



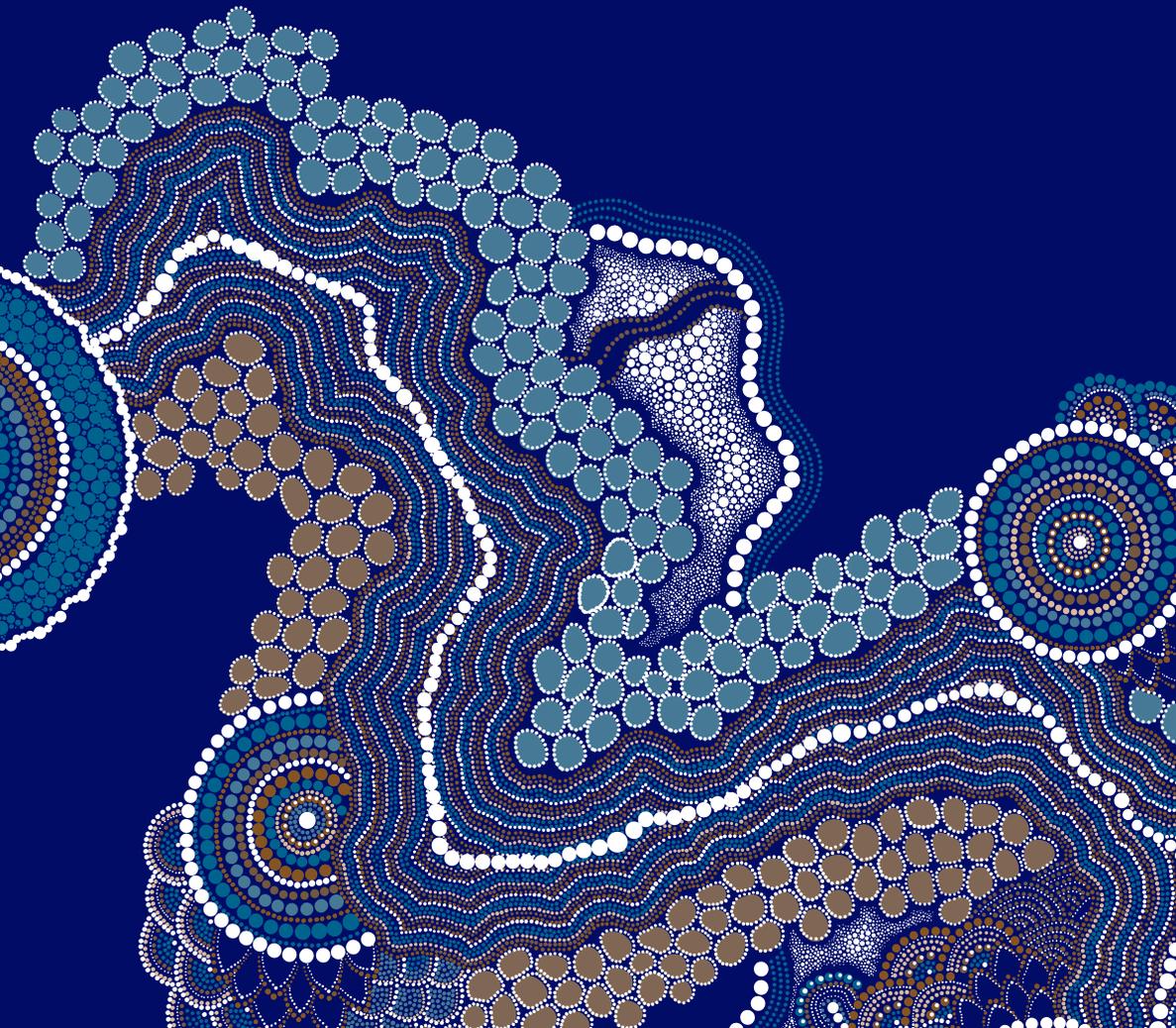
ROAD
TRAVEL
REWARDS

Asleep at the wheel

Addressing tiredness related road crashes

April 2026

We acknowledge the land on which we gather, from places as widespread and diverse as the NRMA. In the presence of Elders past, present and future, we recognise all journeys and our mutual role in creating new paths together.



