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Addressing the barriers to driver licensing for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and South Australia

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Abstract

Objective: Low rates of driver licensing have been linked to increased risk of transport-related injury, and reduced access to health services, employment and educational opportunities in the Aboriginal population. This paper reports on how barriers to obtaining a driver licence are being addressed in four Aboriginal communities in New South Wales and South Australia.

Methods: Qualitative data were collected over a four-month period in 2013. Interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders (n=31) and 11 focus groups with Aboriginal participants (n=46) were analysed thematically using a framework approach.

Results: Factors facilitating licensing included: family support, professional lessons, alternative testing and programs that assist with literacy, fines management, financial assistance and access to a supervising driver. Stakeholders recommended raising awareness of existing services and funding community-based service provision to promote access to licensing.

Discussion: Facilitating licence participation requires systemic change and long-term investment to ensure interagency collaboration, service use and sustainability of relevant programs, including job search agencies.

Implications for public health: The disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people in driver licensing is a fundamental barrier to participation and a social determinant of health. Understanding the factors that promote licensing is crucial to improving access for under-serviced populations; recommendations provide pragmatic solutions to address licensing disadvantage.

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Addressing the barriers to driver licensing for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and South Australia

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The social determinants underlying Aboriginal health are well documented;^{1,2} however, driver licensing is often overlooked among the broader determinants such as education, employment and housing. There is a growing body of research that demonstrates that Aboriginal communities represent an under-served population in relation to driver licensing.³ Low licensing rates have a substantial impact on some Aboriginal communities, contributing to reduced access to employment, education, health services, and social and cultural opportunities.⁴ There is also concern that reduced options for transport contribute to Aboriginal people making unsafe transport choices including overcrowding of vehicles and driving unlicensed. Unsafe transport behaviours have been implicated in higher mortality rates with Aboriginal people almost three times as likely to die from transport-related injury.⁵⁻⁷ Further, Aboriginal people are 30% more likely to sustain serious transport-related injury than non-Aboriginal Australians.⁵ Remoteness is a key consideration. Indigenous people and others have higher injury rates if they live in more remote places, and a larger proportion of Indigenous people than others live in the more remote areas of Australia.⁵ Reduced transport options are also implicated in the over-representation of Aboriginal people

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Key words: Aboriginal, driver licensing, NSW, SA, Australia

incarcerated for transport offences. This is frequently due to a cycle of unauthorised driving following the suspension of a driver licence due to fine defaults, leading to court imposed licence disqualification, further fine defaults and – potentially – imprisonment.⁷

The literature available on this topic highlights the many barriers that Aboriginal

people face in obtaining a driver licence but has to date has provided little insight into what is in place to facilitate them doing so. Barriers include a large number of factors related to social, educational and economic disadvantage, such as the financial cost and poorer literacy, as well as inequities associated with geographical remoteness such as access

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to a licensing authority. The introduction of graduated licensing across Australian States and Territories has also created difficulties for Aboriginal people who experience adversity in accessing vehicles and supervising drivers to meet the compulsory supervised driving requirements.⁸

This research aimed to better understand how the barriers to Aboriginal people gaining a driver licence were being addressed and overcome in some communities. As part of a larger study involving an in-depth examination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community experiences around travel, road safety and driver licensing in two States – New South Wales (NSW) and South Australia (SA) – we collected and analysed both quantitative (survey) and qualitative data (focus groups and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders) at four sites: Redfern and Griffith in NSW; and Ceduna and Port Lincoln in SA. The survey has been described previously in detail.^{9–11} This paper presents the results of the qualitative enquiry that explored factors facilitating Aboriginal people gaining a licence and potential solutions to reduce barriers to licensing in Aboriginal communities.

Methods

A staged approach was taken to the collection and analysis of the mixed methods data. A cross-sectional study undertaken in the first stage of the project provided quantitative data at the individual level about factors relating to: the access and barriers to transport; prevention and management of road injury; and social outcomes.³ The analysis of the survey data allowed us to identify the key issues for each of the communities. To explore identified issues in more depth, we collected qualitative data several months after the conduct of the survey at each of the four sites, which comprised one urban site (Redfern, NSW), two regional sites (Griffith, NSW and Port Lincoln, SA), and one remote site (Ceduna, SA).

