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Returning to driving after spinal cord injury (SCI) in Queensland

This fact sheet outlines the process for returning to driving in Queensland following a spinal cord injury, as well as funding options for driving or transportation.

1. Medical condition reporting.....	2
2. Medical assessment of fitness to drive.....	2
3. Occupational therapy (OT) driving assessment referral	3
4. Funding options for assessment	4
5. What does the occupational therapy driving assessment involve?.....	5
6. What happens after your occupational therapy driving assessment?.....	6
7. Driving lessons.....	6
8. Obtaining medical clearance to drive after your lessons are complete.....	7
9. Modifying your vehicle and accessing funding toward this.....	7
10. Medically unfit to drive?.....	8
11. Financial help with purchasing a vehicle.....	9
12. Disability Parking Permit.....	9
13. For more information.....	9

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1. Medical condition reporting

Driving is a serious and highly skilled activity that requires adequate visual, physical and thinking skills. A spinal cord injury can result in impairments that could affect your capacity to drive. These impairments may also mean that you need to drive in a different way, possibly with the use of vehicle modifications.

The following is a link to the medical condition reporting requirements of the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads website:

<https://www.qld.gov.au/transport/licensing/update/medical>

These medical reporting requirements state that whether you already hold a licence, are applying for a new licence or are renewing your licence, you must notify the Department of Transport and Main Roads regarding:

1. Any long term or permanent medical condition that could adversely affect your ability to drive safely, or
2. Any change to an existing medical condition, which is likely to adversely affect your ability to drive safely.

It is important to note that medical clearance is required before returning to any driving and that your health professional is legally permitted to notify the department about your medical condition.

Failure to notify the department about a medical condition or driving without the correct medical clearance can result in a maximum court-imposed fine of more than \$8000 and possible cancellation of your licence.

Your doctor will be able to make the decision regarding whether you are safe to resume driving following spinal cord injury and will be guided by the Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines. These are available via the following link:

<https://austroads.com.au/>

The following information outlines the process for obtaining medical clearance to resume driving following spinal cord injury.

2. Medical assessment of fitness to drive

Following spinal cord injury, no matter the level, type or severity, you will need a medical certificate confirming your fitness to drive PRIOR to driving.

The first step is to ask your GP or specialist for an assessment regarding your capacity to resume driving. On the Department of Transport and Main Roads website there are several links to the forms that your doctor may use. These include:

- **Form F3195: Private and Commercial Vehicle Driver's Health Assessment**

<https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/forms/QF3195/>

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- **Form F3712: Medical certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver**

<https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/qf3712>:

Following this appointment your GP or spinal cord injury specialist may decide one of the following options:

- **That you do not meet the medical criteria for driving and that you are unable to resume driving** → Your doctor will need to complete the Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver F3712. It is your responsibility to lodge this with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to inform them of the doctor's decision that you are unable to drive.
- **That you meet the medical criteria for an unconditional licence as your spinal cord injury symptoms do not, or no longer affect your ability to drive** → Your doctor will need to complete the Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver F3712 documenting this and tick the relevant box. It is your responsibility to lodge this with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to inform them of the doctor's decision **PRIOR** to resuming driving
- **That further information or assessment is required to assist in determining your ability to safely resume driving or may consider that vehicle modifications will be needed** → In this scenario your doctor will most likely refer you to an occupational therapist (OT) for a driving assessment. Your doctor will still need to complete the Medical Certificate (F3712) with the following licence conditions "*medically cleared for the purposes of occupational therapy driving assessment and driving rehabilitation lessons if required*".

3. Occupational therapy (OT) driving assessment Referral

Your funding situation will generally dictate the OT driving assessment referral options available to you.

- OT driving assessors can primarily be found in the private sector and a list of private driving assessors can be found via the following link <https://www.otaus.com.au/find-an-ot> (enter Funding Scheme, enter "Driving" in the "Area of Practice" and enter your location).
- There are still some limited public service options available located at the Occupational Therapy Departments at The Princess Alexandra Hospital, Logan Community Health, Gold Coast Community Health, Ipswich Community Health, Rockhampton Hospital and Townsville Hospital. Operation of these services vary as does their waiting lists and criteria for referral acceptance. Contact with the service directly is recommended to confirm whether the service remains operational and whether referral to a public service is an option.

4. Funding options for assessment

The first step is to establish what your funding arrangements are. These may include:

Public health services

If your referral is accepted to the public service the OT assessment time and report (s) are all covered however you would be required to meet all costs associated with driving school assessment time, lessons, and vehicle modifications (if required).

Private services (self-funded)

If you are privately funding your own assessment you can select an OT driving assessor of your choice and would be required to meet all costs associated with the OT assessment, report, driving lessons and vehicle modifications if required.

NDIS Funding

To receive NDIS funding for return to driving (assessment, lessons, modifications) you need to be an accepted NDIS participant and have the goal of driving included as part of your current plan.

