

Fitness to drive information for Ophthalmologists and Optometrists

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

Vision and fitness to drive

Driving is a complex task, which requires good vision, judgement, perception and physical abilities. Many health and eyesight conditions may affect these attributes so fitness to drive should be a consideration for any patient presenting with visual system impairment.

Examples of eyesight conditions that may affect safe driving include:

- Visual field defects
- Visual acuity defects
- Monocular vision
- Diplopia
- Progressive eye conditions (e.g. cataract, glaucoma, optic neuropathy and retinitis pigmentosa)
- Congenital and acquired nystagmus

Visual system impairments are usually persistent, and some are progressive. **The effect of multiple eye conditions and co-morbidities and their treatments on driving should also be assessed and managed.**

The diagnoses listed above provide a useful guide as to the type of eye conditions for which fitness to drive should be considered as part of overall management, either in the short term or long term.

Assessing and managing fitness to drive can be complex and challenging. There is a need to balance importance of driving for an individual's independence, social contact or employment with community safety.

What is my role as an eye health practitioner?

Your role is to provide advice to patients, carers and families about the impact of eyesight 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.

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 and duty of care 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 eyesight report form – available on the VicRoads website. You may 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. It is also important to advise your patient's GP of your fitness to drive recommendations.

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

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

- when they apply for, or renew a licence, or

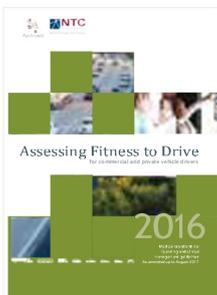
- as soon as possible when they become aware of new conditions/disabilities.

KEY POINTS

- Fitness to drive may be an important consideration for people with some health and eyesight conditions.
- The eye health practitioner can provide advice about short and long term impacts 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 abilities, providing drivers are safe to do so.
- All drivers have a legal responsibility to notify VicRoads of significant long term health or vision 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 protected from liability under Victorian Road Safety law. Reports can be anonymous.

Such a notification will initiate the Medical Review process. VicRoads will request a fitness to drive eyesight and/or a medical report.

- You can assist your patient to notify medical review by completing the eyesight report (available on VicRoads website).
- It can be sent to VicRoads by email, fax or post using the contact details below.



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

What is VicRoads medical review role?

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

- Vision and driving
- 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 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).**

Most importantly, your patients should understand that having an eyesight condition does not necessarily lead to a loss of licence. Continuing licensure can be achieved through options such as conditional licences (no night driving, wearing corrective lenses) and regular reviews to monitor vision status.

Assessment considerations

a) Visual Field Assessment

Anyone who has, or is suspected of having, a visual field defect should have a formal perimetry assessment. If monocular automated static perimetry shows no defects, this is sufficient to show the standard is met.

Patients with any significant field defect and/or progressive eye condition require a **binocular** visual field assessment – generally the binocular Humphrey Esterman test or the Medmont Binocular Driving Test. If using the latter, ensure that under the 'Display' tab the 'Level' map type is selected, as well as the 'numeric' data view. Also check the boxes 'Numeric Tick Marks' and 'Annotations'. For more details refer to *Assessing Fitness to Drive guidelines* (2016) (Vision & Eye disorders, B:10, p. 125).

b) Colour vision assessment

There is no colour vision standard for driver licensing, either private or commercial. Health practitioners should, however, advise drivers who have a significant colour vision deficiency about how this may affect road signal light responsiveness and the need to adapt their driving accordingly.

c) Contrast sensitivity

Reductions in contrast sensitivity should be considered in relation to vision system limitations and the application of relevant licence conditions (e.g. no night driving).

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

If a person continues to drive despite advice to the contrary 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 or eyesight 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** using the VicRoads medical or eyesight report form.

What happens when a patient is referred to VicRoads?

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

VicRoads may also refer complex cases to its' external medical advisors for review.

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.

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 and vision 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 possible driving requirements for work so that the relevant standards can be applied. A person who does not meet the commercial vehicle medical or eyesight 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.

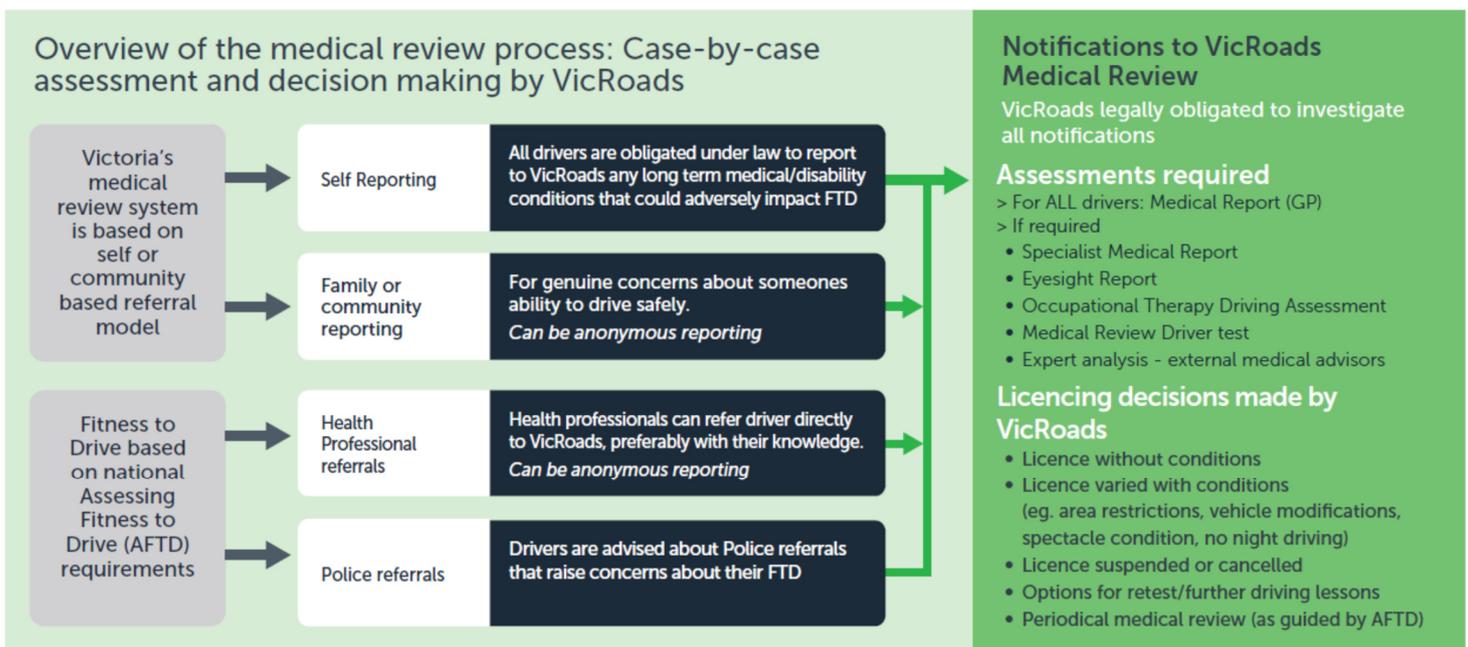


Figure 1 – Overview of the medical review process