Qualitative data were obtained from interviews with 31 stakeholders and 46 Aboriginal participants of 11 focus groups across the four study sites over a four-month period between August and November 2013. Interviewees were not asked their Aboriginal status; however, people in Aboriginal designated positions and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations were well represented among the stakeholder

group. The wide range of organisations that were considered stakeholders in the process of achieving licensing are listed in Supplementary Table 1 (available online). The agencies were classified into: licensing specific agencies; job service agencies; employment agencies; community development agencies; community brokerage agencies; justice systems – police and courts; and state government licensing authorities.

The purpose of the stakeholder interviews was to ascertain what programs were operating in each site in order to identify strengths and gaps in programs, funding and responsiveness to community need. We identified local and regional representatives from key government stakeholders including agencies representing transport, justice and police, as well as representatives from local community groups at each site. As we sought to obtain a diverse range of stakeholder views, including service providers from a range of industry sectors and professional groups, interviewees were asked to recommend other potential interviewees (snowball sampling). The purpose of the focus groups was to enable an in-depth exploration of each of the key licensing and road safety issues that had been identified in the survey conducted in the first phase of the study with adult Aboriginal community members from across a range of age groups. We recruited and trained Aboriginal research assistants to moderate the focus groups in community settings. Separate groups restricted to males (aged 18–59 years), females (18–65 years), and young people (16–30 years) were conducted at all but one of the sites.

The qualitative data were transcribed by an independent company; transcriptions were checked for accuracy by a member of the research team (KH). Initial categories were generated by the research team. These were expanded, refined and amalgamated into themes by KH and KC; discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was reached. A framework approach^{12–14} was applied to the thematic analysis of the focus groups and the in-depth interview data to allow for comparison between community member (focus group) and stakeholder (interview) perspectives. QSR N-Vivo Version 10 software was used to manage all qualitative data. The initial categories that emerged from the data were grouped thematically as barriers to licensing or facilitators to licensing. While barriers and facilitators were present

as themes in both the focus group and interview data, the content of these themes varied between the participant groups. Using a framework method, these data were tabulated to allow thematic exploration across the participant groups (sources). The barriers and corresponding facilitators across the sources, with key examples from the community and stakeholder data, are presented in Table 1 (supervised driving practice and costs), Table 2 (literacy) and Table 3 (lack of documentation, outstanding fines and state debt).

Ethical approval was obtained from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW Ethics Committee (AHMRC) for the NSW sites, and from the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee and the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee of the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia (AHCSA) for the SA sites.

Results

Suggestions for how to address Aboriginal licensing

Stakeholders were asked to make suggestions about how to address the Aboriginal licensing issues in their communities. Of the large number of suggestions, the most frequently mentioned were: 1) job service networks playing a more active role in helping Aboriginal clients gain a licence; 2) better use of work and development orders (WDOs); 3) inclusion of driver training in high school education; 4) funding licensing programs and community education courses that included basic literacy skills; 5) better provision of services locally in regional and remote areas; and 6) legal solutions, such as court diversionary programs.

Job service networks

Holding a driver licence is a prerequisite for many jobs, and the link between holding a driver licence and employment was made by most of the stakeholders interviewed. Job Services Australia (JSA) is the Australian Government employment services system set up in 2009 to assist job seekers find employment (<https://employment.gov.au/job-services-australia-jsa>). JSA operates through a network of organisations funded by the Australian Government to provide employment services to job seekers and employers. Many stakeholders were emphatic that JSAs should play a more

active role in helping young people get a licence, to improve their chances of attaining employment. The degree to which JSAs provide support for licensing appears to vary from region to region.

