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Please Quote: VRPC008630  
(File No: PC036808)

Ms Mikaela Meggetto  
Coroner's Registrar  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh Street  
**SOUTHBANK VIC 3006**

Dear Ms Meggetto

**INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF JUNE DANGERFIELD:  
COR 2016 005539**

Thank you for your letter dated 31 July 2018 regarding Coroner Audrey Jamieson's findings and recommendation. Firstly, VicRoads extends sincere condolences to Mrs Dangerfield's family and friends.

Her Honour recommended that Transport for Victoria and VicRoads consider a mechanism for providing feedback regarding the fitness to drive medical review process to reporting General Practitioners.

**Preliminary matter - Fitness to drive activities to be undertaken by  
VicRoads over 2018**

As noted by Coroner Jamieson, VicRoads has previously detailed considerations and a plan of activities over 2018 regarding mandatory medical reporting in formal responses to Coroner Jamieson regarding investigations without inquest including (but not limited to) the responses submitted in December 2017 [Pamela Elsdon (COR 2016 005554) and Frederick Hylla (COR 2016 004001)]. We will also incorporate the response to providing feedback to medical practitioners regarding the fitness to drive process within this report which is due 1 December 2018. We outline our response here to the recommendation to retain the integrity and completeness of the Coroner reporting process for the public.

**Response**

The coroner's recommendation is under consideration and we have introduced immediate improvements to strengthen the sharing of medical fitness to drive information across health practitioners as described below.

**VicRoads current Medical Review process**

- (1) VicRoads acknowledges and supports the integral role that medical practitioners play in the driver medical review process and in applying the national Austroads Fitness to Drive guidelines (1).

- (2) Patients rely on doctors' advice about how medical conditions, disabilities and treatments might affect driving and about their driver legal reporting obligations. They also seek the input of doctors to complete medical fitness to drive reports which are a compulsory component of the medical review process. For patients with long term chronic health conditions or disabilities, doctors routinely enquire about how health conditions or disabilities are impacting daily living activities including general mobility and driving.
- (3) VicRoads' current self and community referral model of initial notification to Medical Review allows any member of the public to report their concerns about a driver's medical condition or disability and its effect on the driver's ability to drive safely. Some notifications come directly from doctors or health professionals.
- (4) A significant proportion of drivers also self-notify in fulfilment of their legal obligation to advise the licensing authority directly of any permanent or long-term injury, illness or disability that may impair their ability to drive safely.
- (5) When a notification is received by VicRoads Medical Review (from any source) the licence holder receives a letter by mail advising them of the notification, explaining the medical review process and (if not already received) requesting them to provide a medical fitness to drive report from their usual treating general practitioner.
- (6) As part of the medical review process, licence holders may also be required to attend medical specialists or undertake on-road competency tests either with VicRoads or with Occupational Therapy Driving Assessors. VicRoads does not direct drivers to any health professionals. Drivers consult with their General Practitioner regarding access to medical specialists and they choose occupational therapy driver assessors and optometrists either in consultation with their doctor or rehabilitation team, or independently.
- (7) For some patients with complex or advanced medical conditions or disabilities, the medical review process can be prolonged due to waiting times to undertake medical specialist reviews or on-road competency tests. Additionally, VicRoads refers two to three hundred cases per month to its Medical Review Panel for expert transportation medical advice. (This service is currently provided by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine.)
- (8) VicRoads Medical Review is responsible for final licensing decisions, taking into account information from the driver, other notification sources, all relevant medical and health professional sources as well as from police and the courts. For the more complex cases, the medical review process and final licensing decisions may take several months due to the case-by-case assessment process.
- (9) The majority of people referred to medical review for assessment retain their licence, some with conditions (e.g. periodical review); and only ~12% are assessed as not fit to drive and have their licence suspended or cancelled.
- (10) VicRoads writes to the licence holder to advise of the final medical review licensing decision. The majority of letters contain additional advice such as periodical review periods (e.g. annual, every 2 years) and conditions that may have been placed on the licence (e.g. automatic transmission only, radius restriction, no night driving). Correspondence may also be accompanied by information fact sheets (e.g. dementia and driving, diabetes and driving, getting around without a car).




