

Media Release

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TRAGIC YEAR ON AUSTRALIA'S ROADS PROMPTS RENEWED HOLIDAY SAFETY PLEA

Australian Road Safety Foundation Urges Australians to Give the Gift of Presence This Christmas

With road fatalities up 6.8% in the past 12 months¹, the Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is urging all Australians to prioritise road safety during the notoriously dangerous Christmas period.

So far this year, 990 lives have been lost on Australian roads – meaning 990 families will face an empty seat at the table this Christmas.

ARSF has issued the plea alongside a powerful Tree of Remembrance installation in Brisbane's Queen Street Mall, featuring 228 illuminated lanterns – each representing a life lost on Australian roads during the last summer holiday period (December to January).

Among them, 40 red lanterns stand out, symbolising those who tragically lost their lives during the peak 12-day Christmas period (23 December to 3 January).

The 228 Australians who were tragically killed on the nation's roads across December 2024 and January 2025 last year mark a 6% increase from the previous period.

Michelle Underhill, who lost her daughter Elle and saw her other daughter Elaina seriously injured in a head-on crash in Northern NSW in 2015, shared how one moment on the road can change lives forever.

"Elle's life was taken in a moment, and Elaina's was changed forever," Ms Underhill said.

"No family should ever have to experience that kind of heartbreak, especially from something so preventable," she said.

"The ripple effect of that crash has been immense, touching everyone who loved our girls. I just hope our story reminds people to slow down, pay attention, and remember how fragile life truly is."

"Christmas used to be our favourite time of year, but now it's a painful reminder of what's been lost. All we can do is hope that by sharing Elle and Elaina's story, other families might be spared the same heartache," she said.

ARSF's most recent research² raises concerns that risky driving behaviours remain deeply embedded in Australian culture.

¹ Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts Road Deaths Monthly Bulletin, September 2025

² Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of Australian Road Safety Foundation between 28 January - 6 February 2025 with a sample size of n=1509 Australian drivers aged 18+years

More than two-thirds (68%) of Australian drivers admit to engaging in risky behaviour, and over half (56%) admit to breaking road laws.

Distraction was the most common offence, with seven in ten drivers (70%) admitting to experiencing some form of distraction while driving – most commonly caused by GPS systems, mobile phones, or talking to passengers.

Speeding also continues to pose a serious threat on Australian roads, with almost half (47%) of drivers exceeding the limit, while a third (33%) admit to driving while fatigued – a risk comparable to drink-driving in its impact on reaction times and decision-making.

ARSF Founder and Chair Russell White said the findings are a stark reminder that too many Australians underestimate the consequences of everyday choices behind the wheel.

“Even seemingly minor behaviours – like glancing at a phone, pushing through tiredness, or driving a few kilometres over the limit – can have life-altering outcomes,” Mr White said.

“Most crashes aren’t accidents; they’re the result of unsafe decisions. We’re urging Australians to make safer choices this Christmas – to slow down, stay alert, and give the greatest gift of all: their safe arrival home.”

“The holiday season should be a time of celebration, not mourning. By giving the gift of presence – by choosing to arrive safely – we can help keep families together and prevent more empty seats at the Christmas table,” he said.

Despite the concerning statistics, there is hope for change. ARSF’s research shows that 87 per cent of drivers say road safety messaging inspires safer behaviour.

AAMI EGM CTP Insurance & Advocacy, Michelle Bain, said the keys to road safety, and achieving a fatality free Friday, are in all Australians’ hands.

“We know that road trauma is preventable. Road safety is a choice we can all make and a responsibility we should all carry when we travel on the road, whether we drive, ride, cycle or walk,” Ms Bain said.

“We’re proud to once again partner with ARSF, and encourage all Australians to ditch the distractions, focus on the road, follow the rules and commit to reducing the road toll in 2025,” she said.

In the lead-up to Christmas, ARSF is asking road users to choose road safety – to take responsibility for themselves and others, obey the road laws and adopt practical principles to protect lives, ensuring the following behaviours:

- **As a driver:** being fit to drive, driving to suit the conditions, staying focused, and taking regular breaks
- **As a passenger:** avoid distracting the driver, being a 'second pair of eyes,' and only travelling with someone fit to drive
- **As a cyclist or motorcyclist:** being as visible as possible, wearing protective clothing and a helmet, as well as avoiding distractions
- **As a pedestrian:** being as visible as possible, staying alert and aware of road users around you, and avoiding being distracted by devices

For further information about the Australian Road Safety Foundation, or how to support festive road safety activity, visit arsf.com.au.

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About Australian Road Safety Foundation:

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to improving road safety outcomes and reducing the rates of death and the mental and physical injuries that result from road crashes. It achieves this through innovative road safety awareness programs, education, advocacy, research and community engagement.