“Job networks are providing support in Blacktown, not so much in Redfern or La Perouse.” (Male stakeholder, government organisation)

JSA support for licensing has also varied over time, with some stakeholders claiming that JSAs used to provide opportunities for driver licensing but this has reduced over the past few years. Associated with this was a strong critique of the way JSAs currently ‘cherry pick’ their clients; despite the funding they receive to assist Aboriginal unemployed people and the long-term unemployed, many

agencies assisting those with the greatest job prospects and leave aside the long-term unemployed people who they may have to spend more money on. Stakeholders thought that JSAs could assist their clients to pay for the costs associated with licensing because of clear association between having a licence and having a job.

Table 1: Barriers and facilitators to licensing: supervised driving practice and costs.

Barrier	Facilitator	Source	Perspectives	Example
Supervised driving practice	Log book hours with family or friends	Focus group	Family or friends commonly supervised learner driving practice for younger participants. Young adult children also supervised older participants; this was not considered a burden.	I can get my aunty to do it or I can ask one of her friends.
		Stakeholder Interview	Many clients had limited access to a vehicle to do their supervised driving practice.	Oh, I think, just availability of a vehicle or a driver to sit in the car with people who don't have that access to that. And I think just young people not being able to have access to a mentor, or a supervising driver, another car – maybe their family don't have a car that they can use, especially parents, time restrictions.
	Professional driving lessons	Focus group	The cost was prohibitive for many families.	we struggle sometimes because we've got a big family and I'd rather have other stuff than go for a driving lesson.
		Stakeholder Interview	Professional driving lessons were recommended as a sensible investment which would assist individuals in becoming safe and legal drivers. This could also benefit other community members and future generations by breaking the cycle of low licensing rates.	Why not have them get a quality lesson from an instructor where they're going to be given really good instruction to take them into the future... and it's only for this generation because once they start getting their licences and they've got employment opportunities, created by having a licence, then they can move it on to the next generation.
Mentor programs		Focus group	Of the few participants who mentioned mentor programs the general consensus was that such programs had not achieved longevity.	Years ago when I got my licence there was a program around the Kooris... but they virtually haven't got anything like that now.
		Stakeholder Interview	Difficulties in recruiting mentors were an ongoing challenge to the success of these programs.	They just couldn't quite get it off the ground with getting the volunteers or mentors to come in for the training sessions I think.
Costs	Financial assistance	Focus group	The cost of obtaining a license was seen as a barrier. The \$67 paid to an individual professional driving instructor was a substantial cost for one participant. Licensing programs such as the ones offered by TAFE, some Job Service Australia and community programs covered the costs of professional driving lessons.	I paid the first time and I think that's why I didn't go. I have a job but because I don't really get that much so \$67 is a lot for me.
		Stakeholder Interview	While Job Service Australia agencies were an untapped source of funding support, some licensing specific programs did provide financial assistance for licensing costs.	Personally, I think the job networks should be assisting in that, they get X amount of dollars for each client on their books. I think some of that money should be used for getting their Ls and even paying for lessons.

Table 2: Barriers and facilitators to licensing: literacy.

Barrier	Facilitator	Source	Perspectives	Example
Literacy	Alternative testing	Focus group	Completing the learner knowledge test through the TAFE course was considered 'easier' than going to the registry office for testing. This is possibly also due to familiarity and the confidence gained through the way TAFE delivers courses; participants specifically mentioned both the support from being part of a group and having instructors to help you throughout (individual assistance).	It's like I know it, so I'm going through it slow but then in the end it's like the questions, how they are worded on the test rather than in the book.
		Stakeholder Interview	Stakeholders perceived a need for greater provision of oral exams at the registry for clients who have literacy issues that impact their performance on the computer-based learner knowledge test.	I think so and you also you would feel a bit of hope that if you haven't got the ability I think you can still do a verbal test rather than a written test. You've just got to organise it.
	Other courses	Focus group	Participants reported that licensing programs provide an opportunity to practice the learner knowledge test; for example, TAFE was mentioned as providing such programs across a number of sites (Ceduna, Port Lincoln and Redfern). The Aboriginal access learning centres offered by TAFE usually involved group learning as well as individual access to computer practice tests. An inner city Sydney participant was assisted by the Driving Change program. She reported that she had failed at first but with assistance reading the learner manual she managed to pass the test.	Reading the whole book doesn't work for me... But I've never been to do it. The only time I've been is with this program. So four weeks ago was the first and I've been every week since except for last week.
		Stakeholder Interview	Stakeholders identified many licensing support and community education programs that were providing literacy assistance. Stakeholders expressed some concern over the viability of such programs as they were typically funded for short-term periods.	The other is through relationships and programs with TAFE to deliver a driver licensing program that addresses the literacy issues that have been identified, so, the Get Licence, Get Legal, Get Work program. I think there's a really good example in the New England area where TAFE actually went out and asked the community what their needs were and driver licensing was one of those so therefore they scheduled programs.

