

Information update

October 2019

Dementia and driving

Road safety and Medical Review

VicRoads' vision is to create a safe system of roads, laws, vehicles, drivers and behaviour that supports and improves the safe movement of our community. This includes supporting drivers to drive at any age so long as they are medically fit to do so.

We encourage people with medical conditions to speak with their doctor to understand their health conditions and the potential impact on their driving.

Drivers are required by law to notify VicRoads of serious, permanent or long term illness, disability, medical condition or injury (or the effects of treatment for any of those things) that may affect their fitness to drive.

Each driver is reviewed individually to determine the outcome that is best for the safety of the individual and the community.

If you can show that you can drive safely, but only under certain conditions, a conditional licence may be considered. A wide range of conditions are possible to maximise your safety and that of other road users. Common license conditions include wearing corrective eye glasses, driving automatic vehicles, driving in daylight hours or only in certain areas, e.g. within 5km to assist with your independence.

This information update describes how you can meet your legal obligations and what you can do about driving, if you develop dementia.

What is dementia?

Dementia is a condition that affects thinking skills, including memory, concentration, judgement, vision or problem solving. It can cause difficulties completing everyday tasks such as household chores or driving.

A diagnosis of dementia doesn't necessarily mean that you are incapable of driving safely. However, at some stage in the future, a person with dementia will not be able to drive.

If you are diagnosed with dementia you are required by law to notify VicRoads. Failure to notify could also affect your insurance cover.

You should be aware that some medicines might also affect your ability to drive safely. It is illegal to drive if you experience significant side effects caused by any medicine(s). Discuss this with your doctor.

What are the warning signs?

If you have a possible or confirmed diagnosis of dementia - watch out for the following signs:

- Getting disorientated or lost whilst driving in familiar areas.
- Forgetting the purpose of the trip.
- Losing the car in a familiar car park.
- Difficulty making quick decisions when managing intersections or busy roads.
- Driving through Stop/Give Way signs or traffic lights without giving way.
- Failing to see vehicles, pedestrians or cyclists who are sharing the roadway.
- Difficulty parking or driving into a carport or garage.

- Slower reaction time, difficulty using the brake, accelerator or steering wheel.
- Unexplained dents and scrapes on the car.
- Frequently being tooted by other drivers.

You are more likely to experience these symptoms as your dementia worsens. Sometimes family and friends may notice the signs of dementia before you do, and they may need to assist you to limit or stop driving.

If you have concerns about your ability to drive, speak to your family, carer and doctor.

What are the medical standards for dementia and driving?

VicRoads determines your fitness to drive on a case by case basis in accordance with national medical standards. Medical advice and assessment outcomes are also considered.

As part of a medical review, you will be required to have a neurological examination and to provide a report from your GP or specialist. This report must be no more than six months old.

Medical report forms can be downloaded from vicroads.vic.gov.au.

How can I retain my licence?

A driving test

VicRoads' policy is to keep you driving – as long as you can do so safely. VicRoads may ask you to complete an on-road test to assess whether you can continue to drive safely. This test is usually conducted by an occupational therapy driver assessor. The occupational therapist will ask you about your driving and medical history, test your understanding of the road rules, and assess your physical and mental capabilities. The occupational therapist will then observe your driving performance, in a car with dual controls, and provide you with feedback.

Based on the result of any on-road driving test, medical advice and other information (e.g. police reports), VicRoads will decide if you can retain your driver licence.

Driver licence conditions

Sometimes a driver can continue to drive independently with a condition on their licence. These options are only possible if the driver can reasonably be expected to remember and apply the condition/s.

Examples include:

- only driving in daylight or in off-peak hours
- driving only in familiar areas within a set radius from home.

Through these licence conditions, VicRoads can help a driver to continue to drive in a way that suits their capabilities. As dementia is a progressive condition, you will be required to have regular medical and driving tests to monitor your ongoing ability to drive safely.

Drivers of commercial vehicles

Standards for commercial truck, taxi and bus licences are stricter than those for private licences. You may not be medically fit to hold a commercial licence such as a taxi or heavy vehicle licence. Specialist reports would be required, e.g. neurologist, geriatrician etc.

What can I do if my licence is suspended or cancelled?

If VicRoads suspends or cancels your driver licence on medical grounds, or if you voluntarily surrender it, you will not be eligible to regain it until you provide a medical report that indicates that you have met the requirements for fitness to drive. You may also be required to undertake an on-road test.

You may receive a partial refund of your driver licence fee if your licence is cancelled due to your dementia, or if you decide to surrender it.

If VicRoads varies, suspends or cancels your licence you can appeal against the decision. However, you cannot appeal if VicRoads requests you to provide a medical or other report, or asks you to undertake a driving test.

There are two ways you can appeal:

- You can write to VicRoads and ask for an independent internal review.
- You can appeal to the Magistrates' Court.

How can I plan ahead to stay mobile?

If you have dementia, you should plan ahead for the time when you will no longer be able to drive.

It is important for you to maintain your social contacts. Many people with dementia continue to keep active without driving by using different ways to keep mobile. Some ideas others have found helpful include:

- Discuss driving and mobility regularly with the GP.
- Make sure that your eyesight is checked at least every two years or more frequently if you have cataracts or eye disease. Good vision is required for mobility.
- Develop a relationship with your pharmacist and always ask about medicine side effects and their possible impact on driving.
- Develop confidence with using public transport or community buses to get to local facilities (shops, doctor, bank etc).

- Arrange appointments and social visits at times when others can do the driving.
- Exchange rides with friends or neighbours for other favours.
- Ask about transport rosters (to get to church, Probus or other clubs).
- Arrange for family or friends to visit you so you don't need to travel.
- Write out a plan of action for the time when your driving is no longer safe (e.g. which people make the decision and when, what to do with the car, selling the car and using the proceeds for a taxi fund).
- Seek support from organisations such as Alzheimers' Australia or call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Where can I get further information about the VicRoads Medical Review?

Further information is available on the VicRoads website: vicroads.vic.gov.au or by calling VicRoads on 13 11 71 (TTY 13 36 77, Speak and Listen 1300 555 727).

VicRoads Medical Review

Email medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Call (03) 8391 3226

Fax (03) 9854 2307

Mail Medical Review
PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101

For information about dementia and available resources and services contact:

Dementia Australia Vic

98-104 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn Vic 3122

Call (03) 9815 7800

Fax (03) 9815 7801

Mail Medical Review
PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101

Email alz@alzvic.asn.au

Web vic.fightdementia.org.au

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500