



Driving with a Disability

Driving is an important activity for most people, whether it is part of their work role, required for transport to and from the workplace, or needed for personal reasons such as visiting friends, attending medical appointments or going shopping. Having a disability does not necessarily mean that a person will be prevented from driving, but it may mean that a driver assessment may be required. The purpose of a driver assessment is to ensure that an individual is safe to drive, and to determine whether any modifications to the vehicle are required.



Assessing Fitness to Drive

- A driver is required by law to notify the licensing authority (Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER) of any long-term or permanent injury or illness that may affect their ability to drive safely. This may result in the request for a 'Medical Fitness To Drive Assessment' form to be completed by a relevant medical practitioner and the completion of a driving test.
- A person's fitness to drive, and whether they need driver assessment and training, should be established before vehicle modifications, such as hand controls, adapted foot pedals, spinner knob attachment, or seating alterations are installed.
- To determine a person's fitness to drive, health professionals will refer to *Assessing Fitness to Drive 2022*
- If a long-term medical condition or disability affects a person's ability to drive safely, a GP or specialist will conduct a medical assessment in accordance with the medical standards and complete a report which is given to the person to take to the licensing authority.
- Many temporary medical conditions prevent people from driving. After an injury such as broken leg, or an operation such as a hip replacement, a GP or specialist will give advice about the need to cease or restrict driving for a short-term period, e.g. 6 weeks. In most such cases a person's licence status will not be affected, and they will not need to report the temporary medical condition to the licensing authority.
- For conditions which are progressive or changeable e.g. multiple sclerosis, diabetes or vision impairment, an annual medical report will be submitted to the licensing authority and a conditional licence with a requirement for periodic reviews may be considered.
- The GP may refer the person to a specialist for further medical assessment and/or to an occupational therapist (OT), qualified in driver assessment and training, for a practical driver assessment.



Practical Driver Assessment

- This involves a medical assessment (provided by GP/specialist), an off-road assessment and an on-road assessment. During the off-road assessment, conducted by the OT, the person is asked about their driving history, their understanding of road law will be tested, and their physical, visual, sensory and thinking abilities will be assessed. The on-road assessment is conducted by the OT with a driving instructor present, using the instructor's vehicle which, for safety reasons, has dual brakes.
- Based on these assessments, the OT writes a report which is sent to the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER), the referring agent, e.g. GP/specialist, and any other relevant persons/organisations. It will include conclusions and recommendations focusing on:
 - the impact of the medical condition or disability on the person's ability to drive safely, legally and independently
 - whether vehicle modifications are required to achieve this
 - whether a series of driving lessons is required
- Fees are payable separately to the OT and to the driving instructor. It is recommended that people ask about the OT and driving instructor fee amounts, and when they are payable, prior to the assessment.



Vehicle Modifications

There are many types of modifications that can be applied to a vehicle to enable a person with a disability to drive. In addition to driving control modifications, other vehicle modifications and equipment solutions, may be needed to make it possible for a person with a disability to drive.

Before installing vehicle modifications – procedures and regulations

- If assessment by a driver trained occupational therapist (OT) has been requested, it should take place prior to the installation of any vehicle modifications to ensure that the modifications are appropriate in meeting the driver's needs and that the person is safe to drive using the modifications. The OT will liaise with DIER and installers throughout the assessment and modification process.
- A request to install driving control modifications, seating alterations and structural changes such as lowering the floor level to accommodate a wheelchair docked in place of the original but removed driver seat, must be submitted to DIER (Vehicle Modification Division) and written approval must be obtained before modification work commences - see www.transport.tas.gov.au/vehicle_specifications
- Any newly installed modifications, including spinner knobs and hand controls, must be inspected by a DIER authorised engineering signatory whose report will be reviewed by DIER - see www.transport.tas.gov.au/vehicle_specifications/engineering_signatories. A certificate, specific to the vehicle in which the modifications are installed, will be issued and must be carried in the vehicle at all times. If the vehicle is sold, the modifications must be removed prior to sale. If they are subsequently to be installed in another vehicle, their suitability for that vehicle must be established and the installation inspected by the DIER authorised engineering signatory.
- When modified driving controls have been installed, an advisory sticker is issued. It should be displayed where it is visible to a person sitting in the driver's seat to inform them that the driving controls have been modified.
- If certain structural changes have been made, a modification plate will be issued. Once the plate has been fitted, the vehicle must be inspected at an approved inspection station to obtain the necessary papers for the vehicle details to be recorded at Service Tasmania.

Driving control modifications

A vehicle may need to have automatic transmission to enable some of the driving control modifications to be installed. Driving control modifications can be costly, and some may involve considerable adaptation of the vehicle.

- customised solutions and controls which enable the vehicle to be operated using the upper limbs (arms and hands) rather than using standard foot pedals
- hand operated push brake, and pat, pull or twist accelerator
- left foot accelerator
- floor mounted push brake and pull accelerator or floor mounted foot steering
- extensions to foot and hand controls to enable the driver to reach them more easily
- parking assistance such as parking sensors or a rear-view camera; this is especially useful for people with limited movement
- lighter steering
- steering wheel spinner knobs that enable a person to turn the steering wheel with one hand

modifications to allow independent operation of accessories, e.g. horn, wipers, indicators

Modifications for vehicle access

Modifications, conversions and seat alterations enable drivers to get into their vehicles:

- a hoist attached to a post installed in the car (and removable) enables a person to be lifted from their wheelchair into the car seat
- wheelchair hoists lift the wheelchair onto the roof for storage during transportation
- wheelchair docking enables a person to drive a vehicle from their wheelchair without needing assistance from a carer
- rear fold down ramps allow access for wheelchairs
- a wheelchair lifter, which is a platform at the side or rear of the vehicle, enables a wheelchair user to be lifted into the vehicle
- swivel seats which swing out of the car at 90° to allow a person to get in and out of the car more easily

Are You Sitting Comfortably?

Less complex equipment assists a person to transfer from a wheelchair to a car seat, get into and out of a car, or improve their posture, comfort and safety while driving. These include:

- car seat cushions that provide a more comfortable seating position and/or reduce vibration
- portable rotating seat cushions
- temporary portable support handle to hold when getting in and out of the car
- seat belt extensions
- sliding boards that assist the driver to transfer from a wheelchair to a car



More information

For further information, or advice, about any item contained in this information sheet, please contact Independent Living Centre Tasmania Inc.(ILCT):

- Call 1300 452 827 to speak to a health professional.
- Visit our website www.ilct.com.au or email info@ilct.com.au.
- ILCT visits communities around Tasmania. Contact ILCT to find out when we will be in your area.

ILCT provides Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, and Allied Health Assistant services, on a fee-for-service basis. Our team delivers comprehensive assessments and support that may include assistive technology, home modifications, communication aids, and other tailored interventions to enhance independence and quality of life.

ILCT specifically provides supports to those aged over 18, who are Tasmanian residents and are of any culturally diverse background. ILCT are a registered provider under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

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