“Job networks could use some of the money they receive for clients on their books to put towards them getting their licence.” (Male stakeholder, Aboriginal organisation)

Stakeholders also made the useful suggestion that JSAs attend Aboriginal community working groups and interagency meetings to better understand how they might assist clients. Related to this were suggestions that better communication was needed between JSAs and licensing service providers in communities.

Work and Development Orders

Having a state debt due to non-payment of fines was frequently cited as a reason for why Aboriginal people were unable to obtain or had lost a licence. Work and Development Orders (WDOs) have been set up by the NSW State Debt Recovery Office to allow eligible clients to pay off their debt through unpaid work.¹⁵ Those eligible for a WDO include people who have a mental illness, intellectual disability or cognitive impairment; are homeless; are experiencing acute economic hardship; or have a serious addiction to drugs/alcohol/volatile substances.

Stakeholders strongly endorsed WDOs as an effective and ‘holistic’ system to help resolve some of the issues around licensing

and suggested that there needs to be more extensive use of WDOs.

Some participants drew attention to the important potential role that Aboriginal organisations could play in providing services.

“I wish other (Aboriginal) services did it around here... Because it just is so much better. Yeah. It would be so much more holistic.” (Male stakeholder, non-government organisation)

“Then they’ve got the programs for work and development, and all those, that they can use, but then it’s putting in time into that as well. So I don’t know how many people – I don’t know what the stats are on the Work and Development Orders, but it would be good if people started accessing that and doing that more too.” (Female stakeholder, government organisation)

Once again, stakeholders felt that better interagency collaboration and communication to promote the use of WDO would improve outcomes for clients with outstanding debt.

“The interagency is Aboriginally focused organisations that will share information on what they’ve got coming up or what they’re case workers are working on, what they’re targeting and what their focus is at the time. So it’s an information sharing thing.” (Male stakeholder, Aboriginal organisation)

Driver education in schools

Stakeholders were able to provide examples of driver education programs offered to Aboriginal high school children, such as the program formerly run by TAFE at Marrickville High School, but this had not continued due to lack of funding. Many stakeholders supported the idea of including licensing in the high school curriculum.

“There’s got to be a way that we can have that in the curriculum especially for our public schools anyway.” (Male stakeholder, government organisation)

Ongoing funding for licensing support programs and community education courses

Across the four study sites, stakeholders were able to cite numerous examples of successful licensing support and driver education courses targeting Aboriginal people, such as the Driver Operations Course in Ceduna and the Yalata ‘On the Road’ Program, which had closed due to lack of funding.

“It was just a really, really good course. All of those kids now that I look at, it’s just improved their lives in so many other ways because their job possibilities are a lot better, they just feel so proud of themselves.” (Female stakeholder, non-government organisation)

Table 3: Barriers and facilitators to licensing: lack of documentation, outstanding fines and state debt.

