



Fiona Landgren

Fitness to drive forms

A guide for GPs

This article forms part of our 'Paperwork' series for 2011, providing information about a range of paperwork that general practitioners complete regularly. The aim of the series is to provide information on the purpose of the paperwork, and hints on how to complete it accurately. This will allow the GP to be more efficient and the patient to have an accurately completed piece of paperwork for the purpose required.

General practitioners are often required to assess a patient's fitness to drive, either at the specific request of a driver licensing authority or in the general course of patient management. With the release of the new edition of the national medical standards for driver licensing, *Assessing Fitness to Drive*, in 2012, it is timely to consider the reporting requirements, including the forms and administrative processes involved.

The information in this article has been compiled with input from Austroads and the National Transport Commission.

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The effect of medical conditions on fitness to drive and crash risk has long been recognised. Therefore doctors and other health professionals play an important role in public health and safety when advising patients about fitness to drive and when providing information to driver licensing authorities to support their decision making in this regard. Various forms support communication between the doctor, patient and driver licensing authority.

The national medical standards, *Assessing Fitness to Drive*, were first developed in 1998 in order to support consistent management of medical conditions with respect to driving. The new edition is expected to be available in 2012. These standards clearly state the applicable medical criteria for licensing for private and commercial licences.

The requirements in terms of forms and administrative processes vary depending on the

circumstances in which the general practitioner is considering fitness to drive – for example, depending on whether the assessment is at the request of the driver licensing authority or whether it is being conducted during the general course of treatment. Requirements may also vary between states and territories, so specific advice should be sought from the local driver licensing authority (*Table 1*).

There are also varying requirements for assessments conducted for accreditation of drivers of public passenger vehicles or vehicles carrying dangerous goods.

When conducting an assessment at the request of a driver licensing authority

A driver licensing authority may request an assessment of a person's fitness to drive. This request will generally be made via the patient, who may have reported a medical condition to the licensing authority at the time of licence application or renewal, or may be seeking review of a conditional licence. A request may also come following a crash or other incident if a medical cause is suspected.

When conducting an assessment at the request of a driver licensing authority, the key form is the Medical Report form. This form is issued to the driver by the licensing authority. The patient returns the completed form to the licensing authority following the assessment. These forms are different in each state/territory, however they generally seek information about:

- whether the medical criteria for licensing are met (being specific about whether the criteria for the particular condition(s) are met or not met)
- whether there are additional assessment requirements (such as specialist assessment, occupational therapist assessment or other practical driver assessment), and
- what conditions or restrictions might apply

to the person's continued driving, including requirements for periodic review.

For privacy reasons, only medical information relevant to the patient's fitness to drive should be included on this form.

The original of the medical report should be provided to the patient to return to the driver licensing authority and a copy should be kept on file in the patient's medical record.

As the patient generally returns the medical report to the driver licensing authority, there is no need for signed consent in this regard. The patient may, however, be asked by the driver licensing authority to provide signed consent to enable communication with the examining health professional to secure additional information relevant to their fitness to drive.

While health professionals may provide information about whether or not patients meet the medical criteria to hold a driver's licence, it is the licensing authority that makes the final decision about licensing, based on consideration of a range of information, including the person's driving record.

When assessing fitness to drive in the course of patient treatment

Fitness to drive is also likely to be a common consideration in the course of general patient management, particularly for conditions such as cognitive impairment, epilepsy and other neurological conditions, as well as diabetes, cardiovascular conditions, sleep disorders, substance misuse, and psychiatric disorders.

If, in the course of treatment, the GP considers that a patient's condition may impact on their ability to drive safely, they should, in the first instance, encourage the patient to report their condition to a driver licensing authority. A standard form, the Medical Condition Notification form, may be used for this purpose. This form is contained in Assessing Fitness to Drive and may also be downloaded separately from the Austroads website at www.austroads.com.au.

The original form should be provided to the patient to return to the driver licensing authority and a copy kept in the medical file.

Some states have legislation requiring mandatory reporting by health professionals

Table 1. Australian driver licensing authorities

ACT	Licensing and Registration Team Road User Services PO Box 582, Dickson ACT 2602 Telephone 02 6205 1577
NSW	Manager – Licence Review Unit RTA Driver Administration Section Locked Bag 14, Grafton NSW 2460 Telephone 02 6640 2821 Fax 02 6640 2894 Email RTA_Contact_Centre@rta.nsw.gov.au
NT	Department of Lands and Planning Manager Licensing and Compliance GPO Box 530, Darwin NT 0801 Telephone 08 8999 3108 Fax 08 8999 3103 Email mvr@nt.gov.au www.dlp.nt.gov.au
QLD	Senior Manager – Transport Policy Driver Licensing PO Box 673, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006 Telephone 07 3252 4129 Fax 07 3253 4110
SA	Manager – Driver Licensing Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure GPO Box 1533, Adelaide SA 5001 Telephone 08 8402 1946 Fax 08 8402 1977
TAS	Medical Review Officer Registration and Licensing Branch Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources GPO Box 1002, Hobart TAS 7001 Telephone 03 6233 5221
VIC	VicRoads Medical Review 60 Denmark Street Kew VIC 3101 Telephone 03 9854 2390 Email medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
WA	Team Leader Driver Assessment Section Department of Transport GPO Box R1290, Perth WA 6844 Telephone 08 9216 8382 Fax 08 9216 8178 Email driver.assessment@transport.wa.gov.au www.transport.wa.gov.au

(South Australia, Northern Territory). In states or territories without mandatory reporting, the health professional may feel obliged to make a report directly to the driver licensing authority if they feel the patient has disregarded advice to cease driving and poses a safety threat. The

Medical Condition Notification form may be used for this purpose. Most driver licensing authorities will also accept a letter in place of this form.

Note that such reporting is not required for temporary conditions. Temporary conditions

do not impact on licence status but the patient should be advised not to drive until the temporary situation is resolved.

Reinstatement of licences or removal of conditions or restrictions

The medical condition of a patient who has previously been unlicensed or placed on a conditional licence may improve so that their licensing status warrants reconsideration, for example, the condition is resolved through treatment.

In these circumstances a letter or notification to this effect from the treating GP will prompt the driver licensing authority to consider reinstating the appropriate licence or removing licence restrictions.

The Medical Condition Notification form should be used for this purpose. It guides the GP in providing the information needed by the licensing authority to reconsider the licensing status.

Record keeping

General practitioners should maintain appropriate records of fitness to drive assessments, including forms, in case further information is required by the driver licensing authority.

Resources

- Austroads website: www.austroads.com.au which includes:
 - electronic copy of Assessing Fitness to Drive
 - downloadable Medical Condition Notification form
 - patient information resources.
- SafeDrive Medical online training course: www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/SafetyAndRules/AboutRoadSafety/StrategyAndPrograms/SafeDriveMedical.htm.

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Conflict of interest: Fiona Landgren holds a contract with Austroads to promote awareness and educate health professionals regarding assessing fitness to drive.

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The new edition of Assessing Fitness to Drive is due for release in 2012. All registered GPs in Australia will receive a mailed copy.

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