



keeping mobile

Vehicle modifications for
drivers and passengers
with a disability



Why are vehicle modifications required?

Vehicle modifications might be a legal requirement if you are a driver with a disability. Your vehicle may require some controls adapted to meet your needs allowing you to drive safely.

If you are a passenger with a disability, alterations might be needed to enable you to access and travel in the vehicle safely.

This brochure outlines the process of modifying a vehicle and some resources you might find helpful. Reading this may help you make the right decisions for your particular circumstances.



"Having a wheelchair hoist is great. It means I can store the wheelchair on the roof racks and not have to lift the chair in and out of the vehicle cabin after I transfer into the driver's seat - it really helps at the end of a long day when I'm feeling tired."

Roslyn



First, explore your mobility and transportation options

Before you commit to having a vehicle modified, you should think about the following:

- ✓ *Is your own vehicle the best option for you?*
- ✓ *Are there minor and straightforward modifications to consider?*
- ✓ *What about another type of vehicle? (For example, a modified minivan that complies with requirements)*
- ✓ *Where can you get independent advice about modifications?*
- ✓ *What are the costs involved in modifying a vehicle?*
- ✓ *How long are you likely to need the modified vehicle?*
- ✓ *How will the modifications impact other drivers/passengers that may use the vehicle?*
- ✓ *Do you need to store wheelchairs or other mobility aids?*
- ✓ *Do all passengers have the appropriate restraints?*
- ✓ *What are the ongoing registration, running, maintenance, depreciation and insurance costs?*
- ✓ *What are your rights as a consumer?*



This image shows a steering aid and a set of hand controls

"The spinner device is wonderful - it lets me get a firm grip on the steering wheel despite my arthritis."

Dot, aged 65

Modifying a vehicle – for drivers with a disability

If you have limited movement of your hands, arms or legs you may be able to drive safely with the right modifications to the vehicle and some individual training.

Common vehicle modifications available include steering aids, left foot accelerator pedals, hand controls and extended or extra mirrors. Vehicle modifications are regulated by VicRoads, and must meet regulatory compliance and safety requirements. You must obtain a licence with the relevant condition(s) if driving is only possible with these modifications.



Modifying a vehicle – for passengers with a disability

If you are a passenger with a disability your vehicle may need some modification. For example, if you are in a wheelchair you may need a rear or side access mounted hoist or platform to help you in and out of the vehicle. All passengers, including those with a disability, must comply with legal requirements for seatbelts or restraints. In addition, fitment of wheelchair occupant restraints, child restraints and vehicle hoist ramps must meet the relevant Australian Standards.



“My adult son uses a wheelchair for his mobility needs. The modified van with a platform means I can get him into and out of the van without lifting him - that’s important as I couldn’t manage the lifting otherwise. He can travel in his wheelchair due to the seatbelt and tie-down systems - I have peace of mind that he is safely secured while I’m driving.”

Rose, carer for Tim

Get expert assessment and advice before you decide to modify your vehicle

Driver and passenger needs vary and there are many different modifications available. All modifications must comply with Australian safety and design requirements. Vehicle modifications can be costly and quite complex to complete, so do your homework first. Obtain expert and independent advice (see page 15) before you modify your vehicle or purchase one to suit your needs.

If you have a disability or medical condition that might impact on driving, you must have a medical assessment and the report must go to VicRoads. This is a legal requirement.

If you are a passenger with a disability you should consult your doctor and occupational therapist (OT) about your transport needs.

OTs are trained health professionals who can help you work out what options suit your personal, lifestyle, financial and family circumstances. Some OTs specialise in driver assessment and are trained to evaluate the needs of drivers with disabilities: they will help evaluate your individual requirements, vehicle modification options, driver training and licensing requirements.

The Vehicle Assessment Signatory Scheme (VASS) is a scheme to certify modified, imported and individually constructed vehicles in Victoria. VASS signatories are able to issue an Approval Certificate for registering a modified vehicle in Victoria.



"The occupational therapy driver assessor was helpful. She sorted out what aids would best match my disability and family circumstances - and guided me towards available funding options."

Iris, aged 77

Vehicle choice – getting advice prior to purchase

Some vehicle types and models are more suited to different personal needs and modifications. If you are replacing a vehicle and need to have it modified, it is wise to seek expert assessment and independent advice prior to purchasing. Some older vehicles may not comply with funding scheme criteria for suitability to be modified.

Selecting the most suitable vehicle can make modification easier and cheaper and often preserve the vehicle's safety features. Some vehicle modifications will require a specialist VASS approval certificate to be submitted to VicRoads. Understanding your consumer rights can help avoid costly errors. Get advice and shop around, especially if you want to buy an already modified vehicle. See the RACV website for vehicle choice advice and the VicRoads website for vehicle standards information.

racv.com.au/carbuying
vicroads.vic.gov.au

Vehicle modifications – minor vs. major

Minor modifications usually require fitting removable devices with either minimal or no integration into the vehicle's existing electronic or other systems. Examples include spinner hand-grip devices, back support cushions and additional mirrors.