Barrier	Facilitator	Source	Perspectives	Example
Lack of documentation	Assistance with obtaining identification and completing forms	Focus group	Lack of identification was a common theme. Participants reported difficulties in obtaining a birth certificate, in some cases because the name by which they are known is not the name on the birth certificate and the cost of changing a name is complicated and expensive. Support with the paperwork was sometimes facilitated by a local Justice of the Peace.	Yeah, it was a bit of a process. We had to go to like Centrelink and all that and the RTA and it took about an hour and a half, and then I had to wait for the actual test itself so, it was a pain but I got to get my licence.
		Stakeholder Interview	Local elders were sometimes asked to verify a person’s identity in order to obtain a learner licence. Several licensing support programs helped with the administrative aspects of licensing, for example applying for birth certificates and licensing applications. Job Service Australia agencies were identified as being able to assist with these processes; however some stakeholders felt that more could be done by these providers.	We’re going to start with a few simple modules on understanding forms and completing them, organising your paperwork.
Outstanding fines and state debt	Access to services for debt management support	Focus group	Participants spoke of the importance of avoiding fines in the first place. Some participants had arranged payment plans through the State Debt Recovery hotline, but most were not aware of the processes and services available to assist with debt management.	My partner, he got a fine and he went through state debt, and his Mum got really sick and he just forgot about paying it. So he rung them up and one lady, she must have been angry this day, and she said, “No. You can’t pay it off anymore. You pay the lump sum, and that’s it”. When he got off the phone, I said, “No. Ring back again”. And he got another lady, and she let him pay it off.
		Stakeholder Interview	Various organisations facilitated people in reducing their fines through Work and Development Orders. Others were assisted to get their driver licence while paying off fines by services that advise people how to enter into a fine management arrangement (e.g. Time to pay and Centrepay). These involve paying off fines on a fortnightly basis and thereby lifting the restrictions on getting a licence. Some community programs provided information about state debt issues (e.g. Driving Change NSW) and one program educated young people about helmet use while riding bikes, a frequent source of unpaid fines.	State Debt Recovery which was a good one because that’s now getting people that lost their licence, getting their licence back and doing community time. So that’s a really, really positive one that has – we see people walk down the stairs with a smile on their face going – mums with kids in school going, I can go and get my licence right now.

Many stakeholders would like to see such courses reinstated, and pointed out the need to sustain projects by offering ongoing funding. Instead, stakeholders indicated that state government-based initiatives have the expectation that they can fund community projects on a short-term basis with the aim of building the capacity of community staff to keep it going. The expectation that projects in the community will keep going with capacity building and without funding is seen as:

"A bigger job than anticipated." (Female stakeholder, Aboriginal organisation)

Stakeholders recognised the need to provide more community education courses for people who can't read or don't have access to a computer, and emphasised the need for such courses to include literacy skills as part of the program. The quote below indicates how driver programs can have broad benefits, beyond just individual licensing.

"Lots of our caseloads have been kids that have dropped out of school Year 7, 8, 9 or 10, and with poor attendance all through their primary school. So they have missed a lot of that basic literacy/numeracy, and so, like I said earlier, everyone wants to have their licence." (Female stakeholder, non-government organisation)

Finally, the courses and programs that were considered to be working successfully with the community were those that: 1) had Aboriginal staff and/or experienced culturally responsive staff; 2) were actively involved in interagency collaborations; 3) had established strong connections to the Aboriginal community; and 4) demonstrated respectful communication with the Aboriginal community.

Better local service provision in regional and remote areas

The lack of access to government licensing services is a barrier faced by people in more remote areas of Australia.

"People based out in these remote communities have such a difficulty getting their Ls [learner driver licence] ... I think it's having a disproportional affect in most rural communities." (Female Stakeholder, government organisation)

Stakeholders strongly supported setting up state services in these areas. Alongside the need for services is the need to address the practical issues of remoteness such as having a functional postal service and addressing the needs of Aboriginal people who do not have English as their first language. It was

suggested that state governments (notably Services SA) should establish an ongoing presence for licensing services aimed at community.

