

Title: Child Car Restraint Law Changes: A Kidsafe WA Experience
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Abstract

In 2010, Australia underwent significant changes in road traffic legislation for child passengers as described in the 7th Amendment Package to the National Road Rules. The new regulations were implemented in Western Australia (WA) on 1 October 2010.

While parents were the primary target for the communication strategies and public awareness campaigns about these impending changes, there were significant implications for key stakeholder groups including child care service providers, schools, government agency employees and other professionals who transport children as part of their job. While these professional groups will be included in the communication channels for government agency information distribution, the implications can be more complex due to the number of children they transport and the vehicles they use..

Kidsafe WA identified the significant need for more detailed information for these stakeholders and recieved funding from the WA Department of Health to assist these groups to prepare for compliance with the new legislation.

This paper will outline the strategies undertaken by Kidsafe WA to communicate the changes to professional stakeholder groups and service providers who transport children under the age of 7 years. It will also include a comparison between the results of a pre and post legislation implementation survey and a discussion on how the results influenced the project activities and the ongoing support services offered by Kidsafe WA.

Introduction

The New Child Car Restraint Laws Professional Consultation and Support Project was implemented in 2010 prior to the introduction of the legislation that would change the requirements for child passengers in Australia. As the lead, non-government, not-for-profit, charitable organisation dedicated to the prevention of unintentional child injuries and with a customer base dependent on our expertise for the safe transport of children, Kidsafe WA saw the need for the delivery of additional information and resources specifically targeted towards groups responsible for transporting children.

In order to identify groups affected by the law changes, Kidsafe WA consulted with existing partners to compile an extensive list of contacts. This included Schools, Child Care Centres, Family Day Care Schemes, Foster Carers, Disability Service Commission Offices, Department for Child Protection Family Resource Officers, Department for Communities Children's Services Officers and Allied Health Professionals. Representatives within these groups were surveyed pre and post introduction of the child car restraint law changes to gain an understanding of their concerns with meeting the compliance criteria.

With the funding from the WA Department of Health and in collaboration with the WA Office of Road Safety, resources were developed and support offered to assist stakeholders to understand and comply with the new requirements. These resources provided clear, accurate and easy to use display materials and tools to increase knowledge and help to comply with the changes.

In addition to the specific post implementation survey, Kidsafe WA in partnership with its corporate sponsor SGIO, conducted a post implementation survey among community members. This survey explored community compliance rates and understanding of the new legal requirements for child passengers. The results from these surveys will be presented as part of this paper.

Methods

To increase service provider participation an electronic survey was distributed to measure perceived key barriers to compliance with the law changes and to understand the strategies needed to alleviate these barriers. This survey method was identified in consultation with the project partners. These partners also volunteered to distribute the survey amongst their staff and members. This included a combination of rural and metropolitan contacts.

The pre-implementation survey was used to identify issues with compliance, any additional support needed by professionals and to alleviate any common misconceptions or mixed messages. Information targeted at parents released by the WA Office of Road Safety was then expanded by Kidsafe WA. It included display materials & posters summarising the changes; a selection chart outlining restraint options available on the WA market; and a quick reference guide booklet for professionals. Program resources were delivered to service providers in July 2010.

The post-implementation survey was distributed in April 2011. It measured the level of awareness, barriers faced by service providers and current practices post implementation of the law changes. The survey also measured the effectiveness of the resources provided by Kidsafe WA. Survey participants were asked to comment and score the resources based on content, readability, usefulness and presentation. This included questions on what they would change about the communication strategies used for future updates or regulatory changes.

Results

Initial identification of contacts resulted in the recruitment of 400 service providers and staff in 1,000 primary schools, district high schools and kindergartens. The pre-implementation survey resulted in 200 responses representing a return rate of 14%. Respondents were primarily from the metropolitan area however all regional and remote locations in WA were represented in the results (59% metro, 41% regional)

Ninety four percent of respondents were aware of the changes and 47.3% thought they would have difficulty complying with the changes. Results from the pre-implementation electronic survey identified perceived key barriers to compliance. These included cost, access to suitable vehicles, limited availability of restraints and confusion about specific requirements of the changes. From this, 45 service providers requested additional information from Kidsafe including professional development sessions and workshops.

Consultation and results from the pre-implementation survey highlighted the need for more specific information on the child car restraint law changes. The respondents identified the issues that they felt needed to be addressed. The project partners then worked to identify the most appropriate way to address these issues. The highlighted issues included the identification of suitable vehicle types; the use of restraints within buses; lists of authorised Type 1 and 2 child restraint fitters; a list of narrow restraint alternatives; combinations of restraints that work well together; and information regarding exemptions. The need for new guides, handouts and checklists for service providers and parents was also highlighted.