If you are unsure whether return to driving is included in your current plan it is advised that you clarify this with your NDIS Supports Coordinator or your LAC (Local Area Coordinator).

If return to driving is **not** included in your current plan and you do not feel this reflects your current goals you may need to consider initiating a plan review <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/using-your-plan/changing-your-plan>
It is advised you contact your NDIS Supports Coordinator or LAC to discuss.

Another option would be to wait until your next plan review date and incorporate the goal of driving into your next plan. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/reviewing-your-plan-and-goals>

If return to driving **is** included in your current NDIS plan, you will be able to see that there are funds allocated in the Capacity Building section of your NDIS plan for the OT driving assessment and completion of lessons (if required). You will also be able to see that there will be funds allocated (quote required) under the Capital section of your NDIS plan for the required vehicle modifications to an approved vehicle.

The following is a link to the NDIS website regarding OT driving assessment and return to driving. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-equipment-and-supports/assistive-technology-explained/choosing-assistive-technology/vehicle-modifications>

Please note (and ensure that your NDIS planner is aware) that inclusion of funding for OT driving assessment or vehicle modifications does not preclude your eligibility for the NDIS funded transport assistance that is included as part of your Core funding <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-your-plan/plan-budget-and-rules/transport-funding>.

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NIISQ Funding

To receive NIISQ funding for return to driving (assessment, lessons, modifications) you need to be an accepted NIISQ client. When you are ready to pursue return to driving you would need to discuss this with your NIISQ Support Planner who will help coordinate the assessment and modification process.

Other insurance

Funding arrangements for return to driving (assessment, lessons, modifications) would need to be discussed with your case manager.

As stated above, with either NDIS, NIISQ or other insurance funding you can find a list of private driving assessors via the following link <https://www.otaus.com.au/find-an-ot> (enter Funding Scheme, enter "Driving" in the "Area of Practice" and enter location).

5. What does the occupational therapy driving assessment involve?

Off road assessment

- An off-road assessment will be conducted by the OT driving assessor. The purpose of this assessment is to determine whether your illness or injury has caused any problems that could affect your ability to drive safely. The assessment will review your physical abilities, vision, knowledge of road rules and signs, and thinking skills such as decision making, judgement and planning.

- The results of the off-road assessment will assist your occupational therapist in determining:

- Your readiness for an on-road assessment; and
- If any vehicle modifications will be required.

On road assessment

- An on-road assessment will be conducted jointly by the occupational therapist driving assessor and a driving instructor. The purpose of this assessment is to determine whether your illness or injury has caused any problems that could affect your ability to drive safely. It is a practical assessment of the issues covered in your off-road assessment. The assessment is usually in a driving school car (fitted with dual controls) and generally takes 45 – 50 minutes. For legal and safety reasons, you cannot use your own car.

- Depending upon your requirements, the assessment vehicle can be automatic or manual and can be set up with modifications as required e.g. spinner knob, left foot accelerator and/or hand controls.

What to bring to your occupational therapy driving assessment?

- Your existing driver's licence or learners permit, and medical certificate stating you are fit to undertake the assessment;
- Glasses (if you wear them);
- Any fee where applicable; and
- Any relevant information about your medication and medical condition.

6. What happens after your occupational therapy driving assessment?

In Queensland, it is your referring GP or spinal cord injury specialist who is responsible for making the final decision regarding clearance for driving. They consider their knowledge of your medical condition as well as the recommendation from the occupational therapy driving assessor in making this decision.

After your driving assessment the occupational therapy driving assessor will provide your doctor with a report outlining the recommendations made. The possible recommendations could be:

- a) That you do not resume driving;
 - b) That you are safe to resume driving; or
 - c) That you require several driving lessons and/or modifications to your vehicle such as hand controls before a final recommendation can be made regarding your suitability to return to driving.
- If your doctor agrees with scenarios a) or b) they will be required to complete the Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver (form F3712) available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads Website <https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/qf3712> and it is your responsibility to lodge this form with the Department of Transport and Main Roads prior to resuming any driving.
 - For scenario c) refer to the next section regarding driving lessons.

7. Driving lessons

The purpose of driving lessons following a spinal cord injury is usually to adjust to driving in a new or different way, such as with modifications and/or a different movement e.g. using push/pat hand controls, a spinner knob or a left foot accelerator.

Funding arrangements for completion of lessons would need to be clarified with your funding source.

If lessons are recommended, your Occupational Therapy Driving Assessor can provide a list of local driving schools for you to contact and make your own arrangements to undergo lessons.

These may include driving schools that have access to vehicles with modifications such as hand controls.

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8. Obtaining medical clearance to drive after your lessons are complete

After your lessons have been completed, the driving instructor will provide feedback to the occupational therapy driving assessor regarding your progress.

