

# Roads to health

for Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander people




DRIVING  
**CHANGE**  
LICENSING SUPPORT PROGRAM

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## Driving Change – at a glance

### Community:

- Partnered with 11 communities in NSW
- 1006 clients aged from 16 to 72 years, majority under 25

### Licensing:

- Over 400 licences obtained
- 193 learner licences obtained
- 224 P1 licences obtained

### Training:

- Over 3300 hours of supervised driving practice
- More than 100 volunteer supervising drivers signed up

### Results:

- Clients who had supervised driving practice - 2.4 times more likely to progress to an independent licence
- Clients who received a high level of case management - 1.8 times more likely to progress to an independent licence
- Led to 67% of clients obtaining a birth certificate for identification
- Lifted licensing sanctions for 72% of clients requesting assistance with outstanding fines
- Clients who were supported to maintain or obtain a licence were 2.5 times more likely to have changed employment or have become employed

**“In Dareton, we’ve got a lot of young school leavers, but you’ve also got a lot of older people that never got their licence. We’ve got a lot of industry that requires you to have a licence, so if you want a job there, you need a licence. Public transport is not a big option, and a person’s independence is important, so the whole Driving Change program is like a breath of fresh air.”**

Des Jones, Driving Change Youth Worker, Dareton

## Roads to health

Driver licensing leads to better access to education and employment, and is an important social determinant of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Despite this, there are multiple barriers to driver licensing for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, including access to vehicles and supervising drivers for learner drivers. In recent years, state governments in New South Wales (NSW), South Australia (SA) and Northern Territory (NT) have introduced licensing support programs but there remain major implementation challenges, and poor understanding of impact. This paper outlines the introduction and evaluation of a driver licensing support program delivered in partnership with communities across NSW.

The Driving Change program was delivered to Aboriginal people in 11 communities between 2013–2015. Over 400 driver licenses were obtained as part of the program, more than 100 volunteer supervising drivers signed up, and over 3300 hours of driving practice achieved. The program targeted and reached clients with a high level of need, with the majority aged under 25 years old, who are also unemployed, not tertiary educated, and almost half living in a household without a licensed driver. Program clients who participated in supervised driving practice were 2.4 times more likely to progress to an independent licence, and those who received a high level of case management were nearly twice as likely to progress to an independent licence than those who received low levels of case management. Amongst program clients, those who retained or attained a licence supported by the program were 2.5 times more likely to have changed employment or have become employed, as a result of the program than those who did not attain a licence.

### **About The George Institute for Global Health**

The George Institute for Global Health is an independent global medical research institute. The George Institute conducts targeted, innovative health research aimed at reducing the burden of the leading causes of death and disability in Australia and around the world.

Since our establishment in 1999, our research has influenced medical guidelines and practice, and changed decades old thinking about some of the most common prevention strategies and medical treatments.

The program evaluation suggested Driving Change was responsive to client and community needs with a high level of acceptability and engagement. There were several implementation challenges, including: the diverse community contexts in which partnerships were established, challenges in attracting funding for cars for supervised driving practice, and utilisation of funding for job training from employment agencies for licensing costs. Data quality was also an issue in program evaluation, with inconsistent reporting of Indigenous status in licensing data. Despite these challenges, the evaluation results demonstrate that the 'bottom-up' processes employed led to strong community ownership. Critical to the success of the program were partnerships with Aboriginal community organisations, and Aboriginal leadership across all levels of the program.

There is an urgent need for Aboriginal licensing support programs across Australia. Consistent funding of community-based programs and support for Aboriginal led licensing initiatives are critical in order to close the licensing gap.

Since the establishment of its global headquarters in Sydney, The George Institute has grown to have major centres in China, India and the United Kingdom. The George Institute employs over 600 staff, has a program of research spanning approximately 50 countries and has raised \$650 million for global health research. The George Institute is affiliated with world renowned universities, and our researchers have been recognised among the world's best for scientific impact and excellence.

