



AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC.

ABN 91 028 693 268

16 June 2022

Dr Matthew McConnell
Chair, AMA Public Health Committee
E: mattjmc_connell@yahoo.com

Dear Matthew

Re: Blood alcohol content and traffic accident risk

I write as Chair of the AMA(SA) Road Safety Committee, which, as you may be aware, is the only state-based road safety group within the AMA.

The AMA(SA) Road Safety Committee feels strongly that action must be taken to advocate to governments across Australia for a lowering of the blood alcohol content (BAC) that is legally permissible when operating a motor vehicle. We are initially bringing this to your attention in your role as Chair of the AMA Public Health Committee because we consider that this action requires national advocacy and promotion, and that the Federal AMA is the obvious group to begin this discussion across Australia.

You may recall that in a letter to you dated 19 August 2021, we requested AMA consideration of support for a lowering of the BAC to 0.02. The request came after consideration of evidence at our Committee's July 2021 meeting that highlighted the difference in traffic accident risk between a BAC of 0.05 g/100 ml and a BAC of 0.02 g/100 ml. The Committee was provided with this evidence by new Committee member Associate Professor Jeremy Wooley of the Centre for Automotive Safety Research (CASR) at the University of Adelaide.

In that submission, we noted the reference of our committee member Associate Professor Wooley to research by his CASR colleague, Dr Matthew Baldock. Dr Baldock's evidence points to the 2016 findings of Lacey et al.¹ in the US that a BAC of 0.05 g/100 ml produced an approximate doubling of accident risk. Lacey found an increase of risk of about 40 per cent at 0.04 g/100 ml, and 15 per cent at 0.03 g/100 ml. He found no increased risk at 0.02g/100ml.

However, since then, our committee has spent further time considering this matter in detail. We have viewed evidence of laboratory impairment at blood alcohol levels between zero and 0.02 g/100 ml and explored issues such as the psychology of public messaging. This has persuaded us to change our position, such that we now recommend the AMA advocate for a reduction in the legal BAC while driving to zero.

This would persuade people who are driving not to drink alcohol at all, rather than consume some alcohol and 'take a guess' at their BAC. International evidence suggests that reducing the legal BAC to zero would have a significant impact on the number of collisions, deaths and injuries – an outcome the AMA should certainly promote.

¹ Lacey, J.H., Kelley-Baker, T., Berning, A., Romano, E., Ramirez, A., Yao, J., Moore, C., Brainard, K., Carr, K., Pell, K. and Compton, R. (2016). *Drug and alcohol crash risk: A case-control study* (Report No. DOT HS 812 355) Washington DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

We are now looking to the AMA for a stronger campaign against the consumption of any alcohol before driving. Our committee suggests that our group's mission to improve the safety of people using Australia's roads is shared by everyone within the AMA. Alcohol is a major road safety issue, with an estimated 40 per cent of road deaths in Australia attributed to alcohol. Alcohol is more broadly a major public health issue, with more than 4,000 deaths and many more cases of injury and ill-health attributed to alcohol each year.

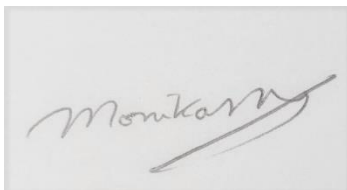
We suggest introducing a zero BAC limit will have the practical effect of separating the activities of drinking and driving. We suggest this will also likely have the secondary effect of reducing alcohol consumption to safer levels, and thereby having a positive flow-on effect to all other alcohol-related harms.

Given the vision of Australian governments to eliminate fatal and serious road traffic injury by 2050, we ask that consideration be given to the AMA examining this matter in more detail, with the intention of developing a new national policy and associated public campaign based on the zero BAC limit. In doing so, the AMA will send a clear message that any drinking of alcohol before driving is unacceptable if we are to safeguard the health of road users and the broader community.

While we understand this will be a major cultural shift in Australia, and is likely to be politically unpopular, we do believe that the AMA has the profile and the platform – particularly after so many months of standing up for evidence-based public health policies during the pandemic – to lead such a campaign and to galvanise change. It will be extremely helpful to understand the AMA position on this before our committee considers our own steps at a state level.

Please contact me at any time if you wish to discuss any of the issues raised in this letter, on 0412 208 369 or at monikmoy@optusnet.au, or by contacting Mrs Catherine Waite of the AMA(SA) Secretariat on 8361 0105.

Yours sincerely

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read 'Monika Moy'.

Dr Monika Moy
Chair, AMA(SA) Road Safety Committee