Returning to Driving after Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) in Queensland

This fact sheet outlines the process for returning to driving and accessing funding toward driving or transportation for people with a spinal cord injury in Queensland. It is important to note that this process can take some time from planning to completion.

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1. Medical condition reporting

- Driving is a serious and highly skilled activity. It requires adequate visual, physical and thinking skills. Following a spinal cord injury, some of these may be impaired which may impact on your ability to drive safely, or may require you to learn to drive in an alternate way.

- The Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads website [http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Licensing/Medical-condition-reporting.aspx](http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Licensing/Medical-condition-reporting.aspx) states that if you hold a Queensland drivers licence, you must report any of the following changes to the Department of Transport and Main Roads:
  - Any long term or permanent medical condition, or
  - Any change to an existing medical condition, which is likely to adversely affect your ability to drive safely.

- Failure to notify the department carries a maximum penalty of $6,600 and cancellation of your driver licence.

- Your doctor will be able to make the decision regarding whether you are safe to resume driving. Your doctor will be guided by the Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines available at the following link: [http://www.austroads.com.au/](http://www.austroads.com.au/)

It is possible for many people to obtain medical clearance to resume driving following a spinal cord injury. The following information outlines this process.

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.

- The first step is to discuss the option of driving with your GP or specialist. The Private and Commercial Vehicle Driver’s Health Assessment (form F3195) on the Department of Transport and Main Roads website is available here: [http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF3195](http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF3195) and assists a treating doctor to assess your capacity to drive. Take this form to your GP or spinal cord injury specialist appointment.

- Your GP or spinal cord injury specialist may decide one of the following:
  a) That you do not meet the medical criteria for driving;
  b) That you meet the criteria for an unconditional licence as your spinal cord injury symptoms do not, or no longer affect your ability to drive; or
  c) Your doctor may be unable to decide whether you are safe to return to driving, or may consider that you require vehicle modifications in order to resume driving.

- For scenarios a) and b) your doctor will need to complete the Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver (form F3712) available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads Website [http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF3712](http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF3712) and select
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Queensland Spinal Cord Injuries Service

SPINAL INJURIES UNIT
Ph: 3176 2215
Fax: 3176 7462

OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENT
Ph: 3176 2641
Fax: 3176 5644

Postal and Location
Princess Alexandra Hospital
Ipswich Rd
Woolloongabba QLD 4102
AUSTRALIA

TRANSITIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM
Ph: 3406 2322
Fax: 3406 2399

Email trp@health.qld.gov.au

Postal
PO Box 6053
Buranda, QLD, 4102

Location
3rd Floor, Buranda Village
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd
Buranda, QLD, 4102
AUSTRALIA

SPINAL OUTREACH TEAM
Ph: 3406 2300
Freecall 1800 624 832
(for regional clients)
Fax: 3406 2399

Email spot@health.qld.gov.au

Postal
PO Box 6053
Buranda, Q, 4102

Location
3rd Floor, Buranda Village
Cnr Cornwall St & Ipswich Rd
Buranda, QLD, 4102
AUSTRALIA

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.

- For scenario c) your doctor will most likely refer you to an occupational therapist (OT) for a driving assessment.

3. Occupational therapy (OT) driving assessment

Referral

- For option c) above, your GP or spinal cord injury specialist will most likely complete a referral form and send it to an occupational therapy driving assessment service. A referral form and further information can be obtained from the Spinal Outreach Team (SPOT) Ph 3406 2300 or spot@health.qld.gov.au. OT driving assessors work in both the public and private sectors. The following details this further.

Public health services

- There are limited public driving assessment services 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. Waiting lists vary and it is recommended that you contact the service directly for more information.

Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS) funding

- In 2012, the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services made available a subsidy toward a private occupational therapy driving assessment for eligible people via the Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS). To determine whether you are eligible, visit the VOSS website and click on ‘guidelines’.


- VOSS will be affected by the progressive roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Funding under VOSS will not be available from a cut-off point of 3 months prior to the rollout of the NDIS in your area. Refer to MASS website for more information https://www.health.qld.gov.au/mass

Private services

- If you are not VOSS eligible you can also find a private occupational therapy driving assessor by visiting the OT Australia QLD website http://www.otaus.com.au/divisions/qld and click on locate an OT qualified driving assessor in QLD.

4. Accessing an occupational therapy driving assessment through the Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS)

- For eligible persons, a subsidy of up to $800 toward the cost of a private occupational therapy driving assessment may be available through VOSS. Information about VOSS is available on their website: http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/disability/support-and-services/our-services/vehicle-options-subsidy-scheme-voss

Self referral

- VOSS require the driver to self refer. To self refer, phone your local Disability Services Centre. A list of the local disability service centres is on the Department of Communities,
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Child Safety and Disabilities website:
- http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/disability/contact-us/disability-services-regional-offices or you can contact the Old Government on 137 468 who will put you through to your local regional Disability Services office.
- When you speak with an intake officer at Disability Services, they will take some basic information and you can ask for a referral to the VOSS service. You will then receive a phone call from VOSS to explain the process.
- VOSS will provide a list of private Registered VOSS Prescribers (RVPs) for you to select from. You will need to contact the RVPs yourself and make arrangements for your assessment.

