

96-01

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Motor Vehicle Safety Belts

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the adoption and enforcement of legislation and comprehensive prevention strategies to improve motor vehicle occupant safety through the use of safety belts. NACCHO supports implementation of the following state and local strategies:

- State legislation, regulation, or policy that requires mandatory use of safety belts by all motor vehicle occupants;
- State legislation, regulation, or policy that requires primary safety belt laws for all ages, which allow law enforcement officers to stop vehicles and issue citations when an officer observes an unbelted driver or passenger;
- State legislation, regulation, or policy that increases penalties and/or fines for safety belt violations; and
- State and local targeted safety belt use education and enhanced equitable enforcement, especially for high-risk populations.

NACCHO urges local public health officials to work with local and state stakeholders, including law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, health care providers, hospital systems, educational agencies, businesses, insurance agencies, and elected officials to increase awareness of the importance of safety belt use in reducing motor vehicle-related injuries and deaths.

#### Justification

Motor vehicle-related injuries are one of the leading causes of death among those aged one to 54 in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, over 2.1 million drivers and passengers were treated in emergency departments for motor vehicle traffic-related injuries and over 41,000 people died as a result of motor vehicle crashes.<sup>2</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the cost of medical care and lives lost attributed to injuries from motor vehicle crashes exceeded \$430 billion in 2020<sup>1,2</sup>

Safety belts are the single most effective safety device in preventing serious injury and death in motor vehicle crashes. Safety belts reduce crash-related injuries and death by about 50 percent, saving the lives of 14,955 vehicle occupants aged five and older in 2017<sup>1,3</sup> In fact, 51% of the 21,376 drivers and passengers killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2020 were not wearing safety belts.<sup>3,4</sup> There is strong evidence that safety belt laws are effective in increasing safety belt use and reducing fatal and nonfatal injuries among adolescents and adults.<sup>5,6</sup>

Primary enforcement safety belt laws permit law enforcement officers to pull over drivers and issue tickets just because the drivers or their passengers are not restrained. Safety belt use is



higher in states with primary enforcement safety belt laws (92 percent) compared to states with secondary enforcement laws or no safety belt laws (86.2 percent).<sup>7</sup> Currently, 49 states and DC have adopted both primary and second laws (under which occupants must be stopped for another violation before being cited for non-use) related to seat belt use.<sup>7</sup> New Hampshire is the only state lacking any seat belt laws, though it is illegal for occupants under the age 18 to ride unrestrained.<sup>7</sup>

Enhanced enforcement strategies involve an increase in the average number of citations each officer issues or an increase in the number of officers on patrol. These strategies are typically supported by education and publicity campaigns. Research has shown that enhanced enforcement strategies increase seat belt use.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, increasing fines for safety belt use violations can result in increases in safety belt use.<sup>9</sup>

## **References**

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## **Record of Action**

*Proposed by NACCHO Injury and Violence Prevention Workgroup*

*Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors February 2, 1996*

*Updated March 2013*

*Updated November 2020*

*Updated July 2023*