About the NRMA

The NRMA is one of Australia's largest member-owned organisations with a 105-year history, representing over 3.5 million members. We offer a world of road, travel and rewards that help members live more freely.

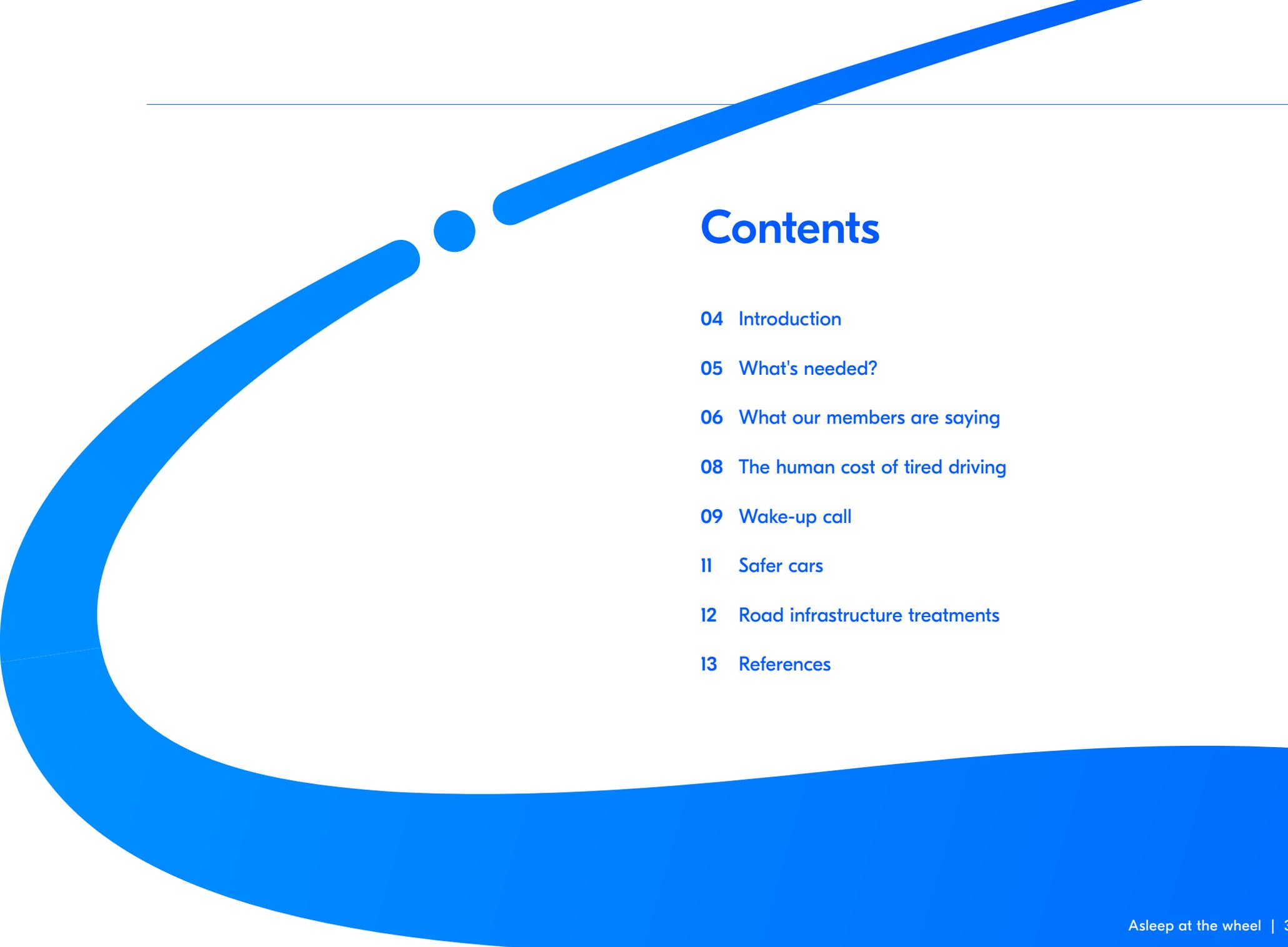
Independent advocacy is the foundation activity of our organisation and remains critical to who we are today. As a modern mutual we work with all levels of government to help improve transport safety, road safety, mobility issues and enhance community connections.

