

Inaction could cost Australian truckers their lives, study finds

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If nothing is done to improve the health of Australia's male truck drivers, 6,067 lives and AU\$2.6 billion in productivity could be lost over the next 10 years, Monash University-led research has found.

Researchers have also found that inaction could cost an estimated \$485 million in [health care costs](#) and 21,173 lost years of life due to work-related diseases or injury in the truck driving industry.

Published in the *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, the study found that while the [transport](#) and logistics industry contributed significantly to the Australian economy, few studies had explored the economic and clinical burden attributed to poor truck driver health.

In 2020 the industry, which contributed an estimated 7.4% (AU\$122.3 billion, dollars) of [gross domestic product](#) (GDP) to Australia's economy in 2015–16, employed about 380,000 workers.

Researchers estimated the work-related mortality burden among truck drivers, using modeling to simulate the Australian male working-age population (aged 15–65) from 2021–2030.

The approach employed is believed to be the first to explore the economic implications of the current state of driver health and well-being.

Researchers used data from the [Driving Health](#) study and other published sources to estimate work-related mortality and associated productivity loss, hospital and medication costs. All outcomes were discounted by five percent per annum.

Modeling showed that reducing the health burden by two percent could result in savings of AU\$10 million in health care costs and AU\$53 million in lost productivity.

"Despite the importance of the transport and logistics industry to the Australian economy, workers are at a greater risk of work-related injury or disease relative to other industries," the researchers found.

"Our analyses highlight the health and economic consequences of poor driver health over the forthcoming decade, and highlight the need for interventions to reduce the burden of work-related injury or disease for truck drivers and other transport workers."

Program Lead Associate Professor Ross Iles said Driving Health had earlier found that the health and well-being of truck drivers in general was poor, and a system-wide effort was needed from the transport industry to help drivers be healthy and stay at work.

"What this part of the project adds is a clear economic argument for supporting driver health and well-being," he said. "If the current state continues, there will be an enormous cost, not only for the individuals concerned, but also for the Australian economy."

"The Driving Health project found there is no easy fix, but this analysis shows that even a small improvement in driver health will lead to savings of tens of millions of dollars."

[Previous research](#) has established that transport and logistics workers have worse health outcomes than those in other industries, especially musculoskeletal and trauma-related injuries.

They also have a high prevalence of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and hypertension, which has been attributed to long working hours, [poor access](#) to health care, exposure to physical and mental stress and other behaviors and occupational characteristics that contribute to poor health.

The new paper found that a collective national effort was required to improve the health and well-being of Australian truck drivers to reduce the burden of work-related injury or disease for [truck drivers](#) and other transport workers.

"To date, there are limited studies exploring the long-term [economic burden](#) attributed to poor health among transport workers, and a clear economic argument for improving driver health would provide a compelling case for a collective effort across industry," the researchers found.

Study co-author Dr. Caryn Van Vreden said there were some efforts underway but they were hampered by lack of funding and [policy change](#) from the government. "Despite efforts to improve driver health by the industry, greater input from government and regulators is needed. This includes increases in funding and changes in policy to effect lasting change," she said.

More information: Peter Lee et al, Exploring the Health and Economic Burden Among Truck Drivers in Australia: A Health Economic Modelling Study, *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s10926-022-10081-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-022-10081-4)

Provided by Monash University

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