

Keys2drive – Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers

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Introduction

Getting a driver's licence is an exciting time for most young Australians. The freedom to drive gives them independence, providing new opportunities for work, study and socialising. In many ways, it is an important step on the journey from a teenager to adulthood.

But many, AAA among them, believe that the elevated crash rate of young drivers means this freedom comes at too high a cost. We believe more should be done to help significantly reduce the crash risk for young people without negating their ability to travel.

AAA is developing a program – *keys2drive* – which is designed to help Learner drivers get more real-world, on-road supervised driving experience before they go solo. *keys2drive* would also give supervising drivers, who are often the Learner's parents, a chance to brush up on their own skills.

Astonishing numbers

In 2006, 1,601 people were killed on Australian roads – on average nearly five every day. Young people aged 16 to 25 accounted for nearly one third of these deaths, despite representing less than 15% of the population.¹

As drivers, 17 to 20 year olds are three times more likely to be involved in a serious crash than drivers aged 21 years, and more than 11 times more likely to be killed than drivers aged 40 to 44 years.²

As well as leaving permanent physical and mental scars on the individuals, friends and families, road crashes are also an extraordinary drain on the Australian economy, costing some \$17 billion a year in terms of hospital care, emergency services, legal fees and lost productivity. That's equivalent to 2.5% of Gross Domestic Product.³

1 ATSB Fatal Road Crash Database; ABS Population Statistics

2 ATSB, 2004. "Road Safety in Australia: A Publication Commemorating World Health Day 2004."

3 Connelly, L.B. and Supangan, R., 2006. "The economic costs of road crashes: Australia, States and Territories." *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, Vol. 38 No. 6.

An issue of national importance

The importance placed on driver education and training is almost universal. AAA's national surveys show that 84% of respondents rate driver education and training as either an "extremely" or "very" important way of reducing road deaths and injuries. Road safety statistics show that young drivers are at exceptionally high risk of being involved in a crash regardless of the State or Territory they live in.

Driver safety is clearly a national issue and a case exists that a national approach to aspects of driver training and education would be beneficial.

The high levels of young driver risk result principally from factors of inexperience, age, and gender. This risk is aggravated by the circumstances under which many young people drive.

Young people, especially males, are over-represented in crashes:

- at high speed;
- at night;
- with similarly aged passengers;
- involving alcohol; and
- when not wearing seatbelts.

In an attempt to address some of the underlying attitudinal and behavioural causes of young driver risk, the Commonwealth Government initiated the Novice Driver Education Trial. The trial is being conducted in partnership with the NSW and Victorian Governments and industry, including RACV. It targets provisional licence holders – that is, those able to drive solo. Unfortunately the trial will not be complete before 2010, meaning implementation of any resultant national program would not be able to occur until after that time.

There is scope for the Commonwealth Government to support a program that complements the National Driver Education Trial, targeting drivers at the Learner permit stage — before they begin solo driving. The aim of such an approach would be to "knock the top off" the spike in risk that novice drivers face when they first begin driving solo (see Figure 1).

