

Fitness to drive information for Mental Health and Addiction Practitioners

Information update

July 2018

This fact sheet explains the VicRoads Medical Review process, including health professional and patient responsibilities.

Mental health and driving

Mental health conditions and substance misuse/addiction may be associated with disturbances of behaviour, cognitive abilities and perception and therefore may affect driving ability in both the short and long term.

Conditions can differ in their aetiology, symptoms and severity. Functional impacts may be occasional or persistent, and may vary over time. Impacts may vary depending on treatment, individual coping strategies and social circumstances.

Severe mental illness often impairs multiple domains of functioning, and is most likely to impact on abilities required for safe driving depending on a person's insight into their condition. Substance misuse can be challenging as patients may understate or deny substance use and may lack insight into the impacts; It can be helpful to consult with family/carers.

The cumulative effect of multiple health conditions and their treatments should also be considered, including the person's self management capacity. In addition to intoxication, substance abuse can impair driving fitness through permanent brain and nerve damage.

What is my role as a health professional?

Your role is to provide advice to patients, carers and families about the impact of health conditions on driving and to make recommendations for management and monitoring. This is part of the overall diagnosis and management of a person to enhance self-monitoring at a given time, including impacts of treatment.

While health professionals provide advice about fitness to drive, VicRoads is solely responsible for issuing, renewing, suspending, refusing or cancelling, or reinstating a person's driver licence (including a conditional licence).

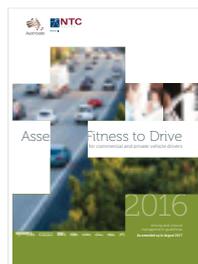
What are drivers' responsibilities and how can I help my patients fulfill these?

Drivers must declare to VicRoads any long term medical conditions or disabilities relevant to fitness to drive:

- when they apply for, or renew a licence, or
- as soon as possible after becoming aware of new conditions / disabilities.

Key Points

- Fitness to drive is an important consideration for people with mental health conditions or substance misuse /addiction.
- Health professionals should provide advice about the impact of these conditions on driving and recommend strategies for management and monitoring.
- The Medical Review process provides a mechanism for assessment and decision making about licensing, and for facilitating ongoing review if required. It aims to optimise driver mobility to drive in conditions that suit capabilities, providing drivers are safe to do so.
- All drivers have a legal responsibility to self-notify VicRoads of long term health conditions or disabilities that may affect driving safety. Health professionals assist patients to be aware of this responsibility and to understand the Medical Review process.
- Having a medical condition does not mean a person is ineligible to hold a licence. In most cases, referral to Medical Review does not result in licence cancellation. It may result in driving restrictions or medical monitoring to optimise ongoing fitness to drive.
- While health professionals are not legally mandated to notify directly to VicRoads, they are ethically obliged to act in the interests of public safety if they are aware a patient is continuing to drive despite advice to the contrary. Health professionals making such reports to VicRoads are indemnified under Victorian Road Safety law.



Advice in this fact sheet is based on the National 2016 Austroads Fitness to Drive: for commercial and private vehicle driver guidelines (AFTD)

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medical-review](http://vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/medical-conditions-and-driving/medical-review)

These declarations will initiate the Medical Review process.

Health professionals can assist patients to fulfill their responsibilities, and understand the Medical Review process. VicRoads assists you by providing:

- Fact sheets that support conversations with patients. See vicroads.vic.gov.au/medical-forms-and-fact-sheets
- Fitness to Drive Medical Report forms (accessible via VicRoads website). Completed forms can be sent to VicRoads by the patient or yourself (with patient's knowledge). See contact details listed overleaf.

Always keep up to date records in the patient's file of the advice you give and any actions you instigate regarding fitness to drive including copies of report forms.

Does a notification to VicRoads result in a loss of a person's licence?

Having a medical, mental health or addiction condition does not mean a driver is ineligible to hold a licence. In most cases, notification to VicRoads Medical Review does not result in licence cancellation.

The process supports people to maintain capacity to drive as long as they are safe to do so. It may result in driving restrictions or medical monitoring to ensure ongoing fitness to drive as described below.

How does the Medical Review process work?

When a medical report is received, the Medical Review team considers this information together with the patient's licence history and other information (e.g. from police or other

health professionals). VicRoads use a risk assessment to make the licensing decision on a case-by-case basis with reference to the national Assessing Fitness to Drive guidelines.

Screening and on-road tests (e.g. with an occupational therapy driver assessor) may help establish driving skills and maintain awareness of how conditions impact on driving skills.

VicRoads will write to the customer to outline the outcome and any restrictions or conditions.

What is a conditional licence?