"I mean another solution would be for Services SA to have an office in Ceduna where everybody could access." (Male Stakeholder, government organisation)

Legal system and court diversionary programs

The full impact of licensing disadvantage is most clearly visible in the courts. Stakeholders from the legal sector provided valuable insight into the dilemma facing officers of the legal system in addressing the complex problems associated with licensing in the Aboriginal population. Stakeholders highlighted that it is difficult – and not sensible – to separate licensing issues from issues of disadvantage, substance misuse and road safety. These problems are highly connected and often come together before the courts. Providing driver training while people are in custody for disqualification was cited as a possible solution, because people in custody have limited access to alcohol and other drugs.

"It's a good opportunity to get people while they're sober and not under the influence of substances – and I do want to reiterate that – most people we have are poly-substance users. Okay, so that's a really big problem particularly with the under reporting of what they're using. So okay, if you can get them clear of those substances and use the opportunity while they're here to do some training, that's great." (Female stakeholder, government organisation)

Another potential legal solution suggested is for the courts to explore issuing court orders for a licensing program, if the courts could be assured that programs will operate and that there is proper monitoring and supervision.

"There has to be a lot of assurances, I think, but having said that, I've just found that if you encourage people and sometimes the encouragement has to take – is also backed up by a court order that can have a big effect, no doubt about it." (Female stakeholder, government organisation)

Another legal solution would be to set up a legal service that tries to assist offenders to get their licence on an individual basis.

"You can literally have a service that was basically trying to get people's licences, and honestly each one of those cases ... some of them would take up enormous amounts of your time because it's actually

quite complicated." (Female stakeholder, government organisation)

Despite offering these innovative suggestions, stakeholders from the legal sector admitted that addressing the licensing issues from within the legal system is complicated, time consuming and ultimately requires a diversionary training program.

Discussion

There is a growing body of research that examines the impact of licensing disadvantage and the barriers to licensing for Aboriginal people in Australia. To date, there is limited information on the factors that enable Aboriginal people to obtain a drivers licence. Exploring the perspectives of community members was vital to understanding factors that currently promote licensing among individuals and across communities, while stakeholder perspectives added valuable insight into the systemic factors that facilitate licensing and how these can be improved. Accordingly, facilitators to licensing can be categorised as: 1) individual and family level; 2) community level; 3) systems level.

Individual and family level

The research identified a number of individual and family-level factors that assisted people to obtain a licence, and it was evident that those who were successfully overcoming barriers to obtaining a licence had the support of family and/or friends. Importantly, building up the necessary number of supervised driving hours in order to obtain a provisional licence was not a burden to all participants; however, supervised driving and meeting the costs of licensing was difficult to overcome for families with few resources. In these instances, participants who had accessed the licensing system tended to report community level factors as facilitators.

Stakeholders also recognised the value of family support in navigating the licensing system. They frequently noted, however, that this placed a burden on families with limited resources. Stakeholders were more likely to recommend investment in community level support, strengthened by systems-level change. This is consistent with research in NSW and SA that describes the difficulties of meeting the licensing requirements as a function of an inequitable licensing system that is placing undue burden on vulnerable families.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ As a solution, stakeholders

proposed that funding could be directed toward increased access to professional driving lessons to assist individuals in the short-term but – more importantly – to aim for long-term generational change: an increase in licensed, safe drivers in communities would, among other benefits, increase the pool of people eligible to act as supervisory drivers. This means that the level of support needed now does not have to be sustained over time; it can be reduced when a critical mass of licenced drivers is achieved.

Community level

Having access to a community-based program was considered to be a strong facilitator of licensing by both Aboriginal community members and stakeholders. Effective programs were providing assistance with supervised driving practice, literacy, administrative tasks (notably including documentation of identity) and offering financial support to cover the costs associated with licensing. Additionally, programs that were working well had strong connections to the Aboriginal community based upon respectful communication, with employment of Aboriginal staff and/or experienced culturally responsive staff. This is in accordance with best-practice recommendations for working with Aboriginal communities whereby community consultation and local governance must be prioritised in program development and implementation.¹⁹

Despite the reported need for culturally responsive licensing support programs, there was a fervent belief that community-based programs were plagued by short-term, insecure funding and, therefore, did not achieve longevity, which undermined community confidence in such programs. There was a consistent recommendation for governments to invest long-term in local community-based licensing programs.²⁰ Furthermore, there remains limited evidence about Indigenous people and driver licensing, although recent work has explored drink driving.^{21,22}

Licensing service delivery was also facilitated by strong interagency networks and collaborations at the community level. Effective communication between service providers was considered key to connecting community members with appropriate service providers. This was an area where stakeholders felt there was opportunity for greater interaction and collaboration

between community service providers and JSAs to enable eligible clients access to funding that will facilitate licensing and thereby improve their employability.

