

Information update

May 2019

Fitness to drive information for medical practitioners

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

Health conditions and fitness to drive

Driving is a complex task, which requires good vision, judgement, perception and physical abilities. Many health conditions may affect these attributes, so fitness to drive is an important consideration when you are managing your patients' health.

Examples of conditions that may affect safe driving include:

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

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 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 or cardiovascular events), fitness to drive will require immediate consideration. The cumulative impact of multiple conditions and treatments (e.g. sedatives) also requires management.

Assessing and managing fitness to drive can be complex and challenging due to needing to balance driving for an individual's independence, social contact or employment with community safety.

What is my role as a medical practitioner?

Your role is to provide advice to patients, carers and families about the impact of health conditions and their treatments on driving and to make recommendations for management and monitoring.

To assist you, *Assessing Fitness to Drive (2016)* – available via the Austroads website austroads.com.au - is a national publication containing information about assessing and managing fitness to drive. It focusses on long term medical conditions as distinct from short term conditions requiring temporary driving abstinence (e.g. acute injuries, post-surgery).

Information is provided for both private and commercial licence holders. The document is also used by VicRoads to make decisions about licensing.

In Victoria, there is **no mandatory reporting** requirement for health professionals. However, you have an **ethical obligation** to support public safety. Thus, 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 using the VicRoads Fitness to Drive medical report form – available on the VicRoads website. You can report anonymously.

If you believe the driver poses an immediate risk to public safety, you should report directly to the Police.

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

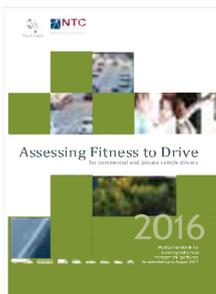
KEY POINTS

- Fitness to drive may be an important consideration for people with some health conditions.
- The medical practitioner's role is to provide advice about the impact of these conditions on driving and to recommend strategies for management and monitoring.
- The VicRoads 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 capacity to drive in conditions that suit their abilities, providing they are safe to do so.
- All drivers have a legal responsibility to notify VicRoads of significant long term health conditions that may affect driving safety. Health professionals can advise patients of this responsibility and educate them about the Medical Review process.
- In most cases, referral to VicRoads Medical Review **does not** result in licence cancellation. It may result in driving restrictions or medical monitoring to optimise future fitness to drive.
- Health professionals are not legally mandated to notify VicRoads if a patient drives despite advice to the contrary. However they are ethically obliged to act in the interest of public safety. If they make a report to VicRoads they are indemnified under Victorian Road Safety law.

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

You can explain to patients 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, or renew a licence, or
- as soon as possible after becoming aware of



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

Phone
(03) 8391 3226

Fax
(03) 9854 2307

Post
PO Box 2504, Kew VIC 3101

Email
medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au

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

new conditions / disabilities.

Such a notification will initiate the Medical Review process and if they wish to continue driving, VicRoads will request a fitness to drive medical report.

- You can assist your patient to notify medical review by completing the medical report (available on the VicRoads website). It can be sent to VicRoads by email, fax or post using the contact details above.
- If you determine that your patient is medically fit to drive but requires a practical driving assessment, you can specify either a medical review drive test or an occupational therapy drive test on the medical report form.

What is VicRoads medical review role?

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 facilitate conversations with patients about:

- some specific conditions (e.g. dementia, sleep apnea, seizures, diabetes) and driving
- the medical review process
- driving tests (medical review drive test and occupational therapy drive test)
- older driver issues (e.g. ageing and driving, health conditions and driving, retiring from driving.)

While the health professionals role is to 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).

Most importantly, patients should understand that having a medical condition does not necessarily lead to a loss of licence. Licensure may be achieved through options such as conditional licences and regular medical review to monitor health conditions.

What is a conditional licence?

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. medication, periodical reviews)
- vehicle modifications
- to drive within a certain radius from home (e.g. 5km)
- no night driving, auto transmission, zero blood alcohol content (BAC)

Early discussion of the concept of a conditional licence will help allay concerns and raise awareness of licensing options especially for patients with long term/deteriorating conditions.

