

**Submission
No 40**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Penrith City Council

Date Received: 13 May 2021



PENRITH

Our Reference: ECM 9526383
Contact: Adam Wilkinson

13 May 2021

The Hon. Lou Amato, MLC
Chair of the Committee
Staysafe Committee

Via Email: staysafe@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Amato

Penrith City Council: Submission to The Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety - Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

Thank you for providing Local Council's with the opportunity to submit comments on the above inquiry into supporting rural and regional learner drivers.

Penrith City Council welcomes continued cross-government and agency support to identify, plan, deliver and evaluate the effectiveness of road safety initiatives delivered across all jurisdictions as we work together towards zero fatalities by 2050.

Please find attached a copy of Penrith City Council's submission to the inquiry.

Should you have any queries regarding this submission, please don't hesitate to contact [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully

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Attachment

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Thank you for providing Local Council's with the opportunity to submit comments on the above inquiry into supporting rural and regional learner drivers.

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Summary

Addressing the barriers faced by young people in rural and country areas in obtaining their drivers licence and gain experience while on their 'L' and 'P' plates is important. It is critical for policy makers and funding providers to understand and respond to these complex issues in order to further reduce the NSW and Australian road toll and impact of road trauma faced by our communities.

Some barriers may be systemic, impacting family generations and will require long term investment by Government to respond in a meaningful and sustained way though all levels of government and delivered in a culturally, age, gender or other targeted method by government and its partnerships with community-based groups that the young person aligns.

Compared to the four years before the introduction of the Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS) in July 2000, there has been a 77 per cent reduction in the rate per licence of learner drivers killed on our roads and a 51 per cent reduction in the rate per licence for P1 drivers killed during the most recent four-year period 2016–17 to 2019–20 (TfNSW, 2019).

Research has shown that young drivers have higher crash risks due to:

- the nature of adolescent development which effects a young person's cognitive and perceptual skills
- lack of driving experience
- poor ability to anticipate, perceive, identify and, therefore, react to hazards
- failure to recognise and assess risk as well as a propensity to take intentional risks
- propensity to be over-confident and over-estimate their driving ability (TfNSW, 2014).

The recent NSW government investment to increase funding to learner driver programs such as Transport for NSW's Driver Licensing Access Program (DLAP) and The Safer Driver Course (SDC) is welcomed and supported by Penrith City Council. There is, however, greater potential to reach learners in regional and remote areas and from low socioeconomic and non-English speaking backgrounds to ensure all young people and their families receive the necessary support to make them safer drivers.

Partnerships with local councils, community groups, stakeholders and industry will help to support the ongoing delivery of road safety initiatives including the GLS program into the future.

Background: Existing programs for young people to access to obtain their drivers licence

The Safer Drivers Course (SDC) commenced in 2013. In April 2019, the Disadvantage Initiative eligibility criteria was expanded to offer free places to participants of the Driver Licensing Access Program (DLAP), giving more learner drivers from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to access the benefits of undertaking the SDC. While the SDC has achieved reasonable reach and access, findings from the evaluation conducted by TfNSW (2019) suggest there is greater potential to reach learners in regional and remote areas and from low socioeconomic and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Driver Licensing Access Program (DLAP), which assists people from communities with lower rates of driver licence attainment to obtain and retain their driver licence, including many Aboriginal communities, some Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities (including refugee and resettlement communities identified by Multicultural NSW), and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The program was expanded again in 2018–19 with \$2.8 million allocated to DLAP funded by the Community Road Safety Fund and included \$300,000 from the State Insurance Regulatory Authority.

The Road Safety Education Program provides educational resources and professional development for school teachers and early childhood educators throughout NSW. As part of the formal school curriculum, road safety for young people is supported by education resources.

Transport for NSW in partnership with local government, delivered free **Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Driver** workshop for parents and supervisors of learner drivers.

TAFE workshops targeting young apprentices, who are at high risk of crashes due to their age, inexperience and the need to travel long distances for work. Transport for NSW was the major sponsor of Western Sydney Local Health District's **bstreetsmart** event. The event compliments what students learn in road safety education programs in schools, such as strategies to help make decisions that improve their chances of avoiding a crash.

What are some of the challenges facing young people?

Research over the years has indicated that low rates of driver licensing in disadvantaged, at risk groups and indigenous communities (Cullen et al 2016) have been linked to:

- increased risk of transport-related injury (such as risk-taking activities, driving without a licence and vehicle overcrowding)
- reduced access to health services, employment and educational opportunities
- reduced opportunity to participate in social and cultural activities

Challenges and barriers faced by some young people and their families in obtaining their drivers licence can be complex.

1. Transport Disadvantage

People who live in peri-urban, rural and county areas may face transport disadvantage. Geographical remoteness can limit participation in programs and other support associated with obtaining and maintaining a driver's licence. This would be especially important in country areas. For young people, there may be less access to a Service NSW Centre or other location to sit the knowledge test, access lessons and other support. Young people and their families may

prefer to have a range of options available to their local area to sit the knowledge test at a familiar location such as local high school or TAFE.

