

Fitness to drive information for Occupational Therapists

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

What is fitness to drive and why is it important?

Driving is a complex task which requires good vision, judgement, problem-solving, perception and physical abilities. Many health conditions and disabilities (or interventions/medicines used to treat them) may affect these attributes with impacts on driving as well as other forms of community mobility. Fitness to drive is an important consideration when you are supporting clients to manage daily living skills. Examples of conditions that may affect safe driving include:

- Blackouts
- Cardiovascular conditions
- Diabetes
- Dementia and cognitive impairment
- Seizures and epilepsy
- Neurological conditions
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Psychiatric conditions
- Sleep disorders
- Alcohol, drug/other substance misuse
- Vision and eye disorders

What is my role as an occupational therapist?

Occupational therapists are responsible for evaluating personal and community mobility including driving. They are in a prime position to assist patients to consider fitness to drive issues and obligations. However, assessing and managing fitness to drive can be complex and challenging due to the need to balance driving independence with social needs, employment and road safety.

To assist you, the national guidelines, *Assessing Fitness to Drive (2016)* (available via the Austroads website austroads.com.au) contain information about assessing and managing fitness to drive for a range of medical conditions.

Fitness to drive should be considered in both the short and long term. For a person diagnosed with a progressive condition (e.g. dementia), early discussions about driving will help the person and their family/carers prepare for non-driving, even though they may initially be safe to continue driving. Regular medical monitoring is required to assess how condition progression affects driving skills.

For other conditions (e.g. seizures/epilepsy, stroke, cardiovascular events), fitness to drive will require immediate consideration with likely requirements for periods of driving abstinence.

In Victoria, there is no mandatory reporting requirement for health professionals. However, you have an ethical and public health duty of care obligation to support patient and 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. This can be done anonymously. If you believe the driver poses an immediate risk to public safety, you should report directly to the Police. Always keep treating medical practitioners informed of your concerns.

What are drivers' responsibilities? How can I help patients fulfill these?

Explain to your patient that drivers are required by law to notify VicRoads of any long term medical conditions or permanent disabilities that may impact on driving in the longer term:

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

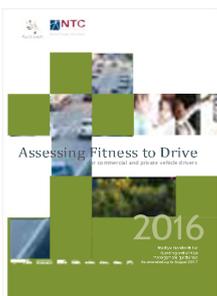
Such a notification will initiate the

Medical Review process. VicRoads will ask them to provide a medical report evaluating how they meet national guidelines to drive.

You should advise the driver that they may also require a practical on-road driving test with an occupational therapy driver assessor to determine whether their disability or health condition is affecting their driving skills.

Key points

- Fitness to drive is an important consideration for health professionals as it has implications for a patient's safety and that of other road users.
- Health professionals have an important role in providing advice to patients, carers and family about the impact of medical/disability conditions on driving, explaining driver legal reporting obligations and recommending strategies for management and monitoring to enhance community independence.
- *Assessing Fitness to Drive 2016* (published by Austroads) provides guidance and criteria for consistently managing fitness to drive.
- All drivers have a legal responsibility to report to VicRoads if they have a permanent or long-term health condition or disability that might affect their ability to drive safely.
- Having a medical condition or disability 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 a conditional licence and/or medical monitoring to optimise ongoing fitness to drive.
- While health professionals are not legally mandated to report directly to VicRoads, they are ethically obliged to act to ensure public safety if they are aware a patient is continuing to drive despite advice to the contrary. Health professionals making such reports to VicRoads can do so anonymously and are indemnified under Victorian law.



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

Visit austroads.com.au

VicRoads Medical Review

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Email
medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

Web
vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/medical-conditions-and-driving/medical-review

You can assist your patient to report a serious, permanent or long term illness, disability, mental condition or injury by advising them to consult their GP for completion of a fitness to drive medical report (available on VicRoad's website). Alternatively you can advise the GP directly of your advice. Completed forms can be sent to VicRoads via email, fax or post using the contact details above.

What is the role of VicRoads medical review?

Medical Review has a role in supporting health professionals fulfil their advisory responsibilities to their patients. VicRoads assists you by providing fact sheets (available on VicRoads website) that support conversations with patients about:

- Specific conditions (e.g. dementia, sleep apnea, seizures, diabetes) and driving
- VicRoads medical review process
- Driving tests (Medical review drive test, occupational therapy drive test)
- Older driver issues (e.g. ageing and driving, health conditions and driving, retiring from driving)

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 is a conditional licence?

It's helpful if patients understand that having a medical condition or disability and reporting it does not necessarily lead to a loss of licence. Most drivers in medical review retaining a licence through options such as conditional

licences and requirements for periodical medical reviews to monitor conditions.

A conditional licence provides a mechanism for optimising driver and public safety while maintaining driver independence under certain conditions. Licence conditions may specify;

- medical management (e.g. requirement for periodical reviews)
- vehicle modifications
- driving permitted only within a specified radius from home (e.g. 5km)
- no night driving
- only to drive with auto transmission or zero blood alcohol content (BAC)

Early discussion of conditional licence options will help allay concerns and raise awareness of these provisions especially for patients with long term/deteriorating conditions.

