

Changes to the Older Driver Licensing System in Tasmania

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What is changing?

Compulsory annual driving assessments for Tasmanian drivers aged 85 or older will end on (October 2011).

This change will place the responsibility of driving in the hands of the driver. The driver is the best person to determine whether or not they should drive, and where they should drive. Older drivers are very good at deciding when and where to drive and drive according to their limits. We will help them with this task by providing information about how to assess their driving

When do the changes start?

Driving assessments end on 7 October 2011.

Why is it changing?

A recent review of the older driver licensing system in Tasmania was conducted, in response to a report by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner claiming that compulsory aged-based driving assessments were discriminatory.

The review showed that older drivers are not a major road safety problem in Tasmania and not over-represented in crash statistics. Normal ageing does not increase crash risk as older drivers generally regulate their own driving and compensate for any gradual decline in driving abilities.

Older drivers are good at making adjustments to their driving if needed, such as making shorter trips, driving during the day or choosing less hazardous routes.

Who will be affected by the changes?

Anyone aged 85 or about to turn 85 will no longer be required to pass a driving assessment in order to retain their licence.

Regardless of age, your doctor may still recommend that you undertake a driving assessment if they have concerns over your medical fitness to drive. The Registrar of Motor Vehicles may also request that you undertake a driving assessment

Will I still need to do a medical?

Anyone aged 75 years or more will still be required to complete an annual medical assessment. Also, drivers of any age who currently undertake regular medical assessments will continue to do so.

What if I'm due for a driving assessment before 7 October when the change is introduced?

You may have already received a letter from the Registrar of Motor Vehicles requesting that you undertake a driving assessment. Until 7 October, it is "business as usual" and you will need to complete your medical assessment and make arrangements for a driving assessment.

It will take time to introduce these new changes as the Government needs to ensure that there are appropriate safety networks in place so that drivers on Tasmanian roads are safe and medically fit to drive.

If you're not sure about whether you still need a driving assessment or not, you can ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225.

What if I'm due for my driving assessment after 7 October when the change is introduced?

If your driving assessment would normally be due after 7 October, you won't need to pass a driving assessment.

If you're not sure about whether you still need a driving assessment or not, you can ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225.

I've just been sent a letter asking me to do a driving assessment and medical – what happens now?

You still need to organise for your medical and driving assessments to be completed, as normal. Until the change is introduced on 7 October, it is "business as usual".

It will take time to introduce these new changes as the Government needs to ensure that there are appropriate safety networks in place so that drivers on Tasmanian roads are safe and medically fit to drive.

If you're not sure about whether you still need a driving assessment or not, you can ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225.

I have been requested to undertake an Occupational Therapist Driving Assessment (OTDA), will I still need to do it?

Yes, you will need to undertake an OTDA if the Registrar of Motor Vehicles has requested you to do one.

I have a condition on my licence because I failed my last driving assessment – what happens now?

Sometimes if you fail a driving assessment, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles may place a condition on your licence to say that you must only drive with a supervisory driver until you pass a driving assessment.

This condition will remain on your licence, and you will still be required to pass a driving assessment to have the condition removed. This is because the RMV has evidence that you may not be safe to drive, so he needs to be satisfied that you are a competent driver by ensuring you pass a driving assessment.

My licence was cancelled because I failed my last driving assessment – what happens now?

Your licence will remain cancelled. You can ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225 to discuss your options, such as applying for a learner licence.

What if my licence has been suspended for not doing a driving assessment?

If your licence has been suspended because you did not complete a driving assessment you can ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225 to see if your suspension may be lifted.

If you don't have compulsory assessments anymore, how will you know if older drivers are safe to keep driving?

All drivers in Tasmania must meet the standards to hold a licence, regardless of their age. It is important for older drivers to be treated the same as all other driver and to only undertake assessments for the same reasons that apply to other drivers.

Older drivers are generally safe drivers and are not over-represented in crash statistics. Normal ageing does not increase crash risk as older driver compensate for any gradual decline in driving abilities. They tend to drive less, make shorter trips, drive in low traffic volumes, drive in good driving conditions and low speed zones and choose less hazardous road. They also drive less distance and less often than other drivers.

As a safety net, there are laws in place that mean all drivers must notify the RMV of any changes in their medical fitness to drive. The RMV also receives notifications from Police, doctors and concerned members of the public about concerns over a driver's ability. All genuine reports are followed up.

How do I know if I'm a safe driver?

Assessing your own driving regularly will help you determine how safe you are on the road, and if there may be any issues affecting your driving.

All drivers, regardless of age, need to regularly and honestly assess their own driving skills to keep themselves and others safe. Drivers who accurately assess their driving skills are more likely to adjust their driving habits and stay safe on the road for longer.

You should regularly ask yourself these questions:

- Are you having trouble seeing signs, road markings, kerbs, medians, other vehicles or pedestrians, especially at night?
- Is it getting harder to judge gaps in the traffic when merging or turning at intersections?
- Does your mind sometimes wander when you drive?
- Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by the traffic environment, particularly when turning at intersections?
- Are you sometimes confused as to who should give way?
- Have you found yourself driving too slowly holding up traffic?
- Have you recently been 'honked' at by other motorists?
- Are you missing (or reacting more slowly to) unexpected hazards, such as pedestrians crossing the road?
- Are you feeling more tired while driving – even on short trips?
- Are you having trouble judging distance, resulting in a small collision in the carpark or with the mailbox?
- Have you had a near miss or actual crash in the last three years?
- Has a friend or family member recently said they are worried about your driving?
- Do you sometimes get lost on familiar routes?
- Has your doctor suggested you limit your driving or think about stopping driving altogether?

