

Substance impaired driving education - a collaborative, systems approach to educating drivers to become responsible, informed, Safe Users

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Abstract

The New Zealand Transport Agency led Substance Impaired Driving education project in New Zealand uses a collaborative systems approach to educating drivers to take personal responsibility and become Safe Users. Data shows that New Zealand drivers, their passengers and other road users are at far greater risk from substance impaired driving than previously thought. Current knowledge of substance impaired driving among drivers is low at a time when an increasing focus on health and safety requires responsible behaviour. The project reaches drivers through trusted influences (health professionals and others) using collaboratively developed education resources.

Project background and model

This project, led by NZ Transport Agency, is a collaborative partnership across Government Agencies and non-government organisations. This has enabled the project to formulate effective solutions, to access international and local evidence, and to reach and motivate stakeholders in a range of sectors so that they can educate drivers. Partners include Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Health, and New Zealand Police, Drug Foundation, Royal New Zealand College of GPs, Pharmaceutical Society, and Automobile Association.

New Zealand drivers, their passengers and other road users are at risk from substance impaired driving from drugs and medications used with or without alcohol. These risks include; death, serious injury, loss of reputation, criminal conviction, suspension or revocation of their drivers' licence(s) and loss of employment (where it is driving based or commuting becomes untenable).

The Substance Impaired Driving project engages with stakeholders as trusted influencers of drivers who can educate and inform drivers to take personal responsibility. The project worked with trusted influencers to develop education resources that are persuasive and motivate change in influencers' behaviour and the drivers that they influence.

The project model, in its entirety, contributes towards Safe Users who are educated at school as they become learner drivers, educated by their health professionals when they are prescribed potentially impairing medications, advised by their employers as it relates to health and safety (with an initial focus on the Heavy Transport sector), and informed by their local traffic Police whose roles include education, detection and enforcement.

The Substance Impaired Driving project in New Zealand initially focused on engaging health professionals to educate their clients/patients at risk of substance impaired driving.

Following the development of resources for health professionals and their clients/patients, piloting in health services showed that the resources would be used and can contribute to increased driver knowledge and responsible driver behaviours. The education of drivers uses an interactive resource that covers the law, their current medications, whether these can impair, signs of impairment, when and whether they can drive (or drink alcohol and drive) safely while taking their medications.

These education resources are being rolled out to the health sector with support of project partners, and further collaboration is underway with the Heavy Transport sector to develop fit for purpose education for this sector.

Key learnings

Key learnings of the Substance Impaired Driving project include:

- Collaboration has enabled access to a far stronger evidence base.
- New Zealand stakeholders highly value, and are motivated by, New Zealand evidence.
- Mining administrative datasets provides startling evidence for informing change across the Safe Road System.
- Collaboration enhances stakeholder ownership and enables relevant and effective solutions.
- The appearance of collaboration (through multiple endorsements of education resources, for example) strengthens the messages and motivates stakeholders to participate in the solution.
- Knowledge levels about this emergent topic are very low across most stakeholders groups, especially drivers, such that access to educative resources that promote personal responsibility may be a particularly effective, and cost effective, solution.