

Australia: Helmets off to legislation

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More people would cycle if they didn't have to wear a helmet, the research finds.

Cycling levels in Sydney could more than double if laws forcing cyclists to wear helmets were repealed, according to new research published today in the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*.

One in five adults surveyed in Sydney said they would ride a bicycle more if they did not have to wear a helmet, according co-author Professor Chris Rissel from the School of Public Health, at the University of Sydney.

Researchers involved in 'The possible effect on frequency of [cycling](#) if mandatory bicycle helmet legislation was repealed in Sydney, Australia: a cross sectional survey' interviewed 600 Sydney adults to identify preferences for wearing bicycle helmets.

"People who ride occasionally and younger people were most likely to say they would ride more if they didn't have to wear a helmet, but significantly, one in five people who hadn't ridden a bicycle in the last year also said they would ride more," says Professor Rissel.

Professor Rissel says that the NSW state government's targets to increase cycling could be easily achieved by repealing bicycle helmet

legislation without spending millions of dollars on new bicycle paths.

"Occasional riders and those people who don't see themselves as a 'cyclist' represents a large number of people. Even if only half or a quarter of these people did actually start riding, it would more than double the number of people cycling now," Professor Rissel says.

The research also found that almost half of the respondents said they would never ride without a helmet. While more than 14 percent said "all the time", and over 30 percent said "some of the time", the rest were unsure.

Support for mandatory helmet wearing was low among people already cycling according to Professor Rissel.

"Overall, one third of respondents did not support mandatory helmet legislation. There was an inverse association between riding frequency and support of the helmet legislation, with those not riding in the past year most likely to support helmet legislation, and more frequent riders less likely to support it," he says.

Professor Rissel said that lots of people would still wear a helmet, but removing the legal requirement to wear a helmet would encourage more people to just hop on a bike.

"Public [bicycle](#) share schemes around the world where helmets are not required to be worn have shown how safe cycling really is," says Professor Rissel.

"There have now been over six million users of the 'Boris bikes' in London and distances cycled total over 10 million kilometres with few serious injuries. In the first three months the accident rate was estimated to be 0.002 percent."

There are similar observations from other schemes. The bike share schemes in Brisbane and

Melbourne are operating at 10 percent of comparable international schemes because of helmet legislation.

Provided by University of Sydney

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