



Australian College of Nurse Practitioners response to:

National Transport Commission

Improving health screening for commercial vehicle drivers

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9 May 2025

National Transport Commission

By online survey portal, date: 8 May 2025

To the National Transport Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on improving health screening for commercial vehicle drivers.

The Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP) is the leading national body representing nurse practitioners. It plays a vital role in advancing nursing practice and enhancing consumer access to healthcare services. Nurse practitioners are uniquely positioned to address unmet healthcare needs in communities and to expand access to health assessments and high-quality care, particularly for underserved populations.

Nurse practitioners work in diverse healthcare settings, including primary care^{1,2}, urgent care^{3,4}, emergency services^{1,2}, older person care^{1,2}, mental health^{1,2}, palliative care⁵, critical care areas such as orthopaedics¹, and chronic disease prevention and management such as diabetes.¹ Research consistently demonstrates high levels of patient satisfaction with care delivered by nurse practitioners, which contributes to improved treatment adherence and health outcomes.^{3,5-8} This success highlights the invaluable role of nurse practitioners within the Australian healthcare landscape, representing a significant step towards more effective and cost-efficient healthcare delivery.

The ACNP strongly advocates for recognising nurse practitioners' autonomous roles and their ability to lead healthcare teams across diverse settings⁹. This recognition and greater integration are essential for strengthening the nursing workforce, supporting the evolving role of modern nurses, and challenging outdated perceptions.

After an in-depth review of the '*Improving Health Screening for Commercial Vehicle Drivers - Discussion Paper*' and all relevant information, the ACNP endorses and supports **Option C** (1C, 2C, 3C) in Table 1. 'Summary of options' for health screening.

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Our responses to the consultation questions are as follows:

Question 1:

Can you provide any more information relevant to support our understanding of the commercial vehicle industry, including road safety impacts? _____33

Given that heavy vehicle operators transport goods and services across multiple states and territories, it is essential that Driver Licensing Authorities (DLAs) in states that do not currently enforce periodic fitness-to-drive assessments for Medium Rigid (MR) and Medium Combination (MC) license holders take shared responsibility for traffic incidents involving their drivers when these incidents occur interstate i.e. outside the state in which the driver is licensed and involve drivers who have not undergone appropriate fitness assessments.

The ACNP supports a unified, national approach to ensure consistent fitness-to-drive standards for heavy vehicle drivers across all jurisdictions. Over time, this approach would improve national road safety and reduce regulatory inconsistencies between states and territories.

Question 2:

Can you provide any more information relevant to supporting our understanding of the general health status, priority health areas and risks for commercial vehicle drivers? _____33

There is a significant opportunity here to increase preventative health screening and early health promotion activities to improve the overall health and wellbeing of commercial vehicle drivers. Regulatory bodies have a responsibility to assess both the health status of commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers and the potential risks their health conditions may pose to public safety.

As highlighted in the discussion paper a key concern is the sedentary nature of the job, particularly among long-haul drivers, which contributes to the increased prevalence of several non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The three most identified health issues in this group are cardiovascular disease (CVD), type 2 diabetes, and sleep apnoea, conditions that are both prevalent and, importantly, modifiable.

Periodic Health checks for commercial drivers are essential—not only for improving road safety by preventing medical events that could lead to crashes and mass casualty events, but also for supporting broader health promotion and disease prevention goals. These checks present a valuable opportunity to

optimise health outcomes, reduce disease burden, prevent premature mortality, and enhance overall wellbeing.¹²

Modifiable biomedical risk factors such as sedentary behaviours, exposures to unhealthy foods, or physiological characteristics that increase disease risk are prevalent among commercial drivers.¹⁰ These include hypertension, dyslipidaemia, impaired fasting glucose, immobility, and obesity.^{10,13} According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) uncontrolled high blood pressure accounts for approximately 42% of CVD cases and 63% of Australia's hypertensive heart disease burden.¹¹

Evidence-based strategies, such as increased physical activity and improved nutrition, have been shown to prevent or delay the onset of NCDs, including ischaemic heart disease, diabetes, mental health decline, and chronic lower respiratory conditions.¹²

Healthcare assessors and clinicians should take every opportunity to prescribe physical activity and implement targeted preventative initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of NCDs in commercial vehicle drivers.

