Aboriginal Road Safety: A Health Lens Project

A collaboration between SA Health, Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI), Attorney-General’s Department (AGD), South Australian Police (SAPOL), Department for Correctional Services (DCS), Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST).

Final Recommendations
March 2014
Aboriginal Road Safety: Driver Licensing
Recommendations

These recommendations have been developed as part of the Health in All Policies (HiAP) health lens project: Improving the mobility, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in South Australia through increasing the number of Aboriginal people who obtain and retain their driver licence. The recommendations have been informed by extensive research, consultation with key stakeholders, and considered input from project partners from Attorney-General’s Department, Department for Correctional Services, Department of Further Education, Employment Science and Technology, Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI), South Australia Police and the Department for Health and Ageing.

Mobility is a key determinant of health and wellbeing and a basic human need. Mobility can be a factor in employment, access to health and education services, social interaction and the ability to meet family obligations. We all recognise that a driver licence is legally required to drive a car; and that in some parts of our state, travel by car is the only viable option. Therefore a driver licence is a critical tool that links mobility with opportunities, access and outcomes.

It is well understood that the proportion of Aboriginal people successfully gaining and retaining their driver licence is significantly lower than the overall population. Evidence shows that many of the barriers to driver licensing are system barriers. The South Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS), and its underpinning legislation, policies and operations have been developed over a number of years, and modified in response to emerging evidence and subsequent policy changes. While DPTI has responsibility for governance of the licensing system, aspects of it are impacted by the policy and operational decisions of a number of other state government agencies. This has added additional complexity to people navigating the licensing system and at times resulted in unintended barriers.

Aboriginal people are often affected by socio-economic and locational disadvantage which is compounded by institutional discrimination. The recommendations from this project aim to support the South Australian driver licensing system to increase equitable outcomes for Aboriginal people across the State.

The underpinning principles of these recommendations include working towards a culturally inclusive driver licensing system that:

- builds a culture of road safety
- strengthens community value of a driver licence and
- increases equitable outcomes for Aboriginal people.
Recommendation 1: Coordinated Cross-government approaches to Aboriginal Road Safety

The Health Lens project partners recognise the complexity of the driver licensing system and agree that significant benefit will be achieved through a more strategic, coordinated and collaborative approach. Recommendation 1.1 is in harmony with the intentions of South Australia’s Road Safety Strategy Towards Zero Together and specific actions contained within The Road Safety Action Plan 2013-2016.

1.1 It is recommended that DPTI leads a cross-government approach to improving driver licensing outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Ongoing "improvements" to the GLS have had the unintended consequence of increasing the gap in licensing rates between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people. Given that one of the basic tenets of the GLS is to improve road safety and reduce death and injuries from motor vehicle crashes, it follows that failure to address barriers that particularly impact on Aboriginal people will lead to ever increasing over representation in road crash statistics.

The following recommendations are required to reverse the trend and prevent further widening of the gap.

1.2 It is recommended that the cross-government approach uses the evidence gathered through the health lens project and other initiatives ¹ to develop policies, programs and processes that result in a culturally respectful, inclusive and supportive GLS system for Aboriginal people.

The findings from a series of forums with service providers who work with Aboriginal people highlighted the importance and value of having information and messages communicated in a culturally appropriate form by all agencies involved in the licensing system. It was also recognised that some useful resources have been developed, but service providers are often unaware of how to access them. A more coordinated approach to developing and providing resources was recommended.

Changes are required so that all communication related to the driver licensing system is culturally appropriate, effective and easily accessed.

1.2.1 It is recommended that the cross government approach to improving licensing outcomes is applied to a review of relevant communication, correspondence and resources.

¹ Austroads’ projects including RS 1745 Tracking Forward to a Provisional Licence.
A critical component of the cross-government coordination will be the development of a robust framework of monitoring and evaluating outcomes for Aboriginal people in South Australia. The recent introduction of an Aboriginal identifier within TRUMPS means that it will now be possible to more accurately monitor what happens to Aboriginal people in the driver licensing system, and therefore provides an opportunity for tailored responses and interventions.

**1.3 It is recommended that DPTI develops a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure progress towards improved licensing outcomes for Aboriginal people in South Australia.**

**Recommendation 2: Increasing the capacity of Aboriginal people to successfully participate in the driver licensing system**

In Australia the GLS relies heavily on suitably qualified family members to act as supervising drivers to support the completion of the 75 hours. Many Aboriginal people have extremely limited access to qualified supervising drivers in their families or communities. Where people can afford to, and where they can be accessed, driving instructors can be used to fill that gap. However, this is a particularly expensive process, and many rural and remote locations lack access to driving instructors.

The project identified that a key approach to resolving this ongoing, detrimental situation would be to have a focus on establishing a critical mass of Aboriginal people to obtain their licence, who in turn could act as qualified supervising drivers. This ultimately will build capacity within communities to be more self-sufficient and less dependent on external interventions and support. Recent legislative change could be used to facilitate this outcome.

**2.1 It is recommended that targeted investment is provided by government for a five year period to enable a critical mass of Aboriginal people to obtain their driver licence.**

Failure to comply with the payment of fines impacts on people’s ability to obtain and retain a driver licence. Complying with existing fines enforcement policies poses additional challenges for Aboriginal people, particularly those living remotely.

This project identified that the role of the Aboriginal Justice Officers (AJOs), Courts Administration Authority, has been a powerful catalyst in assisting Aboriginal people navigate aspects of the justice system that relate to driver licensing, particularly fines enforcement. Recent changes resulting in the Attorney-General’s Department taking responsibility for the collection and enforcement of fines may have reduced the opportunity for AJOs to support Aboriginal people regarding fines. This could result in increased non-compliance of fines payment by Aboriginal people.

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\(^2\) Transport Regulation User Management Processing System – the State Government’s electronic records database of driver licences and vehicle registrations.
2.2 It is recommended that the Attorney General’s Department recognise the important service the Aboriginal Justice Officers have provided in supporting fines compliance, and that this service continues to be provided by the most appropriate officers, in light of the changes to the administration of the fines enforcement through the Attorney General’s Department.