

OVER-85 DRIVER REFORMS

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

When do older driver reforms come into place?

Changes to the frequency of the older driver test came into effect on 1 July 2008. The remainder of the changes will come into effect on Monday 1 December 2008.

Why change the system?

These are the first major changes to the licensing system for older motorists since testing for over-85 drivers was introduced in the early 1960s.

The reforms have been designed to balance the safety of road users and the general community with the continuing independence and mobility of over-85 drivers.

With the older driving population expected to increase from 23,000 to over 52,000 by 2023, we need to change the system now to make sure it's fair and safe for everyone using our roads.

What consultation has been carried out?

In 2007, the RTA received over 24,000 submissions on the proposed licence options for older drivers.

The feedback received was from a wide cross-section of the community, as well as key groups including the Older Drivers of NSW, The Returned and Services League of Australia (NSW branch), Association of Independent Retirees, Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association and War Widows' Guild of Australia NSW.

Every submission was considered carefully before the reforms were formally announced in April this year.

Once the reforms were announced the Older Driver Implementation Panel was formed to oversee the introduction of the reforms. The panel consists of representatives from the NSW Centre for Road Safety, NSW Police, Council on the Ageing, NRMA Motoring & Services Association, Australian Medical Association and the Australian Driver Trainers Association.

Why has the age for annual medical checks been lowered? How will I know when I need to start having these checks?

People aged 75 and over are now required to have an annual medical check by a General Practitioner, to pick up issues such as deteriorating eyesight and dementia.

Lowering the age of annual medical testing from 80 to 75 years was supported by 65 per cent of people who made a submission to the RTA's discussion paper. The change also brings NSW into line with most Australian states.

Each year, drivers aged 75 and over will receive a medical report for their doctor to complete. This will be sent eight weeks before the driver's birthday to give them plenty of time to organise the check-up.

Licence medical checks are a bulk billable item on the Medicare register. Some specialist tests such as eye tests are also bulk billable.

Do I get to choose between taking a test and having an assessment? What is the difference?

Yes. People over 85 can choose to take their driving test at an RTA motor registry or have an accredited driving assessment from home.

The RTA's older driver test is carried out at local motor registries at no charge. Older drivers have three attempts to pass their driving test with the RTA before their next birthday.

The accredited driving assessment is a new option which allows people to do an evaluation from home at their own convenience. The assessment is similar to a driving test but is carried out by an RTA accredited assessor such as the NRMA Motoring and Services Association and the Australian Driver Trainers Association.

The assessment process has been designed to give people a chance to freshen up their skills with a licensed driving instructor who will work with drivers on areas that might need improving.

An older driver can have as many assessments as they like, but they must pass an assessment before their birthday to keep their licence.

Older drivers should note that accredited assessors will charge for their services. The RTA encourages people to shop for competitive prices.

A full list of accredited assessors will be available at your local motor registry, on the RTA website: www.myRTA.com, by calling 13 22 13.

Can I take the RTA test if I have already done a driving assessment?

Yes. Over-85 drivers who engage the services of an assessor can still sit their driving test with the RTA, as long as it's before their upcoming birthday.

What can I do if there is no accredited assessor in my area or I don't want to pay for an assessment?

The assessment option has been introduced to give older drivers more flexibility.

Some assessors maybe willing to travel – you will have to check with the accredited provider – otherwise older drivers can still sit the driving test for free at an RTA motor registry.

What happens after a driving assessment from home?

The assessor will give you a result sheet which you will need to take to a motor registry. The accredited assessor will also notify the RTA if you pass your driving assessment.

If the assessor observes dangerous driving behaviour or serious errors they will notify the RTA and your licence will be cancelled.

What happens after an RTA driving test?

The RTA testing officer will give you feedback on your driving and your test results. If you do not pass, the testing officer will explain why and outline what your options are.

What is counted as a fail and what is counted as a 'serious fail'?

The most common 'fail' items are not following traffic signs, failing to give way, speeding and failing to properly control the vehicle.

A 'serious fail' occurs when the driver's behaviour is found to be a danger to themselves and other road users. If the instructor believes further practice and instruction will not improve their driving, their licence will be cancelled.

How will the RTA regulate the practices of the private driving assessors?

The RTA has set up a stringent assessment process and compliance unit to monitor older driving assessors.

Each assessor has to meet a stringent set of criteria before they are accredited which includes attendance at workshops and special training.

Agreements with assessors will include a code of conduct and complaints handling mechanism.

If an older driver is not happy with their assessor, what can they do?

Older drivers are encouraged to discuss any issues with the driving school proprietor. Alternatively, they can report their concerns to their local registry manager.

What is a modified licence? What are the criteria for obtaining one?

A modified licence is a driver licence that is limited to certain types of driving – such as daytime or local trips only.

Currently, about 17 per cent of over-85 drivers already have a modified driver licence.

The options for this type of licence are arranged by RTA registry managers in discussion with the driver.

Drivers who have demonstrated unsafe driving behaviours at an RTA or voluntary driving assessment will not be eligible for a modified licence.

Can people change from a "modified" licence to an unrestricted licence?

Yes. If an older driver wants to upgrade from a modified licence to an unrestricted driver's licence they will need to pass a driving test or assessment.

What changes have been made to the older driver test?

The new driving test and voluntary driving assessment focuses on an older driver's ability to drive safely.

Crash patterns for older drivers are significantly different to those of other age groups. For drivers aged 80 and over, the most common crashes are intersection crashes where the older driver drives off the road.

The test has been designed to address these issues and concentrates on four main areas:

- Ability to judge distance and gaps in the traffic,
- Ability to maintain speed and drive within the speed limits,
- Ability to judge hazards, and
- Ability to stay within the designated lane.

What happens if an older driver is ill or away when their test/assessment is due?

If an older driver is not capable of doing their test within the given time frame, they should speak to their local motor registry manager to negotiate an extended time.

What is being done to let older drivers know these reforms are coming into place?

The RTA is sending letters to all older drivers and General Practitioners to inform them of the changes.

A print and radio advertising campaign is also being launched on Sunday 30 November.

Additional information is at your local registry, on the RTA website: www.rta.nsw.gov.au or by phoning 13 22 13.