Question 3:

Can you provide more information about how systems that are based on AFTD operate? 47

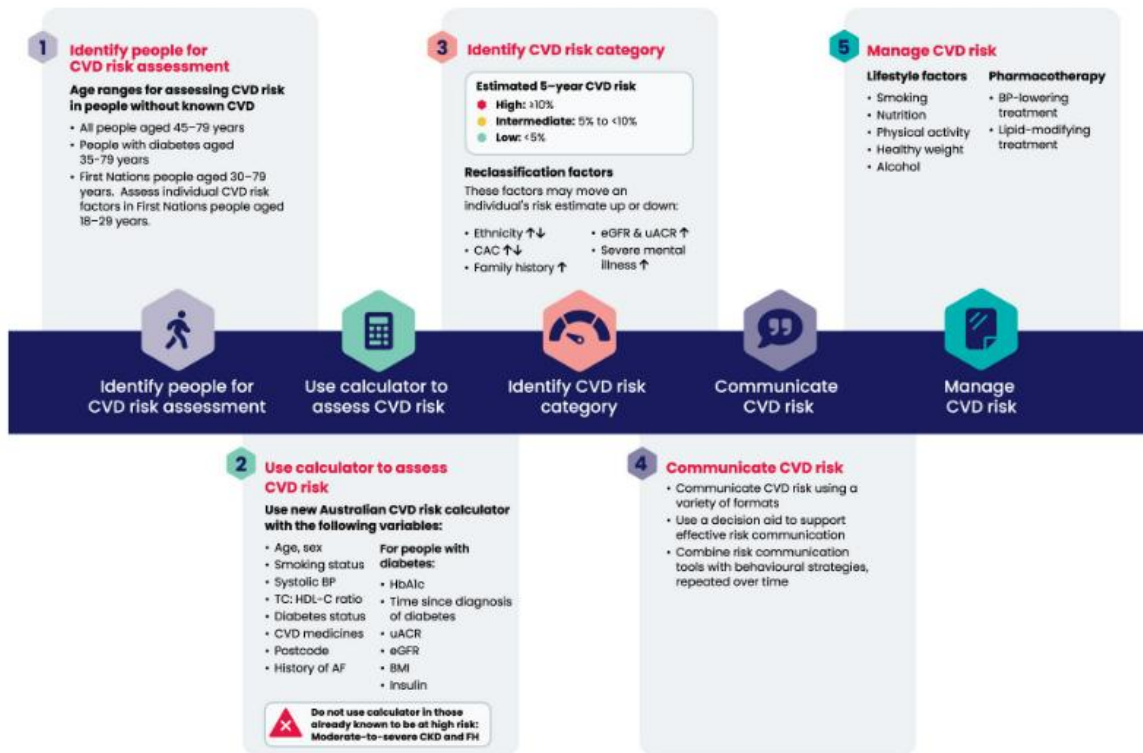
Nil comment

Question 4:

Can you provide any more information relevant to supporting our understanding of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and sleep disorders outlined in this section, including possible screening approaches? _____71

The ACNP supports the use of Australian based reputable screening tools which are freely available to clinicians for consistent, accurate and timely screening. These tools could include:

- The Australian Heart Foundations Cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk calculator is an excellent freely available resource for all clinician's <https://www.cvdcheck.org.au/calculator>



- Diabetes risk assessment tool <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/the-australian-type-2-diabetes-risk-assessment-tool-ausdrisk/tool>

Question 5:

Can you provide any information about other interventions, such as driver monitoring technologies, to support our understanding of managing these conditions? _____75

The Lane Alert feature, integrated into the EyeSight Driver Assist Technology, supports drivers in staying within their lane by issuing warnings when the vehicle begins to veer unintentionally. It incorporates functions such as Lane Sway Warning, Lane Departure Warning, and Lane Keep Assist.¹⁶

Lane Keep Assist can even provide subtle steering input to help nudge the car back into its proper lane when necessary.

Question 6:

Can you provide any more information to support our understanding of other driver health initiatives?
___75

Health and fitness activity prescribing <https://exerciseismedicine.com.au/prescribing-exercise-as-medicine/>. Regular physical activity plays a vital role in preventing, treating, and managing a wide range of health conditions. During a health screening consultation healthcare providers can significantly influence patients' willingness to incorporate exercise into their lives.

Question 7:

What are your views on whether any of these initiatives should be supported or expanded to promote driver health? _____75

Yes. The ACNP recommends and supports initiatives aimed at improving population health through education and personalised one-on-one consultations, which are vital steps toward enhancing public health outcomes. Supporting or expanding programs that promote commercial driver health—particularly those focused on lifestyle factors such as physical activity, nutrition, and mental well-being—can reduce health risks, increase productivity, and improve drivers' overall quality of life.¹⁴ Tailored health promotion efforts in this sector benefit not only individual drivers but also have broader implications for road safety and community health.

