



**96-01**

## **STATEMENT OF POLICY**

### **PROMOTE PASSENGER SAFETY RESTRAINTS**

#### **Policy**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports legislation in all states that makes seat belt use laws subject to primary enforcement, which allow police to stop vehicles solely for seatbelt law violations. NACCHO urges state legislatures to enact such legislation. NACCHO encourages local public health officials to work with law enforcement agencies, the medical community, and others to educate the public about the benefits of seatbelts.

#### **Justification**

Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of all unintentional injury related deaths and are the leading cause of death for persons between the age of 1 and 34. More than 38,000 people in the United States died and approximately 1.8 million were injured in motor vehicle crashes in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Seat belts are the single most effective safety device in preventing serious injury and death in motor vehicle crashes. When used properly, seat belts reduce the risk of fatal injury to front seat passengers by 45 percent and the risk of moderate to severe injury by 50 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Studies have found that states that pass a primary seat belt law increase average seat belt usage by nine to 14 percentage points.<sup>3</sup> The increase is especially pronounced among teen drivers, who are the most likely to be involved in crashes and the least likely to wear seat belts.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the evidence about the effectiveness of seat belts to reduce injuries and fatalities and the passage of primary seat belts laws to increase seat belt usage, 28 states still have secondary seat belt enforcement laws. One state, New Hampshire, does not have a seat belt law covering motorists over the age of 17.

#### **Record of Action**

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<sup>1</sup>National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. "Traffic Safety Facts, 2004: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2004. DOT HS 809 919.

<sup>2</sup> Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatality and Injury Estimates for 2000, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, November 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon, Mark and William Nissen. "Evaluation of Maryland, Oklahoma, and the District of Columbia's Seat Belt Law Change to Primary Enforcement." DOT HS 808 324. Washington DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> McCartt, Anne and Veronika Northrup. "Factors Related to Seat Belt Use among Fatally Injured Teenage Drivers." Journal of Safety Research 35:29-38, 2004.

*Proposed by Community Health and Prevention Advisory Committee  
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