Some results were worrying when looking at the vehicles used to transport children in care and the limited knowledge respondents had about the number of child car restraint anchorage points available and how many children they can legally carry in the vehicles used. The survey asked respondents to list the make and model of vehicles they used to transport children in their care (the most common were vehicles from the Toyota and Hyundai range) and only a handful of respondents used vehicles with more than 13 seats due to the driver licensing requirements for operating a vehicle of this size.

The post-implementation survey resulted in 88 responses (response rate of 6%). These results revealed that 95.1% of participants had been aware of the changes to child car restraints law whilst 24.4% were still having trouble complying approximately 6 months after the changes were introduced. The most common barriers contributing to non-compliance included the associated cost, sizes/ages of children in care, access to anchor points within vehicles and the size of restraints. The new resources and tools made available as part of this project were well received by respondents. All of the tools were ranked as very useful. Participants highlighted the clear, easy to understand presentation of information and the use of photos within the resources.

Some of the negative responses received in the post-implementation survey included the need for further clarification of the legislation changes involving older children who fall outside the size limits of existing child restraints. There was also a belief that the resources were not suitable for use with Aboriginal populations or those with low literacy levels. A total of 68% of participants self-reported knowledge levels of the new child car restraint laws as good and 17.5% self-reported excellent knowledge levels after the program implementation.

The community survey conducted by Kidsafe WA and Corporate Sponsor SGIO, resulted in 378 responses from community members directly affected by the changes to the child car restraint laws (78.5% had children under 7 years of age). However, 12.4% of respondents were not aware that the laws had changed with 43.4% reporting that they had found out by word of mouth and not through a specific road safety organisation or service provider. Of the parents with a child aged 6 months to 4 years 83.8% reported that their child always travelled in a restraint with an inbuilt harness. However 15.4% with a child within this age range reported that their child sometimes travelled in a booster seat and 7% reported they never travel in a restraint with an inbuilt harness. In addition, 67.7% reported that they were happy to start

using a car restraint again even if their child had progressed out of a restraint under the old legislation. They noted that their child's safety was of primary concern.

Discussion

A comparison between the pre and post implementation surveys revealed that the majority of service providers were aware of the changes to the child care restraint legislation however many were still experiencing problems with compliance after implementation. The resources and tools produced under this project were successful in addressing the key issues identified by the target group. The barriers to compliance from external factors were accurately predicted by participants in the pre implementation survey. The training implemented by Kidsafe WA after the pre implementation survey was effective with 78% of participants rating the sessions as very useful.

The survey also highlighted the lack of communication between government and non-government agencies when working with service providers and parents. Many of these agencies were working on separate responses to the new legislation in isolation from each other. This caused confusion, duplication of effort and an inconsistency in the message to the various stakeholders.

Whilst stakeholder groups were identified as needing more information on the changes, parents were identified as the group requiring more information from the service providers. In addition to the resources produced by Kidsafe WA under this project resources produced by SDERA and the Office of Road Safety on selection and use of compliant child car restraints were also distributed. This included a series of resources produced in collaboration with SDERA, which are available in several languages and simplified for community members with low literacy levels.

One adverse outcome to the implementation of the new legislation was the reduction in services reported by some organisations. Due to the costs associated with compliance a small percentage of service providers reported that they had changed the age of children they serviced or stopped offering school drop off and pick up programs. Some of these services had been removed due to staff unwillingness to operate and install child car restraints and the costs associated with providing appropriate restraints for children, particularly for children under 4 years of age.

Kidsafe WA also offers ongoing support services related to correct fitting and checking of child car restraints. These services include information and advice available on the Kidsafe WA website; via the face to face Child Car Restraint Advice Service; through Type 1 Child Car Restraint Fitters courses including workshops and the fixed Child Car Restraint Fitting and Checking Service. The display room located at the Kidsafe WA centre at Princess Margaret Hospital offers parents and carers solutions for their restraint needs. It provides advice on the need for multiple restraints fitted into single vehicles and incorporates long term safety solutions.

To help alleviate the associated costs Kidsafe WA offers a Child Car Restraint Hiring Service with a range of capsules, convertibles, combination restraints and booster seats. Kidsafe WA operates Free Child Car Restraint Checking Days periodically at a variety of metropolitan and rural locations. With an alarming number of restraints incorrectly installed, this initiative is aimed at parents and carers who may have

incorrectly fitted child car restraints at home. However services such as care centres, family day cares and schools are still experiencing problems with cost and the availability of vehicles that cater for the number of children and restraints needed.

The next challenge will be the introduction the new range of child car restraints complying with the 2010 Australian/New Zealand Standard. The 2010 version of the standard introduced the most significant changes to the standard for many years, replacing mass with seated height and age as the indicators for suitable use.

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