We're for members. We're independent.

The NRMA is a member-owned organisation, independent and non-partisan by design. We advocate for our members and their communities and engage constructively with governments, stakeholders and industry to help shape fair, practical outcomes that make life better for all Australians.

Our positions are shaped by member experience, research and consultation.

It's an approach we've taken for more than a century, guiding how we advocate for and contribute to practical change that improves safety, affordability and access. By working openly with others, we focus on outcomes that make a real difference for communities across Australia.



Contents

04 Introduction

05 What's needed?

06 What our members are saying

08 The human cost of tired driving

09 Wake-up call

11 Safer cars

12 Road infrastructure treatments

13 References

Introduction

Feeling tired is part of everyday life. We experience it after a poor night's sleep, a long day at work, or hours spent caring for others. For many people, tiredness feels normal, something to be pushed through. However, tiredness does not stay harmless when we get behind the wheel. Driving while tired slows reaction times, impairs judgement, and increases the risk of a serious crash.

Alarming, NRMA research shows this behaviour is common. More than one in five drivers surveyed reported having fallen asleep or closed their eyes while driving. Worryingly, among those who drove tired in the past 12 months, one in five said they do so at least once a week.¹

The consequences are becoming increasingly apparent. Fatigue-related fatalities have risen sharply over the last five years. In 2022, tiredness accounted for 12 percent of road deaths. By 2024, this figure had jumped to 23 percent, almost double in just two years. This upward trend highlights a growing and largely preventable risk on our roads.

While sleep is the only cure for tiredness, relying on individual behaviour alone is not enough. A broader approach is needed, including targeted education for at risk-road users, greater uptake of safer vehicles, and increased investment in proven road treatments at known fatigue-related crash hot spots.



**1 in 5
drivers**

admit to falling asleep
or closing their eyes
at the wheel

What's needed?

1

Targeted education and awareness initiatives for at-risk groups of drowsy driving including new parents, young drivers, people with sleep disorders, and shift workers.

2

Measures to encourage the uptake of safer vehicles, particularly among young drivers.

3

Road infrastructure treatments, such as audio tactile marking should be prioritised at locations with a high risk of fatigue-related crashes.

What our members are saying

We surveyed 1,870 members in NSW and the ACT regarding their experiences of driving while tired.¹

21%

have fallen asleep or closed eyes while driving.

34%

started a road trip at a time when they would usually be sleeping.

47%

of respondents have driven tired in the past 12 months.



Tired driving behaviours

Of those who reported driving while tired in the last 12 months:

20%

are driving tired at least once a week.

34%

reported that their most recent experience of driving tired occurred in the late afternoon.

58%

of tired driving occurred during everyday trips, followed by long distance trips (37%).

35%

pulled over and took a break when it was safe after feeling tired while driving.

Circumstances surrounding tired driving

Among respondents who reported driving while tired in the last 12 months, the most common contributing factors* were:

46%

had not had enough sleep

37%

reported feeling mentally exhausted

33%

cited work, study or caring demands

28%

said they were tired due to stress or being busy

25%

were already tired when they started driving

Impact of driver tiredness

Respondents who reported driving while tired in the last 12 months experienced the following impacts* on their driving:

28%

said they zoned out or had difficulty remembering the last few kilometres

12%

drifted in their lane

12%

drove over rumble strips

12%

had trouble maintaining a constant speed

8%

experienced slow reaction times at traffic lights or intersections

* Respondents could select more than one reason.

