

## MEDIA RELEASE

8 August 2023



# ACU researchers to provide a pathway to safer walking for older Australians

Australian Catholic University (ACU) researchers will develop a program to enhance pedestrian safety among older adults, thanks to funding from the Australian Automobile Association (AAA).

Pedestrian deaths increased by 10.3% in the 12 months to June 2023 (to 161), while the National Road Safety Strategy has also identified older people as vulnerable road users.

ACU health sciences researchers will develop a tailored online training program for people over 60 to enhance their hazard perception skills and reduce the risk of harm.

The program is the first of its kind in Australia and will use 3D simulations and gamification alongside physical and cognitive training to allow older adults to respond safely to traffic-related threats while walking.

Lead ACU researcher Dr Joanne Bennett from the National School of Behavioural and Health Sciences said the online platform would achieve significant advancements in road safety.

“This cutting-edge platform enables older adults to enhance their hazard perception, physical, and cognitive skills.

“The ultimate goal is to improve pedestrian safety and, potentially, driving safety as well.

“By supporting older adults in understanding and improving their core pedestrian-safety skills, this pioneering initiative aims to help them live long, safe, and independent lives.”

ACU will receive \$820,000 to develop and deliver the innovative program over the next two years.

Associate Professor Jonathan Duckworth and Dr Li Ping Thong from RMIT University’s School of Design will collaborate with ACU researchers to build the online platform.

“Combining 3D simulated hazardous roadway scenarios with gaming elements to enhance user engagement and motivation will provide a novel approach to tackle the pressing issue of pedestrian injuries and fatalities among the ageing population in Australia,” said Associate Professor Duckworth.

“Considering the target audience of older adults, the program's design must focus on accessibility. This involves ensuring the interface is easy to navigate, accommodating varying levels of digital literacy, and supporting users with potential sensory or cognitive impairments.”

The AAA funds research and practical activities that deliver real benefits for road users and the community.

“This is a promising project that could prevent many deaths and injuries,” AAA managing director Michael Bradley said.

“Australian road death numbers are rising and our population is ageing. ACU’s work is addressing an important need and a major gap in the nation’s road safety measures.”

**Dr Joanne Bennett is available for interview.**

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