

22 September 2017

Craig Richards  
Chief Executive Officer  
Bicycle Network  
PO Box 24013  
Melbourne VIC 3001

Dear Craig,

**Re: Should Bicycle Helmets be Mandatory?**

VicHealth welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to Bicycle Network to help shape your position on Australia's bicycle helmet laws.

**Cycling is important to supporting Victorians being physically active**

VicHealth's clear mandate is to improve health and wellbeing. Our [Action Agenda for Health Promotion 2013-2023](#) has an ambition that one million more Victorians will have better health and wellbeing by 2023. Encouraging regular physical activity is one of five areas of focus for VicHealth, where we aim to encourage 300,000 more Victorians to engage in physical activity by 2023.

Cycling is an important way for people to be active. Our [VicHealth Indicators Survey](#) shows that 12% of Victorian adults participate in cycling, which is amongst the top five non-organised physical activities. While cycling is popular form of physical activity for adults, learning to ride is an important life skill and form of active travel for children, particularly those who are primary school aged.

Walking, riding a bike, scooting, skating or catching public transport to school and other places is a great way for children to be active in their daily lives. This is important as only [around one in five Australian children](#) aged 5 to 17 years meets the recommended one hour of physical activity every day.

VicHealth's Walk to School initiative supports primary school children to walk, ride or scoot to and from school during the month of October as a way to build active travel as a healthy habit for life. With only around [one in four children in Victoria](#) walking or riding to school, addressing barriers to support more children to walk or ride is important.

Riding a bike is a great way for children to also build independence. [Our research](#) shows that riding a bike in the street was one of the most common independent activities for children. In addition, children that are able to play and travel without an adult and those who walk or ride to school are more likely to meet Australian physical activity guidelines.

Despite this, concerns about safety is a key barrier to children walking or riding to school. Safety includes parents' perceptions of 'stranger danger' as well as concerns about traffic safety.

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While VicHealth recognises the overall health benefits from being active through cycling, we also realise that cyclists are inherently at risk when riding in traffic. High traffic volumes and high traffic speeds are among several factors that can increase the risk of crash and injury for cyclists.

While there is an increasing focus on addressing these risks, through programs such the Safe System Road Infrastructure Program, substantial levels of risk will still exist across much of the road network for many years ahead. The desired improvements in infrastructure are likely to take many years to put in place and, even if low risk speed limits could be achieved in the immediate future, there remains the problem of risk of injury from riders falling from bikes, often at low speed.

### **VicHealth supports compulsory bike helmet wearing**

With this in mind, VicHealth believes there is a strong case for cyclists to continue to be required to wear bike helmets. Bike helmets remain an important measure to reduce injury and improve safety for one of our most vulnerable road users, cyclists.

There is clear evidence that as wearing of bike helmets has increased the [risk of head injuries has reduced](#). Two years after mandatory bike helmet laws were introduced, there was a [reduction in head injuries](#) in metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria (16% and 23% respectively).

We commend Bicycle Network for reviewing its position on bicycle helmet laws. We encourage you to continue to identify improvements to policy and practice, which support more Victorians to be more active through cycling at the lowest practical risk.

Yours sincerely,



**Jerril Rechter**  
**Chief Executive Officer**