

Headway NZ Position Statement: Mandatory Helmet Use for E-Scooter Riders

Headway NZ supports a comprehensive review of e-scooter safety in New Zealand and recognises that a range of evidence-based measures could reduce the incidence and severity of head injuries including traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). These include speed restrictions, improved vehicle safety standards, stronger enforcement of impaired riding laws, and mandatory helmet use.

However, implementing a full suite of safety reforms will require significant time, investment, and legislative change. In the meantime, New Zealand cannot afford to delay an action that can mitigate the severity of head injuries.

Headway NZ is therefore calling on the Government to introduce **mandatory helmet use for all e-scooter riders as an urgent, practical, and evidence-based measure to reduce the severity of traumatic brain injuries, potentially save lives, and reduce the growing burden on individuals, whānau, communities, and the health system.**

E-scooter riders face a disproportionately high risk of TBI due to the design and operating characteristics of e-scooters and the absence of key safety protections. While helmets alone will not prevent all head injuries, they are one of the most effective prevention strategies available to reduce the severity of head injuries including TBIs when crashes occur.

Mandatory helmet use is also a realistic and readily implementable policy option. New Zealand already requires bicycle riders and motorcyclists to wear helmets, meaning a similar requirement for e-scooter riders could be introduced using existing legislative and enforcement frameworks.

Headway NZ calls on the Government to:

1. Introduce mandatory helmet use for all e-scooter riders, and
2. Ensure helmet requirements apply equally to privately owned and shared rental e-scooters.

While broader safety reforms should continue to be explored and implemented over time, mandatory helmet use represents the most immediate and achievable step the Government can take to reduce the toll of head and traumatic brain injuries associated with e-scooter use.

Background and Evidence

- Brain injury – including traumatic brain injury and stroke – is a leading cause of death and disability worldwide, and in New Zealand is the leading cause of long-term disability among children and young adults.¹
- In 2023, ACC recorded 53,731 traumatic brain injury (TBI) claims in New Zealand – an increase of 48.6% from 36,179 claims in 2017.²
- TBI has serious financial, health system, community, and personal implications.²

- ACC data shows 2,781 new e-scooter related injury claims with active costs exceeding \$9.2 million for the first half of 2026.³
- Children and young people are increasingly at risk: ACC data shows 10–19 year-olds now have the highest number of e-scooter injury claims in New Zealand.³

E-Scooters Present a Unique Risk of Brain Injury

- A recent UK study of hospitalised e-scooter riders, cyclists, and motorcyclists found that:
 - E-scooter riders are 3.45 times more likely to sustain a TBI than motorcyclists and 1.74 times more likely than cyclists.
 - More than one-third of adult e-scooter injuries involve a TBI.
- E-scooters have small wheels and a high centre of gravity due to the standing riding position. This can increase instability when encountering obstacles such as kerbs or potholes and contribute to riders being pitched forward over the handlebars.⁵
- E-scooter riders are exposed to a significant risk of mild and severe brain injury. Speed is a key factor in the risk of injury during the fall.⁵
- The risk of severe head injury to pedestrians rises dramatically with speed, increasing from approximately 30 to 50 percent at 10 to 12 km/h to more than 90 percent at speeds above 15 km/h.⁶

Helmets Reduce Serious Injury

- Correctly worn, helmets substantially reduce the severity of brain injury. Decades of bicycle helmet research show roughly a 50% reduction in head injury and a 70% reduction in serious head injury.⁷
- A meta-analysis of 55 studies found bicycle helmet use reduced:
 - Head injuries by 48%
 - Serious head injuries by 60%
 - Traumatic brain injuries by 53%
 - Fatal or serious cyclist injuries by 34%⁷
- Research examining e-scooter injuries has similarly found that helmet use is associated with a reduced risk of head injury.⁸

Without Regulation, Helmet Use Is Very Low

- Where there are no helmet laws, helmet use among e-scooter riders is exceptionally low:
 - A major 2026 UK study found that only 5.9% of hospitalised e-scooter riders were wearing helmets.⁹
 - Helmet use among e-scooter riders is low in NZ. An Auckland Transport study found that only 11% of shared e-scooter riders and 44% of private e-scooter riders wore helmets.¹⁰
 - International research similarly shows very low helmet use among e-scooter riders sustaining brain injuries: a 2026 scoping review of 25 studies involving 3,088 patients with e-scooter-related TBI reported helmet use of just 2.4%.¹¹

- Helmets are mostly worn on e-scooters when they are mandated – a recent Australian study found that around 70% of e-scooter riders wore a helmet where helmet use was a legal requirement.¹²
- Systematic reviews have consistently found that mandatory helmet legislation for bicycles increases helmet use.¹³

Mandatory Helmets Are a Practical and Achievable Solution

Helmet use is one of the most effective measures available to reduce the severity of e-scooter-related TBIs and represents an achievable first step while broader safety reforms continue to be explored.

New Zealand already requires bicycle riders and motorcyclists to wear helmets. Extending this requirement to e-scooter riders is a logical step and proportionate response to the growing evidence of the risk of serious TBI associated with e-scooter use.

The timing for change is particularly relevant. The Government has agreed to amend Land Transport rules to allow e-scooters to use cycle lanes, with changes expected to take effect late 2026. Headway believes this provides a timely opportunity to address the current inconsistency in protection requirements between bicycle and e-scooter riders using the same transport infrastructure.

References

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