INTRODUCTION
The VicRoads Starting Out Safely (SOS) program commenced in 2002 and was specifically designed to provide road safety information and support to parents and carers of children under six years of age. The program aims to communicate the important role parents and carers play in teaching their child about how to be safe when near or around traffic.

The program aims to encourage parents to act as role models in safety, to supervise children effectively and to train children in pedestrian and vehicle safety. Prior to launching the program, a benchmark study of behaviour and attitudes toward road safety was conducted in late 2002. This study presents the second wave of research designed to measure the impact of the SOS program.

The overall research objective is to determine whether the SOS program has had a positive influence on the behaviour and attitude of parents and carers towards teaching children about road safety.

**Behaviour**

Parent/carer behaviour with respect to road safety modelling, supervision and training
- What are people actually doing when parking, getting young children in and out of the car, crossing the road, using child restraints, and so forth?
- What are they doing in terms of teaching road safety to their children?
- How this behaviour has changed since the study in 2002?

**Understanding and Attitudes**

Parents/carer’s understanding of and attitudes towards road safety for their young children
- To what extent are they aware of the basic ground rules?
- To what extent do they claim to follow these rules (and how does this ‘claimed behaviour’ compare with actual behaviour)?
- To what extent are they aware of their role and the importance of their role in inculcating road safety knowledge in young children?
- To what extent have understanding and attitudes changed since 2002?

Attitudes, understanding and behaviour of family support and early childhood agency staff with respect to road safety education and advice...
- What role do they play in childhood early childhood road safety education?
- What level of understanding do they have?
- What are their attitudes towards childhood road safety education?
- To what extent have these attitudes changed since 2002?

The SOS campaign

The role of the SOS program in modifying attitudes, understanding and behaviour
- To what extent do people recall the campaign overall and its various elements?
- What are the main outtakes from the campaign?
- What impact has the campaign had?

METHODS

The research focused on parents/carers, maternal and child health and early childhood staff. Data collection methodologies included:
- 496 behavioural observations of adults and children getting into and out of the car and crossing the road. The observations took place at 20 locations across Melbourne and regional locations in Victoria. This included maternal and child health centres, long day care centres; shopping centre car parks and traffic intersections.
- 367 computer assisted telephone interviews with Victorian parents and home based carers of children aged between six months and under six years of age
- 35 self completion surveys with Victorian early childhood and maternal and child health staff.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**When should we begin teaching children about road safety?**
- Most parents/carers believe the best age to begin teaching children about road safety is between two and three years of age

**Who should be responsible for teaching children about road safety?**
- While school, kindergarten and long day care staff are expected to help children learn about road safety, parents consider themselves to be primarily responsible for teaching their child about road safety (86%)
- 80% of parents and carers and 75% of early childhood staff place ‘a great deal of importance’ on teaching children about road safety

**Awareness of the Road Safety Advertising Campaign**
- 78% of parents recall seeing the ‘Stop, Look, Listen,Think’ advertisement, yet only 5% say that they talk to their children about listening and looking out for traffic when out walking with their child. They rely more on holding their child’s hand.
Behaviour

Role model behavior
- All parents/carers say they always wear a seatbelt, but 2 in 10 say they occasionally bend the rules when it comes to traffic regulations.
- Maternal and Child health centres are the main source of information on child restraints, however this decreases by the 3.5 year old visit.

Child restraint usage
- Majority of parents of children aged three to five years claim to place their child in the correct restraint (80%). This finding was supported by the observational study with 77% observed in the correct restraint (2002 observation 63%)
- 22% of children aged three to five years were observed wearing a seatbelt only compared to 28% in 2002.

Location of child restraint in the vehicle
- All respondents claim to place child restraints in the rear of the vehicle. 45% reported they use the rear passenger side, this was also seen in 45% of observations. This is compared to 30% in 2002.

Unloading the car
- Consistent with the results in 2002, 92% of respondents said they would first take out the pusher or bulky item before they remove the child from the vehicle. However 24% of adults were observed unloading the pusher and bags first, down from 41% in 2002.

Child getting out of car
- 95% of respondents said they or another adult opens the door for the child. 52% of children observed got out of the car themselves after an adult had opened the door. 9% of children were observed to open the car door themselves and get out of the vehicle without and adult watching.

Side of car child gets out from
- 83% of respondents reported their child exits the car from the passenger side; this is consistent with the 2002 study with 87% reporting the same. 67% were observed exiting the car from the passenger side.
- 10% said their child exits from the driver’s side, however 28% were observed doing this. 55% were observed exiting from the driver’s side in 2002. The location of the child restraint influenced where the child exited the car.

Where the child waits when they first get out of the car
- 52% of parents report their child waits next to the car, however only 23% were observed doing this.
- 22% said they place their child somewhere safe and 21% were observed doing this. 30% were observed doing this in 2002.
- 13% were observed as carelessly moving around the car and not looking for traffic. 41% were observed doing this in 2002.

Action taken when child gets in and out of car
- 72% said they usually fasten the seatbelt for their child and 16% said they double check the restraint by touching the seatbelt clasp to ensure it is properly fastened. However 56% were observed fastening the seatbelt for the child and in 35% of cases children were observed buckling themselves in.
- 49% were observed checking the seatbelt/restraint (62% in 2002), 10% were observed looking at the restraint only and 20% did nothing.

CONCLUSIONS
- Parents and carers see the responsibility for teaching children about road safety falling primarily with them but supported by the extended family and teachers.
- Whilst parents recognise the importance of talking to their children about road safety few were observed doing this, the focus when out walking tends to be on safety rather than talking
- The are gaps between what parents say they do and what they are observed doing (e.g. when getting children out of the car)
- Although VicRoads is not immediately recognised as having a direct responsibility for teaching children about road safety however key messages from VicRoads are strongly recalled.
- It is critical that resources are kept up-to-date and invigorated to provide early childhood staff with fresh ideas. This can be extended to online support for staff and parents.