## An in-depth look

Having a driver licence is often taken for granted in Australia. In regional and remote areas, a driver licence and access to a car is essential to get to work, to see a doctor or visit family and friends. Public transport outside metropolitan areas is often infrequent or unavailable all together. In metropolitan areas, there are also challenges in access due to the high costs of living and transport.

But for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people there are numerous challenges to obtaining and maintaining a driver licence, and this impacts on health, employment prospects and wellbeing.

To address these issues, the not-for-profit sector and some Australian state governments are working to improve licensing to overcome such transport disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes DriveSafe NT Remote, South Australia's program, On the Right Track Remote and, the NSW Government's driver licensing access program. In NSW, community programs are delivered by organisations including ACE Community Colleges, Birrang and in Bourke, the Maranguka Program. However, without rigorous program evaluation it can be challenging to obtain ongoing funding for such programs.

Given the importance of driver licensing in providing access to education and employment, there is a clear need for evidence to inform policy development and program implementation.

### **What is transport disadvantage?**

When you are unable to get to the places you need to in order to fulfil the usual activities of life – shopping, caring for family, social activities, access to health care, education or employment – you are transport disadvantaged. Transport disadvantage impacts on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population more than the rest of the community, as higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in regional and remote parts of the country without access to public transport. Transport disadvantage also exists in urban areas, for example where public transport services are poor or prohibitively expensive. Having a private car can mitigate some of the disadvantage but there are also fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with access to a car.

Private car ownership requires a licence however and this may not always be easy to obtain. Driver licensing laws have been gradually strengthened Australia-wide to improve safety for young drivers, who experience very high crash rates. Such laws have been effective in improving safety but also make it more difficult to access a driver licence.

### **Barriers to licensing**

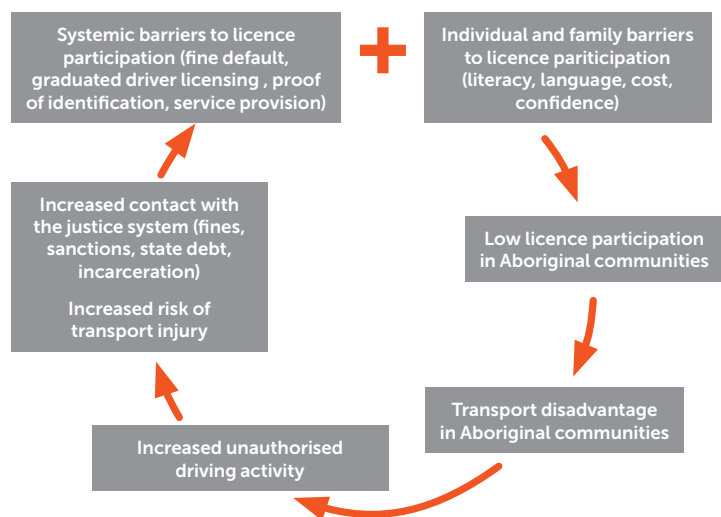
There are substantial barriers to driver licensing that significantly impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Previous research in NSW, NT and SA has consistently highlighted these barriers, which are pervasive and not readily overcome. These can include:

- Financial barriers that result in a lack of ability to pay for licence fees or driving lessons
- Poor literacy and numeracy skills which impacts on pass rates for the learner licence theory test
- Lack of cultural safety or responsiveness in service provision at registries
- Lack of access to licensed supervising drivers and cars for driving practice

Further, certain laws around licensing, especially regarding fines enforcement in states like NSW, have led to high rates of driver disqualifications and suspensions. In some states, enforcement action notices may lead to the cancellation of a driver licence or car registration, even if the fine is non-road related. If alternative transport is not available, this may lead to increased offences for driving while unlicensed or suspended, which in turn can contribute to higher rates of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although such licensing laws can be important for safety, it can also lead to disadvantage among some groups of drivers.

Barriers to licensing can therefore lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of adversity as seen in figure 1 (next page), particularly in relation to supervised driving practice, fines enforcement, and driving while unauthorised.