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

If a person continues to drive despite advice and they do not report their condition to VicRoads, they are not fulfilling their legal responsibility. If they are involved in a crash and it is determined their health condition /disability was a contributing factor, they may be prosecuted and their insurance may not be valid.

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.

What happens when a patient is referred to VicRoads?

If a notification is received, VicRoads will request that the driver provide a

medical fitness to drive report. VicRoads considers allied health and medical information together with the patient's licence history and any other information (e.g. from Victoria Police, or the courts).

VicRoads makes a risk assessment and licensing decisions on a case-by-case basis with reference to the national *Assessing Fitness to Drive 2016* guidelines.

The majority of people with a first notification retain driving privileges, often with a conditional licence. Screening and on-road tests may be recommended to help establish driving skills and assist patients improve awareness of how their condition may be affecting their driving.

VicRoads will write to the customer to advise the outcome and next steps.

An overview of the fitness to drive process is provided in the diagram below.

Are there special requirements for commercial drivers?

Reflecting the increased risks associated with driving commercial vehicles, more stringent health standards apply to commercial drivers (e.g. bus, taxi, bulk/dangerous goods and heavy vehicle drivers). These requirements are outlined in *Assessing Fitness to Drive (2016)*.

It is important for health professionals to ask about possible driving requirements for work when managing fitness to drive so that relevant standards can be applied. A person who does not meet the commercial vehicle medical criteria may still be eligible to retain a private vehicle driver licence.

For more detailed information on the medical review process, visit the VicRoads website.

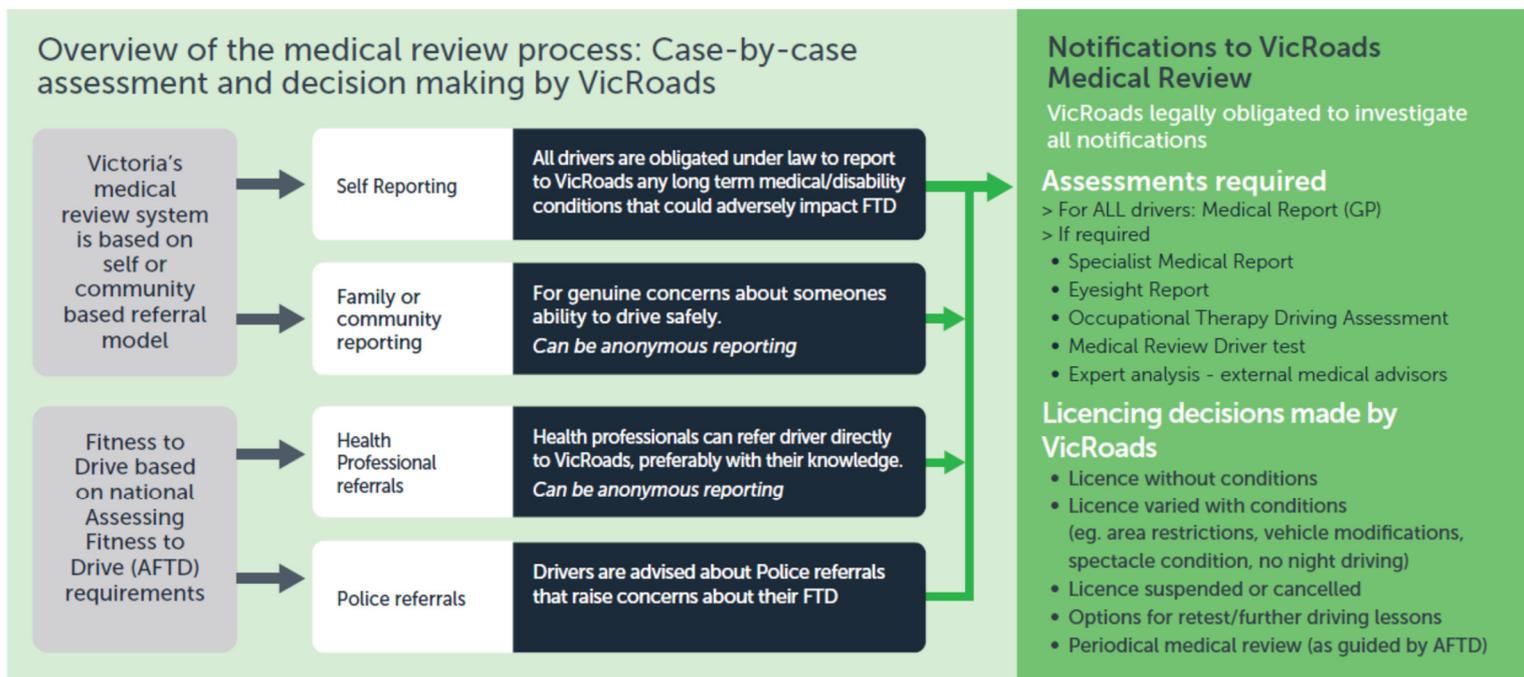


Figure 1 – Overview of the medical review process