

30 May 2025

Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health

Hon Scott Simpson, Minister for ACC

copy to: Audrey Sonerson, Director General of Health

copy to: Megan Main, Chief Executive, ACC

Dear Ministers

“Run It Straight”

Te Whare Piki Ora o Māhutonga – the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. The RACS Aotearoa New Zealand Trauma Committee is committed to preventing and mitigating the effects of trauma-related fatalities and traumatic injury.

The Trauma Committee expresses profound concern regarding the increasingly prevalent informal activity known as “Run It Straight.” This practice, characterised by two players charging directly at each other in a high-speed collision, poses significant risks to participants, leading to severe injuries and, tragically, fatalities.

We call on you to:

- raise awareness to ensure participants understand the potential for serious injuries and the long-term consequences of high-speed collisions.
- introduce regulatory measures such as medical evaluation, age restrictions, and safety protocols to minimise risks
- promote safer alternatives for fundraising events that do not involve high-risk physical competition
- encourage education about the risks, and help young athletes protect their health
- engage with healthcare professionals to provide valuable insights into injury prevention and help inform public policy decisions.

The recent death of a young man during a “Run It Straight” challenge has brought the dangers of this practice into sharp focus. This incident is not an isolated case; it highlights a broader issue within both organised and informal sports where the emphasis on toughness and bravado can lead to reckless behaviour. Glorification of head-on collisions as a measure of strength is outdated and harmful, particularly for youth and young adults who may feel pressured to participate in these dangerous activities to prove their worth or bravery.

The biomechanics involved in “Run It Straight” significantly increase the risk of serious injuries, including concussions, cervical spine injuries, and long-term neurological damage. Unlike controlled tackles within the framework of regulated gameplay, this practice lacks tactical purpose and amplifies the potential for high-impact forces that can result in catastrophic consequences. The repetitive head trauma associated with such collisions poses a well-documented risk for developing chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease increasingly recognised among athletes in contact sports.



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The environment in which “Run It Straight” typically occurs—often informal, unsupervised, and unregulated—further compounds the dangers. Most of these events happen outside of structured sporting contexts, frequently in casual settings where safety protocols are absent. This lack of regulation exposes participants to unnecessary risks and highlights the urgent need for action from the broader community, including parents, coaches, schools, and sports organisations, and from Government.

To combat the rising trend of dangerous practices such as “Run It Straight”, we call on you to take immediate and concerted action to:

- **Raise awareness:** Public health campaigns must educate individuals, especially young athletes and their families, about the dangers of participating in “Run It Straight” and similar activities. It is crucial that participants understand the potential for serious injuries and the long-term consequences of high-speed collisions.
- **Introduce regulatory measures:** We advocate for the establishment of clear guidelines and regulations governing informal and organised sporting events. These should include mandatory medical evaluations for participants, age restrictions, and well-defined safety protocols to minimise risks.
- **Promote safer alternatives:** Charitable organisations and community groups should be encouraged to seek safer alternatives to fundraising events which do not involve high-risk physical competition. Engaging communities in activities that foster fitness and camaraderie while prioritising safety is essential.
- **Encourage educational initiatives:** Educational institutions and sports organisations must incorporate discussion of the risks associated with “Run It Straight” into their curricula and training programs. By promoting a culture of safety and informed decision-making, we can help young athletes understand the importance of protecting their health.
- **Engage healthcare professionals:** Collaboration with healthcare professionals is vital to enable them to advocate for participant safety in all forms of sports, including informal activities. Their expertise can provide valuable insights into injury prevention and help inform public policy decisions.

In conclusion, “Run It Straight” represents an alarming trend that requires immediate attention from all associated parties.

Within your portfolios, we urge you to prioritise safety in both formal and informal sporting activities and foster a culture that values well-being over reckless displays of toughness.

Regards

Dr Chris Wakeman

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Chair, Aotearoa New Zealand Trauma Committee

RACS represents more than 8300 surgeons and 1300 surgical Trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. We are the accredited training provider in nine surgical specialities. Surgeons are also required by RACS and Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa - Medical Council of Aotearoa, to continue with surgical education and review of their practice throughout their surgical careers.