**Figure 1: Cycle of licensing adversity**



Multiple community-based programs have emerged across Australia to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community priorities around driver licensing support. However, most rely on small community grants and goodwill from community organisations and individuals for sustainability. Without funding for evaluation, there programs are unable to demonstrate impact which inhibits their ability to attract more funding.

### **Driver licensing as a social determinant of health**

Having a driver licence is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people because it means much more than just being able to drive a car; it is a social determinant of health. Where other forms of transport are not available, a licence provides a means to get family around, access health services, connect with the community, get to work or participate in sporting activities. Licensing is a way to access education and employment – if you have a driver licence the odds of having a formal educational qualification are doubled and the chances of employment are increased four-fold.

### **The Driving Change program**

Driving Change was developed with oversight from a steering committee of key policy and community organisations with funding from AstraZeneca, Transport for NSW and NSW Health. The program was implemented and evaluated across NSW to examine its effectiveness in increasing licensing for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in need

of support. Initially at three pilot sites, the program included significant input from youth advisory groups and youth workers who identified key community needs and informed the development of the Driving Change program. As a result, Driving Change was rolled out at eight further sites.

### **A case management approach**


The underlying approach to Driving Change was intensive case management through all stages of licensing. The program was aimed at young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were struggling to obtain or retain a driver licence, and who did not have other family or community support. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth workers, based in local community organisations, case managed people through the licensing system, providing support for all the following stages:

- Obtaining identification documents
- Literacy and numeracy support for the theory test
- Assisting with management of fines and licence suspensions
- Financial assistance for licensing fees
- Providing access to a car and supervising drivers to obtain necessary supervised driving hours during the learner licence
- Access to professional driving instruction

The youth workers in each community also coordinated a learner driver mentor program to support novice drivers to gain supervised driving practice. In NSW, people aged under 25 years are required to accrue 120 hours of supervised driving to be eligible for a provisional P1 licence. As part of the learner driver mentor program, youth workers at each site recruited volunteer mentors from within the local community, and coordinated training for mentors.

### **Who were the clients?**

Across the sites there were 1006 clients ranging in age from 16 to 72 years. Of the total clients, 88% were unemployed, and almost one third of clients had dependents and/or carer responsibilities. The need for licensing support was also related to the lack of licensed drivers in households. Almost half of all clients came from households where no family member had a licence to drive. In total, 267 novice drivers received supervised driving practice via the learner driver mentor



program, with 103 volunteers delivering 3350 hours of supervised driving practice. Meanwhile, one third of clients were provided with financial assistance to cover the costs of licence fees, licensing testing and professional driving lessons.

### **Program outcomes**

Across the 11 sites, 193 clients obtained a learner licence and 224 clients obtained a P1 licence. Other outcomes included obtaining a birth certificates for 67% of the clients requesting identification assistance, and the lifting of licensing sanctions for 72% of the clients requesting assistance to manage outstanding fines.

### **The impact of Driving Change**

Clients who had supervised driving practice were 2.4 times more likely to progress to an independent licence. Those who received a high level of case management were 1.8 times more likely to progress to an independent licence than those who received low levels of case management. Implementation was facilitated by community partnerships that were characterised by a high level of acceptability and engagement. This was attributed to local delivery, Aboriginal leadership, connections with community networks, and community ownership of solutions.

Clients in the program were followed up by phone for an evaluation interview 12 months later. With support from Driving Change, people were 2.5 times more likely to have changed employment or have become employed as a result of maintaining or obtaining a licence than those who did not attain a licence.

An analysis of new licenses issued by the NSW Roads and Maritime Services revealed that licence numbers in most of the communities in which Driving Change operated increased post-program implementation. Notably, in seven of the Driving Change communities there was an increase in new P1 licenses issued post-program implementation; this included Redfern, Shellharbour, Condobolin, Dubbo, Taree, Wagga and Dareton.

