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MEDIA RELEASE

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RESEARCHER URGES REFORM OF ROAD ACCIDENT COMPENSATION SYSTEMS

For the 66,000 Australians injured in a motor vehicle crash each year the path to recovery can be slow. However new research has found engagement with the road accident compensation system can make recovery even slower.

This is a finding from an analysis of thousands of road trauma victims by Dr Melita Giummarra, Research Fellow at Monash University. Dr Giummarra is named as 'Rising Star' of the Australian Pain Society's annual scientific meeting in Adelaide, April 9-12, where she will outline her research.

Dr Giummarra found that while most people injured in a motor vehicle crash recover well and return to work and social activities within months, around one fifth have delayed and complex recoveries.

Her research analysed both patient-reported outcomes from injured persons, and administrative claims and payments data from Victorian Transport Accident Commission road transport claimants. Her results show that the health impacts of injury are frequently worse when the injury is compensable – a phenomenon described as 'the compensation effect'.

Dr Giummarra said that while symptom exaggeration and malingering may play a role in a small number of cases, there are other factors at play. These include adversarial relations with insurers, negative experiences with health professionals, or conflict with family members. When the injured person has a compensation claim, or perceives that the injury was someone else's fault, *and* they develop a moderate to severe level of disability, they have a much higher perception of injustice than those who do not engage with the compensation process, or do not attribute fault to another.

Dr Giummarra said the psychological impacts of dealing with the compensation system can contribute to chronic pain and mental health conditions.

Dr Giummarra called for innovation "to identify clients at risk of a poor outcome so they can be targeted with early interventions, and to streamline lodging and receiving compensation".

Dr Giummarra said: "Reforms in this direction will reduce some of the enormous socioeconomic and health impacts from motor vehicle crashes that cost the economy more than \$27 Billion annually.

"The responsibility will ultimately sit with federal, state and local government, primary health care networks and clinicians to get engaged and help develop an effective solution.

"Moreover, the transport and workplace compensation systems in each state should maximise their potential to be gate-keepers to recovery by working in partnership with local service providers".

Dr Melita Giummarra is an ARC DECRA (Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Award) Research Fellow at Monash University.

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Australian Pain Society
[37th Annual Scientific Meeting](#)
9-12 April 2017 | Adelaide Convention Centre