



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE

Road safety – a crucial Indigenous issue

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Government, health and law enforcement agencies must act to improve road safety and access to trauma care if Australia has any hope of reducing the high rate of fatalities suffered by Indigenous Australians in car accidents, according to the Director of the National Trauma Research Institute, Professor Russell Gruen.

Professor Gruen said Indigenous Australians, including very young children, are three times more likely to die in car crashes than other Australians. Three quarters of these are in regional or remote areas.

Speaking at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' Annual Scientific Congress, he said the reasons behind the high mortality rate included difficulties accessing urgent trauma care in remote regions, the use of unsafe cars, bad roads, over crowded vehicles, alcohol and a lack of simple measures such as wearing seatbelts.

“In some places, the mortality rate for Indigenous Australians in motor vehicle accidents – including single vehicle rollovers and pedestrian deaths – could be 17 times higher than the national average, which is cause for very serious concern,” Professor Gruen said.

“Obviously when accidents happen in remote areas it is harder to get the victims to the high quality emergency care they need, but that should not mean we accept these death rates.

“Federal and state governments must act to improve access to trauma care and improve public transport in remote areas. Authorities should be given the resources to conduct comprehensive vehicle safety inspections, ensure the wearing of seatbelts by all car occupants and enforce speed and drink driving laws.

“It is urgent that we create the health infrastructure and the regulatory framework within these regions that the rest of Australia takes for granted and which have reduced our national road toll so dramatically in past decades,” Professor Gruen said.

More than 2000 delegates are expected to attend the Annual Scientific Congress which is being held at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre from 4 – 7 May. The ASC program is available online at www.surgeons.org

Media inquiries: Michael Barrett, Manager Media & PR Manager - 0429 028 933
Ruth Charters, Senior Media & PR Officer - 0409 330 274