



Victoria

## DEMENTIA AND DRIVING

### What's your stop sign?

Driving is one of the issues you will have to address once you have a diagnosis of dementia. At some stage in the future, the progression of the dementia will mean you will need to stop driving, and the earlier you plan for this event the easier the transition will be.

Giving up driving is hard. We rely on the independence given to us by a car and licence to lead an active life.

However, a person with dementia has an illness affecting their brain that can lead to:

- confusion about time and place
- getting lost
- impaired visuo-spatial skills
- delayed response times
- poor decision making
- forgetfulness

Although others may observe these changes, it is possible that the person with dementia will have limited insight into these problems as the disease progresses, and think that they are driving as well as ever.

Consider this example:

*A woman told her husband that she thought drivers had become ruder and more dangerous, as they often tooted her and made gestures. When her husband saw her driving one day, he realised she was driving very dangerously and other drivers had to take action to avoid accidents with her.*

The woman thought everyone else on the road was driving badly. Because of her dementia, she did not understand that she was the one making mistakes.

What advice would you give this woman? Would you suggest she stop driving immediately? Perhaps you would suggest she only drives in a limited range, only drives close to home, only to certain destinations, stays away from peak times and busy roads? Would you suggest she keep driving until she has a small accident, and then take that as the sign to stop?

People will have different responses to this question based on their own judgement and experiences. Different answers might be right for different people, but if you have dementia, you will need to consider your own situation and legalities to decide what is the stop sign for you.

### Facts you should consider

#### Driving licence eligibility

When you have a condition that may impact on your ability to drive it needs to be determined if you meet the criteria for the licence you hold 'conditionally', 'unconditionally', 'not at all'.

The Driver Licensing Authority (DLA) in Victoria is VicRoads. It will decide if you can continue to hold your licence based on information such as:

- A Medical Certificate completed by an examining medical practitioner – usually your doctor.
- With your consent, additional information about your condition from the Medical Practitioner
- A specialist opinion
- A practical driving assessment
- An Occupational Therapist's driver assessment

Anyone who is concerned about your ability to drive safely can inform the DLA without your consent, as long as they are acting in good faith.

Where an Alzheimer's Australia staff member feels that by continuing to drive a person poses a real threat to themselves and others, and they refuse to stop driving, the staff member may consider notifying your doctor or VicRoads. This would only be in extreme cases.

## Medical Practitioner's role

A Medical Practitioner may:

Who will be affected by this decision?

- Advise you whether you have a reportable medical condition (as a guide VicRoads must be notified on any neurological disorders such as dementia)
- Advise you of the impact of the condition on your driving
- Continue to provide advice and assess your medical fitness to drive

If your Medical Practitioner believes that you are a danger to public safety and you continue to drive in spite of everything he or she has said, they may provide a report to the DLA and inform you of their intention to do so.

## Legal Issues

The following consequences may occur if you don't notify the DLA of your reportable medical condition.

If you are involved in an accident:

- You may be charged with related driving offences, **and**
- Failing to notify the DLA of your reportable medical condition
- You may be sued under common law
- Your vehicle insurance policy cover may be affected

## Making the decision

### Questions to think about:

- Who will be affected by this decision?
- Who should be included in making this decision?
- When should the decision be made?
- What alternative types of transport are available to me?
- What can I do differently so I don't need a car?

## How Alzheimer's Australia can assist

### Information

We want to help you make an informed decision. Knowing more about dementia, and particularly the different types of dementia, will help you understand when you might need to give up driving.

We can also provide links to information about driving.

### Counselling

Talking over the issues that concern you will help you think them through, and make decisions.

### References:

*Assessing Fitness to Drive*, Austroads 2003  
*The Victorian Older Drivers' Handbook*, VicRoads 4<sup>th</sup> Edition  
*Fitness to Drive*, VicRoads  
*Driving and Your Health*, Austroads

**For information to assist in making a decision about driving,** ask for the free Alzheimer's Australia Help Sheet 'Driving'.

Call National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500

For information about licensing and road rules contact VicRoads on 13 11 71

For information about medical reviews contact VicRoads on (03) 9854 2407

*The Victorian Older Drivers' Handbook* can be obtained from VicRoads Bookshop (03) 9854 2782 (this publication is free)

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### National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500

This publication provides a general summary only of the subject matter covered. Carers and persons with dementia should seek professional advice about their specific case. Alzheimer's Australia is not liable for any error or omission in this publication, even if negligent.