The difficulties accessing local services in regional and remote communities has been identified in previous licensing research and reflects both the lack of service providers in these locations and the reduced options for public transport.^{16,18} Study participants from the regional and remote community sites felt much more could be done to improve local provision of licensing services.

Systems level

Recommendations for solutions pointed overwhelmingly to a need for systems level change. While there were some positive facilitators of licensing, including WDOs, fine instalment payment plans and alternative testing options, there was a need for greater awareness and use of these services. This is where community-based programs and interagency collaborations can be most successful, as they can connect clients with existing services. As mentioned above, this depends on strong community networks and sustained provision of funding.

Current practices within the legal system were seen as both a significant obstacle and as an area where change could have a meaningful impact. The linking of unpaid state debt with licensing sanctions has been identified as a barrier to licensing for people with reduced resources. The WDO mechanism offers a practical solution in NSW that warrants greater uptake at an individual, community and systems level and in other jurisdictions. There is also an urgent need for diversionary programs to which magistrates can refer offenders, rather than having no options but to impose fines and/or incarceration. These changes have previously been recommended by the NSW Auditor General.¹⁷

Job services agencies appear to be a greatly under-utilised resource for improving the rates of Aboriginal licensing. The study results show that although Aboriginal people are accessing these services, they are not provided with appropriate allocation of resources. Study participants reported great variability in the provision of resources for individual clients and in the different communities. The variability appeared to be regionally based. The lack of coordination between licensing service providers and JSAs in communities is likely to be

disadvantaging Aboriginal clients who are eligible for licensing support as a pathway to employment. The widespread reporting of this issue signifies that it is a considerable problem and input from policy-makers is required to address deficiencies in the current system. This will not only facilitate licensing but will significantly improve the employability of JSA clients, which will have resultant impacts on social and economic participation opportunities.²³

This study has addressed the limitation of previous research on access to transport licensing by examining the facilitators to licensing across two Australian states; however, generalisation to other states and territories must be done cautiously due to variation in licensing policy, service providers and delivery. This project could be replicated in other states to explore the impact of licensing policy and the factors that promote licensing in under-serviced populations. Furthermore, while Aboriginal people represent an under-serviced population, it would be useful to explore the facilitators to licensing in other vulnerable populations, e.g. refugees, long-term unemployed and people with English as an additional language. This study has overcome certain limitations of previous research by exploring the issues in urban, regional and remote communities to better understand both the location-specific and universal factors impacting licensing.

Conclusion and implications

Individual and community facilitators to licensing are helping Aboriginal people access the driver licensing system; however, these are not always sufficient, particularly where resources are limited and in communities with inadequate local service provision. Systemic change is required to address the lack of cohesion between licensing service providers, with a significant need to increase the awareness and uptake of existing programs. Further, sustained and consistent investment in funding is recommended to support local delivery of licensing support services that address fines management, literacy, driving lessons, supervised driving practice and the costs associated with licensing. Community-based programs were reported to be highly conducive to facilitating licensing for Aboriginal people, particularly where programs were culturally responsive, staffed by Aboriginal workforce and prioritised

respectful communication. Licensing support can also be achieved through school-based programs, diversionary programs and importantly by stronger regulation of access to JSA funding, which is a largely untapped resource. Supporting the evaluation of such programs would help to improve the commitment and sustainability of these initiatives. With policy makers investing in safe and legal driving in Aboriginal communities, there is potential to break the cycle of licensing disadvantage, promote health, employment and education thereby creating generational change.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article:

Supplementary Table 1: Stakeholder Organisations.