Question 8:

What are your views on how any of these initiatives might integrate with improved health screening for commercial vehicle drivers? _____76

Integrating health initiatives with improved health screening for commercial vehicle drivers could significantly enhance the early detection and management of chronic conditions, including overweight and obesity, which contribute to worsening cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and sleep apnoea. Early intervention is essential for preventing disease progression and improving long-term outcomes. By combining regular screenings by health practitioners with educational and lifestyle-based interventions, drivers can receive more comprehensive support tailored to the unique occupational health risks associated with the sedentary nature of their work. This integrated approach ensures that screening serves not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a gateway to sustained health improvement. It encourages ongoing engagement, reinforces healthy behaviors, and ultimately contributes to safer roads by promoting fitter, more alert drivers.

Question 9:

In relation to options A and B, please comment on the benefits, costs, barriers and limitations and advise of any other information that should be considered. _____85

Cost reduction in healthcare, particularly by decreasing demand through effective prevention, is essential to addressing the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including among the commercial driving population.¹⁵ Relying solely on primary health services is insufficient to manage the rising rates of NCD acquisition across the community. Instead, targeted, preventative, occupation-specific strategies are required.

The Austroads Fitness to Drive (AFTD) screening process and assessment for CVD, Diabetes and Sleep apnoea presents a valuable opportunity to identify early health risks in commercial drivers and intervene before conditions progress to more serious stages. By embedding preventative health measures and lifestyle interventions into routine fitness-to-drive assessments, we can potentially reduce healthcare costs, improve driver health outcomes, and enhance overall public safety.

Question 10:

Can you suggest any other implementation approaches to support the application of the current standards and guidance in AFTD (option B)? _____85

To strengthen the application of current Austroads Fitness to Drive (AFTD) standards under Option B, a number of targeted implementation approaches can be adopted. Expanding the pool of eligible assessors to include all suitably qualified health professionals—particularly nurse practitioners—would significantly improve access to assessments across Australia, especially in rural and remote areas. Nurse practitioners are uniquely positioned to deliver thorough and holistic AFTD assessments, given their training in clinical assessment and preventative health. Standardising national training for all assessors would help ensure consistent application of the AFTD guidelines across jurisdictions. Additionally, introducing a centralised digital system for managing assessments would streamline documentation, improve oversight, and support information sharing between states and territories. Complementary efforts to educate employers and drivers about the importance of health-based road safety, alongside linking assessments with preventative health services, would further enhance the effectiveness of the current framework and contribute to improved health and safety outcomes for commercial drivers and the wider community.

Question 11:

In relation to options 1C, 2C and 3C, can you please comment on the benefits, costs, barriers and limitations and advise of any other information that should be considered? 85

Ensure assessments are funded through the Medicare Benefits (Schedule MBS) Chronic Disease Assessment item numbers to ensure that commercial drivers incur minimal out-of-pocket costs when undergoing health assessments, which will also support driver compliance with the required assessments and reduce the financial burden associated with routine screening. Access to MBS funded Health Assessment must also be linked with chronic disease management, including accessing Allied Health appointments.

However, several barriers and limitations must be acknowledged. One key concern is the stress drivers may experience during the assessment process, particularly due to the potential for license restrictions if conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, or sleep apnoea are identified. The uncertainty and time spent away from work surrounding the assessment and follow-up steps, including further testing, treatment plans, may discourage drivers from engaging with the process. Overtime earlier intervention may help mitigate these concerns, and their perceived implications for driver employment and potential loss of income.

Additionally, delays in post-assessment follow-up can negatively impact both health outcomes and driver livelihoods. Therefore, timely, clear, and streamlined follow-up pathways are essential to ensure that drivers receive appropriate care without unnecessary delays or prolonged uncertainty regarding their licensing status.

Question 12:

Do you have any alternative options to those presented? _____85

Nil comment

The ACNP appreciates the opportunity to provide a response and highlight the important role nurse practitioners play in supporting the health and safety of Australians. However, there remains a need to improve awareness among the public, organisations and healthcare professionals about the nurse practitioner role, their scope of practice, and the valuable contributions they make to the healthcare system. Nurse Practitioners can significantly contribute to AFTD and chronic disease prevention and management.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important review. We welcome further engagement and are available to provide additional clarification as needed.

Yours sincerely



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