5. National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- The NDIS funds reasonable and necessary transport supports. Your transportation needs and options for driving need to be considered with your NDIS planner when developing your plan. Refer to the NDIS website for further information https://www.ndis.gov.au/

6. What will happen during the occupational therapy driving assessment?

Off road assessment
- An off road assessment will be conducted by the occupational therapy 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 therapy 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. If modifications are required, an automatic car can be set up with hand controls, steering aids (e.g. spinner knob) or left foot accelerator.

What to bring to your occupational therapy driving assessment
- You will require your existing driver’s licence or learners permit in order to undergo the occupational therapy driving assessment. If you do not have a learners permit, visit the Department of Transport and Main Roads website here http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Licensing/Getting-a-licence/Getting-a-car-driver-licence.aspx
• Bring glasses if you wear them, any fee where applicable, and relevant information about your medication and medical condition.

7. After your occupational therapy driving assessment

• Following the assessment, the occupational therapy driving assessor will write to your referring GP or spinal cord injury specialist outlining their recommendation. 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 a number of 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.

• The occupational therapist will write a report detailing the recommendation and send it to your referring GP or spinal cord injury specialist, who is responsible for making the final decision based on the occupational therapy driving assessor’s recommendation.

• In scenarios a) and b) your doctor will be required to complete the Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver (form F3712) available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads Website [http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF3712](http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF3712). You will be responsible for lodging this form with the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

• For scenario c) refer to the next section regarding driving lessons.

8. Driving lessons

• The purpose of 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.

• 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 schools that have vehicles with modifications such as hand controls.

Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS) Funding

• For eligible persons, a subsidy of up to $400 toward the cost of lessons may be available through VOSS.


• If return to driving is part of your NDIS plan funds will also be allocated during that process.
5. Obtaining medical clearance to drive after your lessons are complete

- After your lessons, the driving instructor will provide feedback to the occupational therapy driving assessor regarding your driving ability.

- The occupational therapist will then issue a final letter to your referring GP or spinal cord injury specialist outlining the OT recommendations.

- If the occupational therapist recommends that you are able to resume driving, the recommendation may also state that you meet the criteria for a conditional licence and that the following letters be displayed on your licence: ‘A’ – vehicle fitted with automatic transmission, and/or ‘V’ – vehicle specially modified to meet the person’s physical disability.


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

10. Modifying your vehicle and accessing funding toward this

- If your occupational therapy driving assessor has recommended vehicle modifications, such as hand controls, then it is your responsibility to arrange this.

- A list of vehicle modifiers in Queensland is available by contacting SPOT on 3406 2300 or [spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au), or via VOSS.

SCIR funding

- If you have a new spinal cord injury and have been an inpatient of the Spinal Injuries Unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, and are eligible for the Spinal Cord Injury Response (SCIR) equipment program then you should contact SPOT on 3406 2300 or [spot@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:spot@health.qld.gov.au) to determine whether SCIR funding is available for you for hand controls and/or a roof top hoist.

- If eligible, you will need to provide SPOT with a copy of your final letter from your occupational therapy driving assessor supporting your return to driving, and a copy of a quote from a modifier of your choice with modifications matching those recommended by your occupational therapy driving assessor.

Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS) Funding

- For eligible persons, a subsidy of up to $4,300 toward the cost of vehicle modifications may be available through the Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS).


- If return to driving is part of your NDIS plan funds will also be allocated during that process.
11. Medically unfit to drive?

If a health professional is concerned that medical advice has been ignored

- If your health professional has given you advice not to resume driving and is concerned that it may be ignored, or they feel that your condition poses a risk to public safety, they are strongly encouraged to voluntarily report this to the Department of Transport and Main Roads, in the interests of public safety. This is outlined in the Austroads Assessing Fitness to Drive Medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines available at the following link: http://www.austroads.com.au/

- 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: http://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/qtforms/QF4842

Alternate ways to access the community if you are unable to drive:

- NDIS – discuss options available as part of your plan.

- 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 3406 2300, or spot@health.qld.gov.au. Some options are listed below:

  Taxi Subsidy Scheme


  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.

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

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
12. Financial help with purchasing a vehicle

Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS)

- For eligible persons, a subsidy of up to $4,500 contribution towards the cost of a vehicle deemed suitable for modification to enable vehicle modifications may be available through the Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme (VOSS).


National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

- If return to driving is part of your NDIS plan funds will also be allocated during that process. This link provides some further information. https://www.ndis.gov.au/Operational-Guideline/including-7

GST exemption on car purchases

- The Australian Tax Office (ATO) website advises that you can purchase a car GST-free if you are either an eligible:
  - Person with a disability and you intend to use the car to travel to or from gainful employment for either
    - Two years
    - 40,000 kilometres from the date you purchase it
  - Veteran with a disability and you intend to use the car either
    - For your personal transportation for two years
    - To travel 40,000 kilometres from the date you purchase it

- If you have a disability and are not an eligible veteran, the ATO advises that you cannot purchase a car GST-free if any of the following applies:
  - You are not gainfully employed
  - You want to use the car to look for gainful employment
  - You work as a volunteer only
  - You are a student only
  - You purchase it jointly with another person, such as a spouse or carer


13. 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 $14.35 may be required. The application form will need to be supported by your doctor or occupational therapist.
14. For more information

Spinal Outreach Team

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Last Reviewed September 2017
Review Due September 2019