN was moved to do so after reading the Australian Labor Party's document, *'Fresh Ideas, Future Economy: Preventive health care for our families and our future economy'*. This is an excellent document, but has one glaring omission; it hardly mentions the problem of injury.

As injury is the leading cause of death for people in the 1 to 45 years age group in Australia and because it is largely preventable, this lack of acknowledgement in such an important policy document on preventive health care is concerning. Unfortunately, there has been a long history in government policy of the issue of injury being listed as a policy target, but with little or no follow-up action. With the potential of the ALP to take some different directions on health, this would seem to be one important addition to policy that is being missed. Action on injury prevention, of course, could also reduce pain and suffering in our community and significant costs to the health sector.

Attached to this letter is a very brief summary of some relevant statistics and facts about the significance of injury to the health sector and the Australian community.

In order to progress this issue further, would it be possible to meet with you to discuss it and to discuss what the AIPN could do to assist in bring injury into sharper focus as an issue on the health agenda?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Williamson" with a decorative flourish at the end.

A/Prof Ann Williamson
President of AIPN

NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre
University of New South Wales
Building G2, Western Campus
UNSW Sydney, 2052
Ph 02 9385 4599
Email a.williamson@unsw.edu.au

What's the issue with injury prevention?

"If some infectious disease came along that affected children [in the way that injuries do], there would be a huge public outcry and we would be told to spare no expense to find a cure and to be quick about it."

Statement by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop before the Subcommittee on Children, Family, Drugs, and Alcoholism, U.S. Senate, February 9, 1989

Injury is the leading cause of death in people aged 1 to 44 years in New South Wales and Australia and is the leading cause of hospitalisation in children aged 10-14 years. In the 2003-2004 year, 9,924 people suffered a traumatic death in Australia¹. This means that about 27 people die each day from a potentially preventable condition. In Australia, there are about 372,533 episodes of inpatient hospital care per year due to trauma². This equates to approximately 1,021 new hospitalisations for trauma per day and ranks as one of the top causes of hospitalisation in Australia³.

Injury costs the health system and the general community. A recent report that examined expenditure on health research in Australia found that "reducing intentional and unintentional injuries by 30% would save over \$370 billion; greater than Australia's total net foreign debt"⁴. That report found that the economic value of potential health gains from reducing injury was greater than for any other cause, including cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Almost all injuries are preventable. Furthermore, injuries occur in the section of the community who should be most likely to be healthy: people below the age of 45 years. Injuries are also more likely in the most disadvantaged groups in the community, such as those with low socioeconomic status and those in rural and remote areas.

Governments need to provide adequate resources and incentives for prevention rather than just picking up the pieces with acute care. While the major cost burden of injury is borne by the health sector, responsibility for developing and implementing prevention efforts often lie with other government sectors (for example, road speeding controls or workplace safety activities).

Apart from the area of road safety and more recently falls in older persons, there has been little or no health policy development to attempt to reduce the burden of injury on the Australian community. The AIPN is keen to work with governments to improve this situation.

1. Henley, G. Kreisfeld, R. and Harrison, JE. *Injury deaths, Australia 2003-04*, Canberra: AIHW, Cat. no. INJCAT 89, January 2007
2. Berry, J. and Harrison, JE. *Hospital separations due to injury and poisoning, Australia 2003-04*, Canberra AIHW cat. no. INJCAT 88, January 2007
3. AIHW Hospital Statistics 2005-2006, AIHW cat. no.HSE50, 2007
4. Access Economics. *Exceptional Returns: the value of investing in health R&D in Australia*. Australian Society for Medical Research, Canberra. 2003.