The human cost of tired driving

75 people

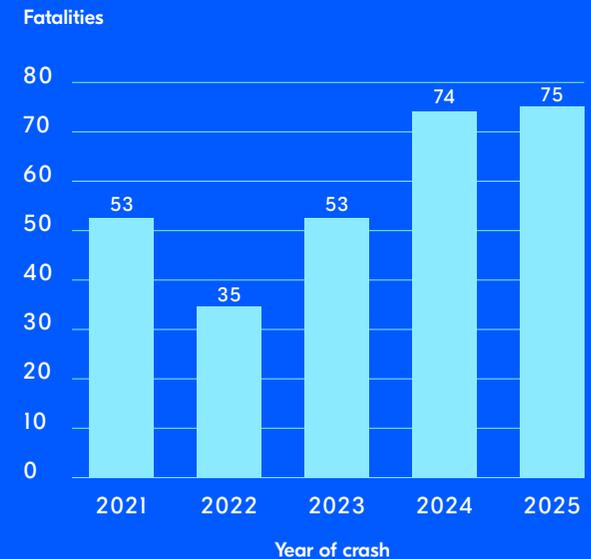
In 2025, 75 people died due to fatigue-related crashes (21%) — up 1 from 2024.²



+40%

More than 40% were aged between 17 and 39.³

Figure 1. Number of fatalities from fatigue-related crashes



Source: NSW Centre for Road Safety

Wake-up call

Fatigue has long been one of the biggest killers on NSW roads. However, the recent increase in fatigue-related crashes is deeply concerning. Last year, 75 people lost their lives in crashes where fatigue was a contributing factor.² More than 40 percent were aged between 17 and 39.³

Fatigue does not discriminate by distance. While it is often associated with long road trips, tiredness can be just as dangerous on short, everyday journeys.

Certain road users face a higher risk of drowsy driving, including young drivers, new parents, shift workers, people with sleep disorders, and commercial drivers.

It was encouraging to see the NSW Government acknowledge the spike in young driver fatigue fatalities through the launch of a recent social media campaign targeting 17 to 39 year olds.³ However, this broad young age group includes other high-risk cohorts such as new parents and shift workers who may benefit from more tailored and targeted messaging and interventions.

Changing driver behaviour without enforcement remains a challenge. To effectively address fatigue-related risk, targeted education campaigns are needed for specific at-risk groups, supported by practical strategies to help drivers avoid getting behind the wheel while tired.

High-risk groups

- People with sleep disorders
- Commercial/truck drivers
 - Young drivers
 - Shift workers
 - New parents





Sleep-deprived new parents

Nearly a decade has passed since the NRMA first called for targeted fatigue campaigns for new parents, yet the gap remains unaddressed.⁴

New parents experiencing sleep deprivation are at risk of tiredness-related crashes.⁵ Despite this, they may underestimate the dangers of drowsy driving. For many, driving may feel unavoidable as they juggle essential caregiving responsibilities, medical appointments, and work.

More research is needed to investigate the prevalence and circumstances of tired driving among new parents. Targeted and practical educational campaigns are also urgently required to raise awareness and promote safe travel decisions, and support this potentially underreported and vulnerable cohort of drivers.

Safer cars

Vehicle technology has evolved rapidly, with passive and active safety features designed to help prevent fatigue-related crashes. These technologies may help detect signs of driver inattention and provide warnings or corrective assistance. This includes:

- **Lane Keep Assist**
Gently steers vehicle back into the lane if no action is taken, with research estimating a 22 percent reduction in fatal and serious run off road and head on crashes.⁶
- **Driver Attention Detection**
Monitors driving behaviour and/or driver cues to detect signs of drowsiness or inattention and alerts the driver to take a break. Some systems also issue reminders after extended periods of continuous driving.
- **Lane Departure Warning**
Alerts the driver when the vehicle drifts out of the lane, using audible, visual or vibration warnings.

Encouraging the uptake of safer vehicles, particularly among young drivers may help reduce tiredness-related crashes and improve crash survivability.