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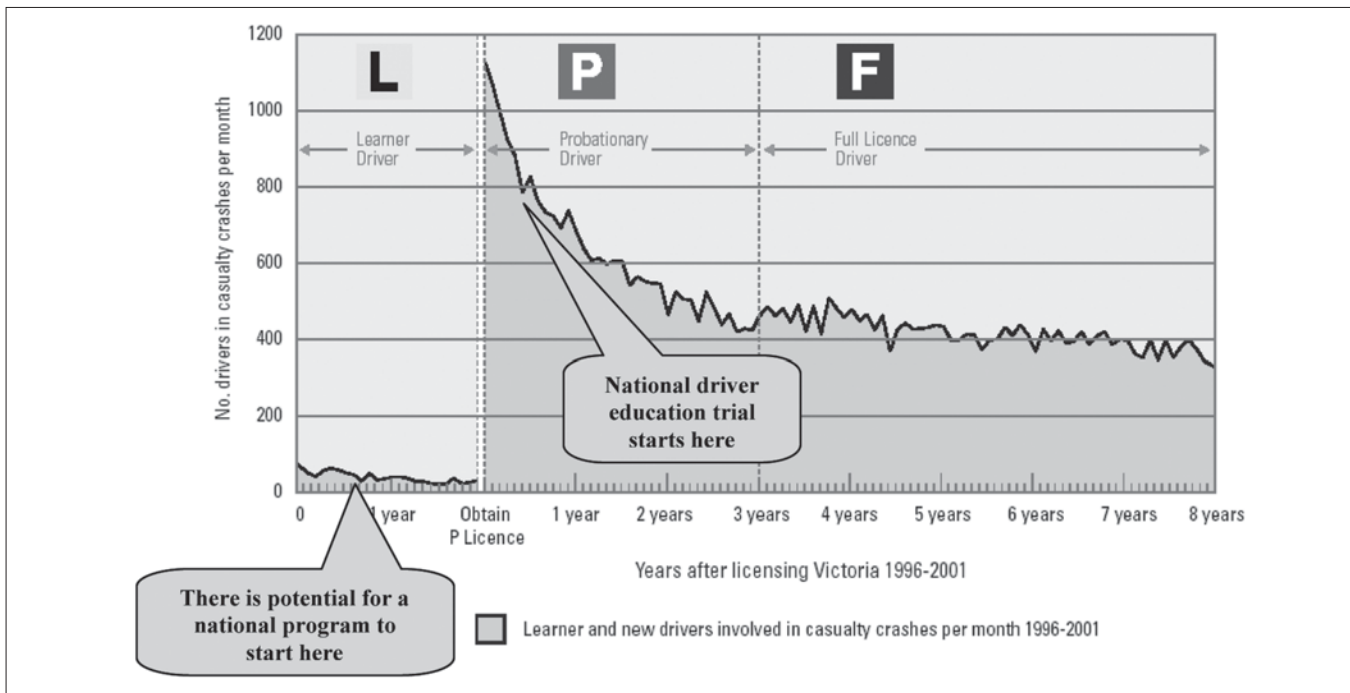
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Figure 1 Novice driver risk (VicRoads, 2005)



Getting better on-road experience

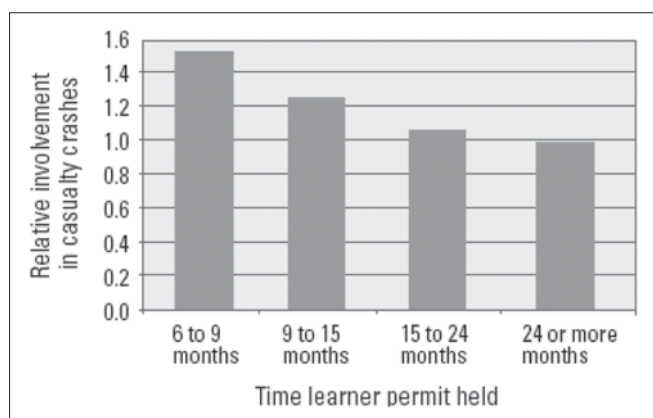
Learning to drive is a highly complex and challenging task, so practice is important. In fact, if there is one sure thing in driver training and education, it's that high levels of supervised practice, involving a variety of driving circumstances before making the transition to driving solo, result in fewer deaths.

Experience in Sweden, which has one the best road safety records in the world, showed that increasing supervised, on-road experience to about 120 hours reduced crashes in the two years following licensing by about 40%, compared to those drivers who only got 45 hours experience.⁴

⁴ OECD, 2006. "Young Drivers: The Road to Safety."

VicRoads research supports this case. It showed that Learner drivers who complete a longer Learner period, and therefore get more on-road experience, were less likely to be involved in a crash in the first year of their provisional licence period (see Figure 2 below).⁵

Figure 2 More experience as a Learner improves safety (VicRoads, 2005)



Most States and Territories have now introduced a requirement that Learners obtain a minimum number of hours of on-road driving experience.⁶

However, many supervisors – who are often parents, brothers, sisters or friends – find teaching their Learner a daunting and stressful task. Many supervisors also underestimate the risk that young drivers face. As a result, research shows that Learner drivers are not getting an optimal number of hours on the road and are not being exposed to sufficient variety of road types and conditions.⁷

keys2drive: AAA’s plan to help Learner drivers become safer drivers

AAA is developing a national model that could help Learner drivers become safer drivers. It would require a collaborative effort by the Australian motoring clubs and driver training industry and the Commonwealth Government.