The occupational therapist will then issue a final letter to your referring GP or spinal cord injury specialist outlining the OT recommendations and any licence conditions. For example:

“A” - vehicle fitted with automatic transmission

“V” - vehicle specially modified to meet the person’s physical disability.

Your doctor is responsible for making the final decision and documenting this on the Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver (form F3712) available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads Website

<https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/qf3712>:

It is your responsibility to return the completed form to the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

9. Modifying your vehicle and accessing funding towards this

Any modifications made to a vehicle need to be completed by a licenced vehicle modifier who is certified with the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

If your occupational therapy driving assessor has recommended vehicle modifications, such as hand controls, you will need to discuss and arrange this with your funding body. Your occupational therapy driving assessor will also be able to provide you with some options for sourcing licenced vehicle modifiers in Queensland.

Funding bodies have specific criteria regarding vehicle requirements for the installation of car modifications. It is important to clarify with your funding body the vehicle that you intend to modify.

For example, NIDS will generally consider modifications to vehicles that are less than 5 years old, under 80 000kms. The following link provides more information regarding this: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-equipment-and-supports/assistive-technology-explained/choosing-assistive-technology/vehicle-modifications>

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10. Medically unfit to drive?

What happens if a health professional is concerned that medical advice has been ignored?

- As outlined in the Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Medical Standards <https://austroads.com.au/drivers-and-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive> if a health professional is concerned regarding a client continuing to drive or that their condition poses a risk to public safety, they are encouraged to report this.
- Under Jet's Law health professionals are afforded protection from liability for providing information in good faith about a person's medical fitness to hold, or continue to hold, a Queensland driver licence. Concerned health professionals can voluntarily report a person in the interests of public safety, using the Health Professional Medical Condition Notification form (form F4842) at this link:

[https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/forms/QF4842/\\$file/F4842_ES.pdf](https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/forms/QF4842/$file/F4842_ES.pdf)

What are some alternate ways to access the community if you are unable to drive?

Transport is an important part of community re-integration following spinal cord injury. If you are unable to resume driving, you can contact SPOT for advice about other methods of transport in your community on 3176 9507, or spot@health.qld.gov.au.

Some options are listed below:

Taxi Subsidy Scheme: The QLD Taxi Subsidy Scheme subsidises taxi journeys for people with severe disabilities. Visit the website to download an application form. <http://www.qld.gov.au/disability/out-and-about/taxi-subsidy/>

NDIS: For participants who have substantial difficulty using public transport there are some provisions for transport assistance through the NDIS. These are outlined in the following link: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-your-plan/plan-budget-and-rules/transport-funding> You may also be entitled for additional care hours for a support worker if you require assistance with social and community participation.

NIISQ: Some options for transport assistance may also be available. Speak with your case manager.

Council cabs: Contact your local council to enquire about the Council Cabs scheme. For eligible persons, shared taxis at scheduled times may be available to assist residents with disabilities to access their local shops. This service is available in Brisbane <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/traffic-and-transport/public-transport/council-cabs> as well as some regional centres (contact your local council).

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Fact Sheet

Queensland Spinal Cord Injuries Service

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Community transport services: Visit the Queensland Government's community transport page to find out more about what is available in your area:

<https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/out-and-about/community-transport>

Some hospitals and nursing homes have transport services that may be suitable as do some local RSL and Surf clubs.

Translink Access Pass: The TransLink Access Pass is a travel pass for people with a significant permanent disability who can a) travel independently on TransLink services, and b) demonstrate that due to their significant permanent disability they are unable to independently use a go card. See the Translink website for more information <http://translink.com.au/tickets-and-fares/concessions/translink-access-pass>

Companion Card: If you have a disability and a lifelong need for 'attendant care support' you can also apply for a Companion Card to assist with the costs of getting out and about with support. This Companion Card enables your companion to receive a second 'companion' ticket at no charge at participating venues and on public transport. The 'companion' ticket is also exempt from booking fees. More information about companion cards can be found at the following websites:

<https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/out-and-about/subsidies-concessions-passes/companion-card>

<http://www.companioncard.gov.au/>

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11. Financial help with purchasing a vehicle

In most cases funding bodies do not provide funding for the purchase of the actual vehicle.

However, before you purchase a vehicle, it is important to clarify that your funding body will fund the required modifications on the intended vehicle.

GST exemption on car purchases

The Australian Tax Office (ATO) website advises that you can purchase a car or car parts GST-free if you meet their eligibility requirements for a person with a disability using a vehicle to travel to or from gainful employment. More information regarding this can be found via the following link:

<https://www.ato.gov.au/forms/exemption-of-gst-on-a-car---person-with-a-disability-gainfully-employed/>

12. Disability Parking Permit

An Australian Disability Parking Permit is granted to applicants when their ability to walk is severely restricted by a medical condition or disability.

An application form is available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads website <http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/disabilityparking>

A non-refundable fee of \$18.05 is required. The application form will need to be supported by your doctor or occupational therapist.

13. For more information

Please contact:

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