What happens if a driver 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 under these circumstances and it is determined that their health condition was a contributing factor, they may be prosecuted and their

insurance may not be valid. If you have concerns about a patient's ability to drive safely you can make an anonymous report to VicRoads using the medical report form.

What happens when a patient is referred to VicRoads?

When VicRoads receives a medical report, all information together with the patient's licence history and any other information (e.g. from Victoria Police, Courts, on-road test results) is considered.

The majority of people with a first notification retain driving privileges, often with a conditional licence. VicRoads makes licensing decisions on a case-by-case basis with reference to the national *Assessing Fitness to Drive* guidelines. Complex cases may be reviewed by external medical advisors. (See overview of process in 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. truck, 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 driving requirements for work 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

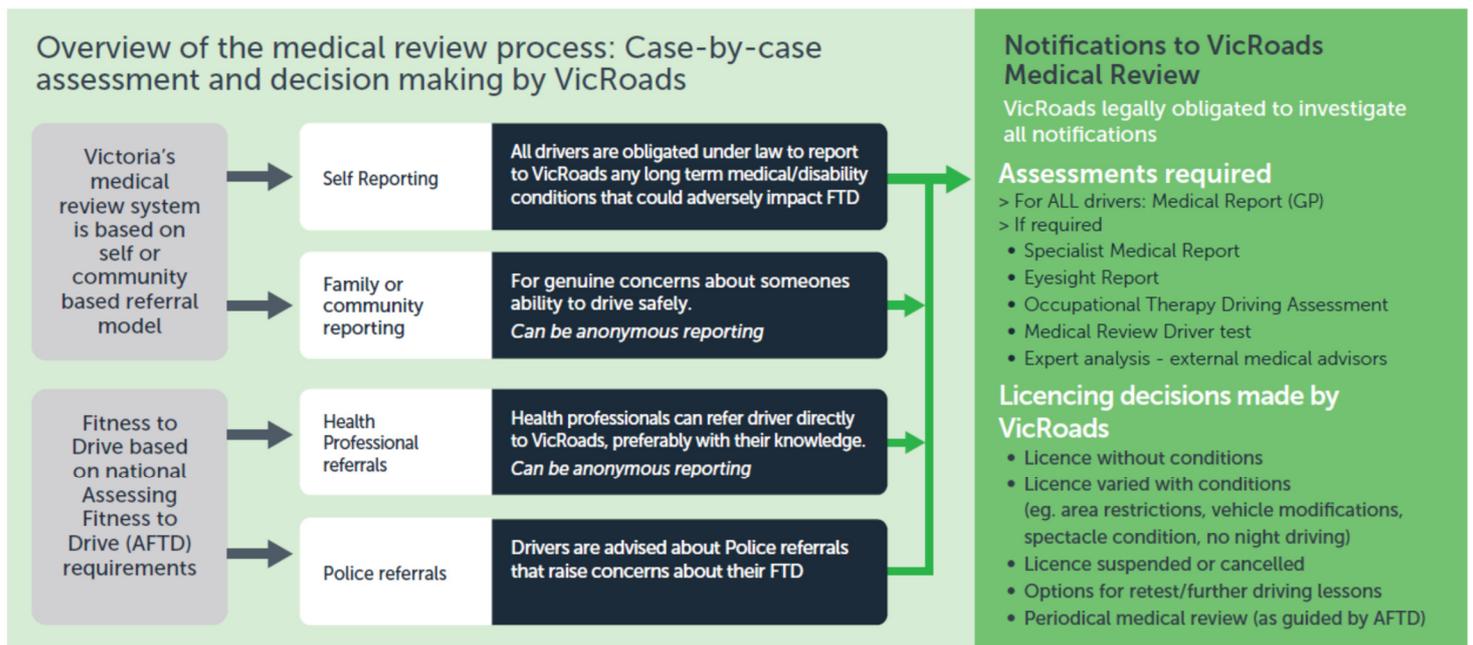


Figure 1 – Overview of the medical review process