Major modifications might involve installing a ramp or hoist, lowering the floor or raising the roof to accommodate a passenger in a wheelchair,



or installing special steering or brake/accelerator systems. As a general rule, major modifications have a more complex assessment and approval process. Planning ahead is very important as installing and approving these modifications takes time. Major modifications will require a VASS approval certificate to be submitted to VicRoads before the vehicle can be registered and driven.



"My vehicle modifications make it easy for me to get into and out of my vehicle."

Mary, aged 42

Your rights and responsibilities as a driver

VicRoads has different licensing provisions that can allow individuals with disabilities to be independent drivers. This may include conditions relating to the driver (e.g., prosthesis must be worn) or the car (e.g., must have certain modifications). All drivers in Australia have a legal obligation to advise VicRoads of any long-term or permanent medical condition or disability that might impact upon their driving abilities. Failing to report may mean driving illegally; drivers risk fines or prosecution and car insurance could also be affected.

Drivers may be required to provide medical reports or undergo driving tests. Waiting lists may apply to some driver assessment services. VicRoads deals with these issues and you can contact them in confidence if you have a query.

VicRoads Medical Review

vicroads.vic.gov.au

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Driving whilst remaining seated in a wheelchair and using adapted controls is possible.

"I couldn't manage to work without being able to drive my car with vehicle modifications. The hand-controls allow me to steer, accelerate and brake safely without needing to use foot controls."

Mary, aged 42

Your rights and responsibilities as a vehicle owner

As a vehicle owner, you must abide by vehicle compliance and registration requirements. In Victoria, registered vehicles may only be modified in accordance with VicRoads guidelines. If major modifications are required, a VASS approval certificate is also required.

Modifications to a vehicle are required to comply with vehicle design standards and registration requirements and must be completed by a suitably qualified vehicle modifiers. As major modifications can be expensive and complex to arrange, vehicle owners are advised to consult with their OT and a VASS signatory in the decision-making stage to ensure that planned modifications will comply with requirements as well as meeting individual medical and/or disability requirements.

Any modification that impacts on the structural integrity of the vehicle, its handling characteristics, safety features (e.g. ESC, airbags), or compliance issues must be certified by a VASS signatory. Prior to purchase and modification, VASS signatories, together with your OT, should be able to advise you about acceptable modifications. The required documentation must be completed in order to obtain the VASS approval certificate which needs to be lodged with VicRoads. Information about this is available on the VicRoads website (check out the Australian Design Rules, Vehicle Standards Bulletins and Information Sheets).

As the vehicle owner, it is also your responsibility to advise your insurance company of any vehicle modifications to ensure that your policy is appropriate for your needs.



What costs are involved?

You may need to pay for:

- ✓ *Medical consultations*
- ✓ *Occupational therapy assessment services*
- ✓ *Driver rehabilitation (learning to use the modifications) and re-licensing costs*
- ✓ *VASS signatory services (provided by private consulting engineers)*
- ✓ *Cost of modifications (e.g. purchase, transport, installation)*
- ✓ *Ongoing costs (e.g. related to maintenance, computer software upgrades)*
- ✓ *Vehicle transfer costs, registration, stamp duty, etc.*
- ✓ *Any change in vehicle insurance premiums*