⁵ VicRoads, 2005. “Young Driver Safety and Graduated Licensing: Discussion Paper.”

⁶ NSW and Victoria have introduced a minimum of 120 hours, Queensland has introduced a minimum of 100 hours, South Australia and Tasmania have a minimum of 50 hours, Western Australia has a minimum of 25 hours, and the Northern Territory and ACT currently have no minimum. In NSW, Victoria, Queensland, and the Northern Territory Learner permits have a minimum tenure of 12 months. South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT have a minimum tenure of 6 months, and Western Australia has no minimum tenure. Test procedures and also vary from state to state.

⁷ Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC), 2005. “Development of a Model Resource for Parents as Supervisory Drivers.”

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The model, named *keys2drive*, is based on the principle that learning to drive should be a three-way partnership between the Learner, their supervising driver and a qualified driving instructor. *keys2drive*, would aim to foster that partnership, and provide the opportunity for every Learner driver and their supervisor to increase the quality of their on-road experience. There would be three key components of *keys2drive*.

1. The first component would be one Commonwealth funded professional driving lesson by a qualified driving instructor for Learner drivers when they bring their supervisor. The lesson would be based on RACV’s existing *Parent Plus* program (see box below).

The *keys2drive* lesson would involve a specially tailored driving lesson for both Learner and supervisor. The aim is to help build the supervising driver’s skills and confidence, so that they are more likely to spend time in the car with their Learner. Supervising drivers would receive comprehensive advice on how to assess whether their Learner has developed sufficient skills in lower risk level driving environments before progressing to higher risk environments — like driving on busier roads, at night and in the rain.

After the first year of the program, RACV surveyed 130 parents who had participated in *Parent Plus*. 93% of respondents felt that their *Parent Plus* lesson was useful assisting them to supervise their Learner driver. In particular, as a result of the *Parent Plus* lesson:

- 66% of respondents thought that they would be more likely to provide more on-road supervised driving experience to their Learner;
- 73% of respondents felt more confident to give their Learner driver experience in various on-road conditions; and
- 84% of respondents had a better understanding of how to help their Learner driver develop their driving skills.

2. The second component of *keys2drive* would be a voluntary accreditation scheme for professional driving instructors. This component would be based on RACWA’s pilot scheme (from which the name *keys2drive* is taken). It would go beyond that required by the normal statutory licensing process, to encourage best practice within the industry, and would seek to actively promote those driver instructors who are accredited.

Accreditation would include committing to a Code of Conduct and successfully completing an annual two-stage review — a desk-top review and a practical review. These reviews could include checks of statutory licensing details, a ‘working with children’ check, examination of the instructor’s knowledge of current road rules, their ability to instruct others, and their ability to deliver *keys2drive* lessons. And consistent with the motoring clubs’ promotion of safe vehicles, accreditation may also require that by year 3 of the program, all tuition be undertaken in a car with a 4-star ANCAP safety rating.

3. The final component would be a *keys2drive* website, which would promote accredited driving instructors, and act as a central, national portal to jurisdiction-specific advice on every step involved in obtaining a licence, reducing crash risk, choosing a driving instructor, lesson plans, quick-reference checklists, interactive tests and competitions. The site would reference existing particularly good sites, such as VicRoads’ *L-Site*.

Depending on the level of uptake of the free lessons, we estimate the cost of *keys2drive* over five years to be between \$21,995,000 and \$37,995,000.⁸

Summary

keys2drive could be the most extensive and far-reaching novice driver training and education initiative seen in Australia, delivering a tangible benefit into the hands of the some 320,000 drivers who obtain a Learner permit every year. The program would not only help Learners, but also give supervisors the opportunity to brush up on their own skills and knowledge.

⁸ The majority of this cost would be a result of the free lessons, which we have assumed would be \$50 each.

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