### **Mechanism for providing feedback to reporting General Practitioners**

- (11) VicRoads has considered the existing mechanisms which apply within the Medical Review process to provide feedback to General Practitioners.
- (12) VicRoads current operational processes and resourcing do not allow for the automatic sharing with General Practitioners of licensing decisions or all the information gathered during a medical review process including specialist medical or on-road competency test results.
- (13) VicRoads has been working to improve the fitness to drive medical review assessment and submission process via the development of an online medical report form. This process will enable General Practitioners to complete, retain a pdf copy, and receive acknowledgement of receipt, of submitted fitness to drive medical report forms.
- (14) At present, there is no provision within the online medical report form platform for automatic generation of feedback of medical review licensing outcomes to be sent back to the general practitioner. Nor is there provision to share information from medical specialists, optometrists or occupational therapy driving assessors.
- (15) However, in the future, there may be an opportunity for VicRoads to leverage the myVicRoads platform to provide an internet portal for drivers to check their case review status and outcomes on a computer or smart device. This would facilitate fitness to drive conversations in doctors consulting rooms.
- (16) VicRoads supports information sharing with health professionals within the requirements of the privacy, health records and other relevant legislation. VicRoads staff routinely either initiate, or respond to, phone, email or written contact with medical and other health professionals to clarify the medical review process, fitness to drive criteria, licensing provisions and to provide medical clearance to proceed with on-road competency tests.
- (17) It is standard health professional practice to advise the other treating practitioners involved in a patient's care, of the outcomes of assessments or interventions. For example, specialists routinely provide summary reports back to General Practitioners to assist with patient management and in recognition of the General Practitioners' important overall patient's health co-ordination role.
- (18) Similarly, occupational therapy driver assessors routinely provide summary reports of their driver assessment and rehabilitation outcomes to General Practitioners. This is documented in the competency standards which apply to these professionals (2) and has been confirmed as standard practice with the Occupational Therapy Association (Victoria) Driving Special Interest Group (3).
- (19) The provision of information about the final licensing decision to a General Practitioner, whilst indicative of the VicRoads medical review outcome, would in isolation of the other sources which have contributed to the decision (e.g. medical specialist or on-road competency test results), fail to convey the most relevant details of the patient's functional status or compliance with the national fitness to drive criteria.

- (20) In the absence of a current technology based system to facilitate a mechanism for sharing detailed fitness to drive patient information, VicRoads believes the sharing of medical and health professional information is best undertaken directly across health professionals involved in patient care, aligned to standard health professional practice.
- (21) VicRoads has undertaken steps to strengthen the sharing of medical fitness to drive information across health practitioners, particularly for those patients with complex or advanced medical conditions or disabilities who may be at higher road safety risk. We have:
- a. reminded health practitioners to share information with the patients' general practitioner in our newly developed health practitioner and fitness to drive fact sheets: to be completed by end October 2018,
  - b. reinforced to occupational therapy driver assessors the need to share results of on-road competency tests with their patients' general practitioners via our regular e-newsletter: completed on 14 September 2018 and
  - c. added a line to the VicRoads Occupational Therapy driver evaluation report declaration which seeks confirmation from the signing health professional that a copy of the patients on-road competency test has been sent to the General Practitioner: to be completed by end of November 2018 aligned with other required changes.
- (22) VicRoads has also sought to facilitate regular interaction between General Practitioners and their patients related to fitness to drive. We added information to all our customer licensing decision letters in mid-September 2018 to remind them to share the outcomes of their medical review process with their treating doctors to facilitate optimal medical condition and disability management.

If you require any further information please don't hesitate to contact VicRoads.

Yours sincerely



**ANITA CURNOW**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACCESS AND OPERATIONS**

**04/10/2018**

- (1) Austroads, (2016), Assessing Fitness to Drive for commercial and private vehicle drivers: Medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines – a resource for health professionals in Australia, Sydney: Austroads  
<https://austroads.com.au/drivers-and-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive>
- (2) OT Australia (Vic) (1998). Competency Standards for Occupational Therapy Driver Assessors: Victoria: OT Australia (Vic)  
Note: These standards have undergone a review and update process: a second edition dated 2018 will shortly be published.
- (3) Personal communication with OT Australia – Vic Driving Special Interest Group Convenors and attendees at 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2018 meeting held at VicHealth, Carlton, Melbourne.