Additional support could also be considered for neurodivergent people to complete the knowledge test in a different format such as verbally or having other reasonable adjustments. This may already be available for NDIS participants, however, could also be extended benefit other young people in rural and regional areas.

The predominate mode of transport for Penrith residents to commute by driving a car (66.5%). The average commuting distance for workers aged 15 years and over from the Penrith LGA is 20.81kms, and as people's income qualifications, occupation, and age increase, so does the distance people commute. For young people in rural and regional areas of NSW the daily commute can be much higher between 40km and 250km (ABS, 2016).

Holding a driver licence is a prerequisite for many jobs and even if it is not required for the role the issue of transport access is critical for young people accessing work in areas that do not have adequate public transport.

2. Cultural Background

The age standardised road fatality rate for Aboriginal people was around 2.1 times that for non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are almost three times as likely to die from transport-related injury (TfNSW, 2014). Further, Aboriginal people are 30% more likely to sustain serious transport-related injury than non-Aboriginal people (Henley, et al. 2013).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Census population of Penrith City was 7,742 in 2016. This represents 3.9% of people across the City identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people in driver licensing is a fundamental barrier to participation and a social determinant of health. Obtaining a driver's licence is often overlooked as a determinant of health with other factors including education, employment, and housing (Clapham, K. et al. 2017).

Penrith LGA had a lower proportion of overseas born people than Greater Sydney, NSW and Australia. The proportion of people born overseas increased from 21.8% in 2006 to 23.0% in 2016. Council acknowledges the current programs offered by Transport for NSW to provide culturally appropriate learn to drive course as some people may preference being taught to drive by another member of their cultural background and/or gender identity.

3. Licence Disadvantage

Licence disadvantage may be experienced by some vulnerable young people by ways of unpaid fines for other non-driving offences (not wearing a helmet when cycling; not having a valid ticket on public transport etc.) impacting their ability to obtaining their drivers licence.

4. GLS Framework

There may be challenges for the young person to achieve the necessary number of supervised driving hours to obtain a provisional licence. The young person may not have access to an eligible adult (parent, carer, other) to supervise and teach while on 'L' plates. While the introduction of the GLS Framework has significantly reduced the number learner drivers killed on our roads, there remains inequalities for some communities to following the framework.

5. Literacy

Lower levels of literacy for some young people and/or their families may be a challenge that may limit the ability to obtain or keep a driver's licence. Lower levels of literacy may be a barrier to obtaining legal advice and navigating the legal system.

6. Economic Hardship and Socio-Economic Index For Areas (SEIFA) Disadvantage

Families may experience economic hardship and the cost to obtain driver's license and access professional lessons is prohibitive. At the time of the 2016 ABS Census, Penrith's Socio-Economic Index For Areas (SEIFA) for relative socioeconomic disadvantage is 999. Leonay is the highest-ranking suburb at 1044 and North St Marys ranks the lowest at 833.

7. Homelessness

Young people who do not have a stable place of residence face additional pressures to obtaining their drivers' licence. Mission Australia's *Staying home: A Youth Survey* report on young people's experience of homelessness says one in six (17.1%) young people aged 15 to 19 who responded to Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2019 have been homeless (Mission Australia, 2019).

Suggestions

- Increase community awareness of the support available when obtaining your driver's licence including financial assistance, cultural appropriateness and other support for the supervising driver and learner driver based on the individual situation.
- Ensure adequate funding is provided to rural and regional community-based programs to better support the complex barriers faced by young people and their families. This could include:
 - Employment services (job seeker) could offer financial support to enable young people looking for work the opportunity to get their drivers licence.
 - Learn to drive programs that support people with a disability, neurodivergent or other diverse people.
 - Provide programs in a location that is more accessible for young people such as local High School and/or TAFE. Students could have an opportunity to log their hours, learning to drive within this educational context by qualified and experienced instructors using a safe vehicle.
 - Provide opportunities for young people and their families to access new and emerging technology such as driving simulation at these locations.
 - Provide free and accessible literacy courses to young people in a culturally responsive way that will improve young people ability to understand and apply the road user handbook when applying for their 'L' plates.
 - Increase the number (and potentially subsidise) of professional driving instructors of diverse backgrounds. These instructors could form part of a mentor program for young people.
 - Increase access and funding for young people to access free legal services to assist young people with their legal matters (on an individual basis) in order to enable them to access licencing.



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Conclusion

The role for government is to continue to provide a range of equitable opportunities for young people from rural and regional area in NSW to learn to drive. Penrith City Council welcomes the NSW Government continued investment under the GLS Framework and its programs that are targeted to increase the rates of driver licensing in disadvantaged, at risk groups and indigenous communities.

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