**“I get a lot out of it personally because I can see... she is growing as a person like not just with the driving... I said to her I’m going to cry on the day whether you get them or not... even sitting there thinking about it I get a little bit emotional.”**

Driving Change volunteer community mentor

### **Feedback about Driving Change**

“But to get the phone call from the young fellow who was just about illiterate, and it’s, like, ‘Hi Auntie,’ he said, ‘I’ve passed my L’s,’ and it’s like – it was just such a lovely feeling, and to have him ring back and congratulate him for it, and I kept saying, ‘It’s all his efforts. It’s all his work, and it’s his determination. I’m just providing the channels that can assist you to get through.’” (Driving Change Youth Worker).

“I like the social side of it because I’m interested in people in different ways of life and things like that... It’s just nice learning who he is. And if they get their licence it gives them the opportunity to get out to get work.” (Driving Change volunteer community mentor).

“I get a lot out of it personally because I can see... she is growing as a person like not just with the driving... I said to her I’m going to cry on the day whether you get them or not... even sitting there thinking about it I get a little bit emotional.” (Driving Change volunteer community mentor).

“There is a pressing need for more culturally appropriate and sensitive service delivery that does support access for Aboriginal people to the system.” (External Stakeholder).

“In Dareton, we’ve got a lot of young school leavers, but you’ve also got a lot of older people that never got their licence. We’ve got a lot of industry that requires you to have a licence, so if you want a job there, you need a licence. Public transport is not a big option, and a person’s independence is important, so the whole Driving Change program is like a breath of fresh air.” (Des Jones, Driving Change Youth Worker, Dareton).



## The way forward: key recommendations

Outcomes from Driving Change and previous work have highlighted the strong links between licensing and employment. However, there is substantial unmet need in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around access to driver licensing and significant gaps in program coordination and program funding remain.

### Data Quality

Better identification of Indigenous status in licensing data is essential to monitor licensing rates and program successes. Such data is important for evaluation of both short and long term trends. At present, NSW remains the only state in Australia that collects Indigenous status in licensing data; we strongly recommend that this is expanded to all states and territories.

### Aboriginal leadership is important

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led initiatives are most effective in addressing community priorities. For this to occur, there needs to be more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, community ownership of programs, and consistent funding of community programs.

Ongoing support for community-led programs such as the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment program, the ACE Licensed and on the Road program and Birrang Enterprise Development driver licensing program, in addition to the multitude of community owned and run programs is important.

### Ongoing funding is critical

In implementing Driving Change, there is a need for overarching coordination and support, including training of staff and strengthening of community networks. To break the cycle of licensing adversity, there is a clear need for consistent and ongoing funding and local community governance. At present, core funding has been from transport authorities but given the broad community benefits, investment across all levels of Government would improve licensing outcomes and generate significant change across measures of health and social inclusion.

**“There is a pressing need for more culturally appropriate and sensitive service delivery that does support access for Aboriginal people to the system.”**

External Stakeholder

# Acknowledgements

## Host sites

Site	Host organisation
Redfern	Tribal Warrior and Redfern Neighbourhood Centre
Griffith	Griffith Aboriginal Lands Council
Shellharbour	Shellharbour Aboriginal and Community Youth Association (SACYA)
Taree	Taree Indigenous Development and Employment (TIDE)
Dubbo	Dubbo Aboriginal Lands Council
Condobolin	Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation
Raymond Terrace	Raymond Terrace PCYC and Kapoondi
Wagga Wagga	Red Cross Wagga
Dareton	Mallee Family Care and Dareton Aboriginal Lands Council
Campbelltown	AB Central
Kempsey	Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre

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Transport for NSW, NSW Department of Justice, Roads and Maritime Services, Aboriginal Legal Aid, Legal Aid, Prime Minister and Cabinet, Aboriginal Affairs, Youthsafe, Red Cross, Office of State Revenue NSW, Shellharbour Aboriginal and Community Youth Association and Birrang Enterprise Development Company.

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