If you answered 'yes' to some of these questions, it's not necessarily a sign that it's time to give up driving. But it may indicate areas where you need to take action to avoid endangering yourself or other road users – particularly if you answered 'yes' to any of the last five questions.

You should consider talking to your doctor first if you're concerned about your driving, to rule out any medical issues. Your doctor may also be able to discuss ideas for regulating your driving so you feel safer, such as not driving at night or during busy times of the day.

I'm still not sure about whether I'm a safe driver – who can I talk to?

If you're still not sure whether you're a safe driver:

- talk to others about your driving and see what their opinion is
- listen to the people who know you best and care about you most
- discuss your driving with your doctor
- consider brushing up on your road rules and driving skills anyway, just to be sure

What if I still want to do a driving test?

If you'd like to get some feedback on your driving ability from someone else, try seeing if a friend or family member will go for a drive with you and give you some feedback on your driving.

You can also try contacting a driving school for a refresher driving lesson.

What if I've got concerns about someone's driving?

If you have concerns about a friend or family member's ability to drive safely, you should first consider discussing your concerns with them directly. It may not be an easy discussion to have, but talking the issues through can help the person realise that they need to take some action.

If they don't want to discuss their driving with you, suggest that the person consult their doctor for an objective opinion.

You can write to the RMV expressing your concerns about someone's ability to drive. You need to include your personal details (e.g. name and address), as well as the details of the person you are concerned about, and the reasons for your concern.

All genuine complaints made in writing will be followed up. Your request will be treated confidentially and your details will not be disclosed to the person under any circumstance.

You can write to the RMV at:

GPO Box 1002, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001

OR

Driver.licensing@dier.tas.gov.au

Can I have more information on the Older Driver Licensing Review?

The Registrar of Motor Vehicles (RMV) has reviewed the Tasmanian older driver licensing system to develop a package of reforms to replace it.

The review arose out of a report by the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner that found the mandatory annual on-road assessment for drivers aged 85 years or more to be direct discrimination on the basis of age.

The review was to provide evidence-based recommendations that:

- were consistent with anti-discrimination principles
- enabled older drivers to remain mobile and keep their licence for as long as possible, provided they are safe,
- were evidence-based with any on-road and medical mandatory assessments delivering road safety benefits and
- didn't create an administrative burden.

The review recognised that it is important for older drivers to:

- be treated the same as all other drivers and undertake assessments for the same reasons that other drivers must undertake them and
- keep mobile for as long as possible provided they are safe to drive.

Following researching and gathering of evidence in respect of older drivers, a discussion paper was developed, containing a range of options which could be read together or separately. Members of the public were invited to make a submission and comment on each option outlined in it, between 20 September 2010 and 18 October 2010.

Sixty-one submissions were received. These submissions were all considered.

The review did not find any evidence to support the retention of the mandatory annual on-road driving and medical assessments on the basis of age alone. It found:

- research concludes that older drivers are safe
- no evidence that older drivers are more likely to cause a crash and
- older drivers are under-represented in crash statistics.

To retain these assessments would be discriminatory on the basis of age, and contrary to the *Anti-Discrimination Act*. Mandatory assessments may also be counter-productive to mobility as it may result in the premature cessation of driving.

The review found that an older driver licensing system should:

- be a self-assessment based approach
- not be age specific
- focus on mobility, rather than physical or cognitive decline
- encourage drivers to be responsible and self-assess their skills by making appropriate and sensible decisions
- assist drivers to self-assess by distributing communication materials (eg a revised Older Driver Handbook, information on the internet site) that contains information on self-assessment
- ensure that the communication material produced can have a shared benefit so that drivers' family members can use this information to help drivers self-assess
- be supported by an enhanced third party notification system where a third party can notify the RMV when drivers' may be unsafe and/or have failed to self-assess appropriately.

The review found that a Medical Advisory Board, requirement to undertake an OTDA and mandatory requirement for health professionals to notify were not currently cost effective for the benefits they would deliver.

Can I have a copy of the Older Driver Review report?

You can view *The Alternative Older Driver Licensing System for Tasmania Final Report* on the web at www.transport.tas.gov.au.

If the driving assessments are discriminatory, how come we don't stop doing them straight away?

It will take time to introduce these new changes as the Government needs to ensure that there are appropriate safety networks in place so that drivers on Tasmanian roads are safe and medically fit to drive.

Aren't aged-based medical assessments also discriminatory, why are we still doing those?

It is planned to cease aged-based medical assessments in 2014. More work needs to be done before this change can be introduced, as it will mean a strong reliance on all licence holders being aware of their responsibilities to notify the Registrar of anything that may affect their ability to drive safely. Between now and 2014, The Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources will be working closely with the medical community to help promote this awareness and educate the public about their responsibilities.

Is this just a cost-cutting measure for government?

No. Assessments for older drivers make up a very small percentage of all driving assessments. Removing these will have little financial impact.

Is Tasmania the only state not assessing drivers over 85?

No, most other states do not have aged-based practical driving assessments. Only Western Australia and New South Wales require drivers aged 85 and over to undertake practical assessments.

What if I have more questions about these changes?

You can ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225 or email questions to driver.licensing@der.tas.gov.au.

What if my heavy vehicle licence is downgraded because I didn't do a heavy vehicle assessment?

Ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225 to find out about getting the higher class of licence back.

What if my motorcycle licence is removed because I didn't do a motorcycle assessment?

Ring the Transport Enquiry Service on 1300 851 225 to find out about getting the higher class of licence back.