Funding sources

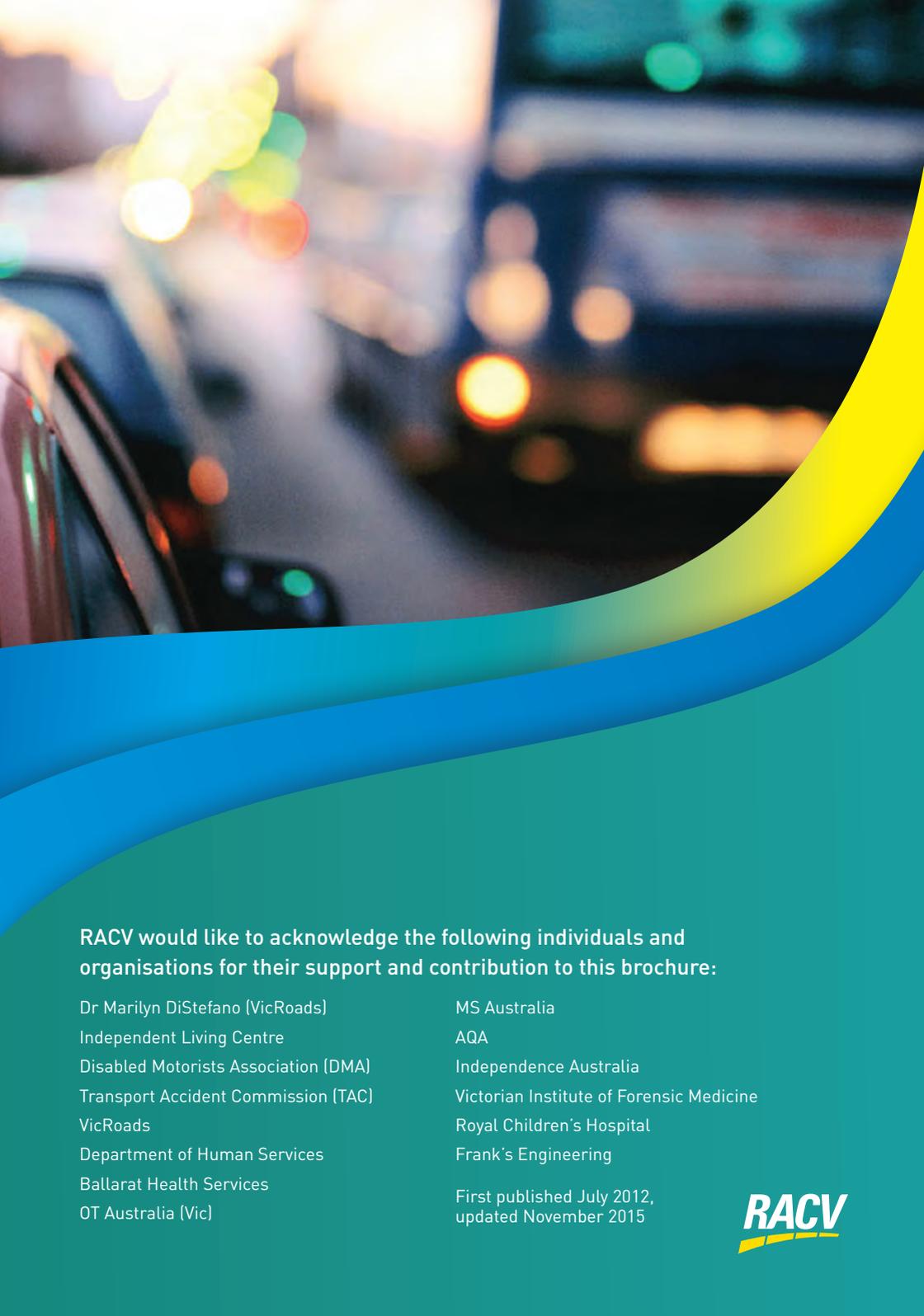
Check if you are eligible for funding:

- The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) will pay for treatment and benefits for people injured in transport accidents.
tac.vic.gov.au 1300 654 329
- Other insurers, if you have a compensable injury (e.g. workers' compensation)
- Employment Assistance Fund is a Commonwealth Government scheme which can fund work-related expenses, including vehicle modifications.
jobaccess.gov.au 1800 464 800
- Department of Veterans Affairs Rehabilitation Appliances Program funds vehicle modifications for eligible veterans.
dva.gov.au 133 254
- Vehicle Modifications Subsidy Scheme (VMSS) provides eligible Victorians with subsidy funding of up to \$10,000 (over a seven-year period) for prescribed vehicle modifications.
swep.bhs.org.au/vmss 1300 747 937



More information and advice

- **Occupational Therapists** - speak to an occupational therapist at your local health centre or hospital or ask your doctor to refer you to one. OT-Australia: Victoria can provide information on how to find an OT generalist or driver assessor
otausvic.com.au 9481 6866
- **RACV** - advice on vehicle choice and car running costs
racv.com.au 9790 2190
- **VicRoads** - VASS, Medical Review, licensing and registration of vehicles with modifications
vicroads.vic.gov.au 13 11 71
- **Independent Living Centre** - free internet database, visit the centre to see the display of some vehicle aides, telephone advisory service, special display days
ilcaustralia.org 1300 885 886
- **Vehicle Modifications Subsidy Scheme (VMSS)** - funding scheme details, application forms, general advice
swep.bhs.org.au/vmss 1300 747 937
- **Disabled Motorists Association** - general advice about modifying vehicles, what the process entails, referral to driver assessment and retraining services, hire/purchase of wheelchair accessible vehicles
disabledmotorists.org.au 9386 0413
- **Transport Accident Commission (TAC)** - information on eligibility for compensation, application forms and vehicle modification information for people injured in traffic accidents
tac.vic.gov.au 1800 332 556
- **Support for spinal chord injuries and similar disabilities**, e.g. Australian Quadraplegic Association (AQA)
aqavic.org.au 9489 0777
- **Transportation of Children and Youth with Additional Needs**
rch.org.au/tocan 9345 5085



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