A conditional licence provides a mechanism for optimising driver and public safety while maintaining driver independence. It identifies the need for medical management, vehicle modifications and/or driving restrictions (e.g. corrective lenses, radius restricted driving area, zero BAC, no night driving) that enable the person to drive safely. It may specify a review period, after which the person is required to undergo medical or competency reviews to establish continued fitness to drive.

What happens if a driver doesn't follow my advice?

If your patient does not notify VicRoads and you have concerns about their ability to drive safely you can make an anonymous report to VicRoads. You may use the Medical Report form, write to VicRoads or call the Medical Review team.

Please provide patient details and the reasons for your concern. Under Victorian law, VicRoads must investigate this information. Health professionals making such reports are indemnified under Victorian Road Safety Law.

Is it mandatory to report a patient to VicRoads?

In Victoria, there is no mandatory reporting requirement for health professionals. However, you have an ethical obligation to support public safety.

If you believe a patient lacks insight/judgement, and/or is not heeding advice to cease driving or self-report, you may report directly to VicRoads. If you believe the driver poses an immediate risk to public safety, you should report directly to the Police.

Are there special requirements for commercial vehicle drivers?

More stringent health and fitness to drive standards apply to commercial drivers (e.g. bus, taxi, bulk/dangerous goods and heavy vehicle drivers). These are outlined in Assessing Fitness to Drive. A person who does not meet the commercial vehicle medical criteria may still be eligible to retain a private vehicle driver licence.

Where do I find more information?

Assessing Fitness to Drive (AFTD) is the national publication containing detailed information about clinical assessment and management of drivers, including criteria for determining fitness to drive for particular medical conditions.

For more information about the Medical Review process visit: vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/medical-conditions-and-driving/medical-review or for the AFTD visit: austroads.com.au/drivers-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive

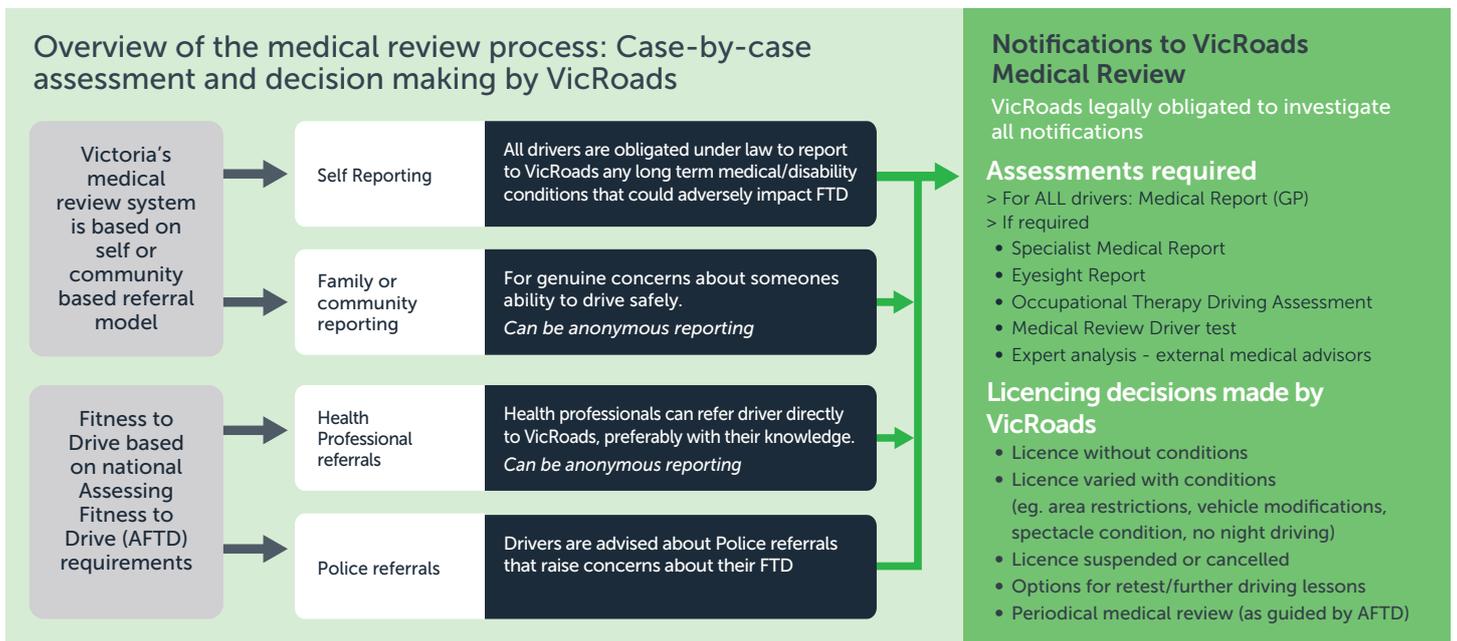


Figure 1 – Overview of the medical review process