Road infrastructure treatments

Fatigue-related crashes most commonly involve lane departure, resulting in run-off-the road and head-on crashes. Simple low-cost road treatments can significantly reduce these types of crashes. Proven treatments include:

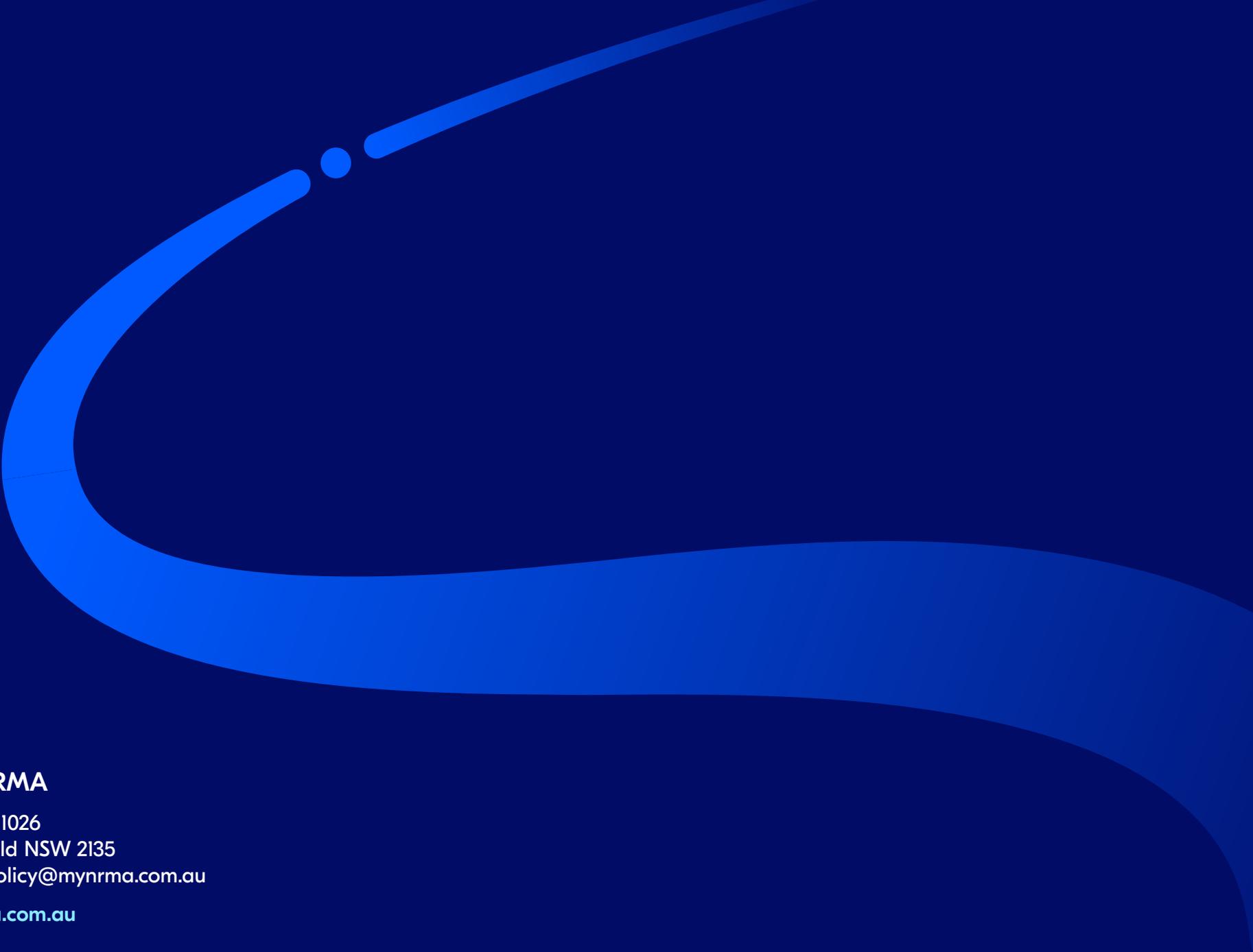
- **Audio tactile line marking (rumble strips)**
Raised markings that create sound and vibration to warn drivers when they drift out of the lane.
- **Wide centre lines**
Increase separation between oncoming traffic, providing greater recovery space and reducing the risk of head-on crashes.
- **Flexible safety barriers**
Absorbs crash forces and contains vehicles, reducing crash severity.

The NRMA believes that low-cost infrastructure treatments, such as audio tactile line marking should be prioritised at locations where fatigue poses a high crash risk.

The NRMA believes **low-cost infrastructure** should be prioritised at locations where fatigue risk is high.

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