



The Problem: Unbelted Motor Vehicle Crashes in North Dakota

Seat belts are the single most effective safety device to prevent death and injury in a motor vehicle crash. Those who do not wear seat belts are much more likely to lose their life in a crash.

Seat belts save lives by: ¹

- Preventing impact with the vehicle's interior and other occupants.
- Keeping people in the vehicle.
- Lessening impact on internal organs and prevent brain and spinal cord trauma.

North Dakota seat belt use is below average.

- 7.5% lower observed seat belt use rate than the 10-year national average (2012-2021).^{3,4}
- North Dakota is one of just 15 states with a secondary enforcement law for adult front seat occupants and one of just 9 states where a secondary law does not address rear seat passengers.

One-year snapshot (2021)

- More than 9,500 vehicle crashes resulted in fatalities, injuries and property damage.³
- Nearly every 10 days one unbelted vehicle occupant died.³
- Nearly every 15 days one unbelted vehicle occupant was ejected.³

Fatalities are disproportionately unbelted.

- Approximately 18% of North Dakotans choose not to buckle up. (ND 2021)²
- Nearly half of motor vehicle fatalities in North Dakota were unbelted. (ND 2021)³

Seat belt use correlates directly to injury severity.

- Unbelted vehicle occupants in crashes in North Dakota account for the largest percent of fatalities and serious injuries.
- Belted occupants most commonly receive non-serious or no injuries.

Unbelted crash victims have expensive medical bills.

- Unbelted crash victims have medical bills 50% higher than belted crash victims.⁴
- Data from 16 of 42 North Dakota hospitals shows that costs related to unbelted motor vehicle crash injuries were more than \$206.6 million over a three-year period (2019-2021).

The "personal choice" not to use a seat belt comes at a cost to all North Dakota taxpayers.

- Emergency response
- Medical assistance
- Increased insurance premiums
- Unemployment compensation

A Solution: Primary Seat Belt Law (PBL)

Driving is a privilege, not a right. A primary seat belt law makes it clear to all drivers and passengers that they are responsible to the people of North Dakota for using their seat belts.

Seat belt use is already required for the privilege to drive.

- North Dakota law enforcement is not allowed to primarily enforce this requirement, resulting in non-compliance.
- PBL would allow law enforcement to issue citations regardless of other offenses.

Primary seat belt laws are proven to work.

- States that transitioned to a PBL experienced a 10-12% increase in observed seat belt use.⁴

Most North Dakotans favor seat belt use.

- North Dakota seat belt use by front seat vehicle occupants was 81.9% in 2021 after peaking in 2019 and 2020 at 83.7%.³

Most North Dakotans favor a PBL.

- A 2022 statewide survey showed that 59% of respondents favored a PBL in North Dakota.³

North Dakota has existing requirements for the privilege to drive.

- Drivers must be licensed.
- Drivers must obey speed limits and traffic laws.
- Drivers must wear corrective lenses if necessary.
- Drivers may not use text messaging.
- Drivers may not drive while impaired by alcohol or drugs.

¹ National Safety Council

² North Dakota State University Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute and the North Dakota Department of Transportation Highway Safety Division

³ NDDOT Highway Safety Division

⁴ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration



North Dakota's Vision Zero strategy aims to establish a culture of personal responsibility where motor vehicle fatalities and serious injuries are recognized as preventable and not tolerated. This means addressing both the causes of crashes and the extent of human injuries and fatalities when crashes occur.

VisionZero.ND.gov