

# Improving Health Screening for Commercial Vehicle Drivers

Friday, 09<sup>th</sup> May 2025

## Introduction

The Australian Logistics Council (ALC) is the peak national body representing the end-to-end freight logistics supply chain in Australia, including road, rail, sea, air, and intermodal freight stakeholders. Our members are major transport and logistics companies, infrastructure providers, and supply chain participants critical to the movement of goods and services across the country. ALC advocates for policy settings that enhance supply chain productivity, safety, sustainability and resilience. ALC welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the National Transport Commission's (NTC) discussion paper on improving health screening for commercial vehicle drivers.

## Current Policy Framework

Australia's approach to screening commercial vehicle drivers for high-risk health conditions—specifically cardiovascular disease (CVD), diabetes, and sleep disorders—is fragmented. Screening obligations and frequency vary significantly by jurisdiction, licence class, and accreditation scheme, as evidenced in the NTC's analysis. For example, only the ACT mandates periodic screening for all heavy vehicle classes; other jurisdictions apply health checks inconsistently or solely to MC licence holders or drivers aged over 70.

In many cases, the application of the Assessing Fitness to Drive (AFTD) standards remains discretionary and reactive, heavily reliant on self-reporting or ad-hoc practitioner judgement. This has allowed critical health conditions to go undiagnosed until they contribute to major incidents, as tragically illustrated in the ACT coronial case that prompted this review.

ALC supports the intent of the NTC's proposed reforms, particularly Option B (improved implementation of existing guidance) and Options 1C–3C (prescribed screening). However, without parallel investment in national consistency and community-led education and engagement, these reforms may not achieve their intended safety outcomes.

## The Role of Industry in Preventative Health Promotion

Health screening should not be limited to compliance. A regulatory-only model risks disengagement from drivers, who may fear loss of licence or income. This risk-averse behaviour undermines early detection and long-term wellbeing.

To address this, ALC strongly supports the complementary role of Healthy Heads in Trucks & Sheds (Healthy Heads) in delivering a non-regulatory, preventative health initiative. Healthy Heads currently operates a national on-road health check program, piloted first in March 2024, offering free, confidential screening and education at truck rest stops and logistics hubs<sup>1</sup>. These touchpoints raise awareness of early health risk indicators—such as blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar levels, and obesity-related concerns—and encourage drivers to seek further medical support without fear of punitive consequences.

On-road health screenings—such as those conducted by Healthy Heads—play a crucial role in raising awareness and prompting behaviour change. Many drivers are unaware of their own health risks, particularly related to cardiovascular disease, nutrition, and early signs of diabetes. By offering free, voluntary checks (e.g., hip-to-waist ratio, cholesterol, blood sugar levels), these programs give drivers insight into conditions that are otherwise silent until advanced. This awareness can motivate individuals to seek clinical care or adopt preventative lifestyle changes.

Although Healthy Heads cannot collect or retain individual data due to privacy restrictions, anecdotal evidence shows a significant gap in driver awareness of preventable health issues. Their role as a neutral, non-regulatory body also overcomes the 'fear factor' of drivers being penalised by employers or regulators if a condition is identified. This trusted

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthyheads.org.au/news-and-media/road-show-is-back-for-2025>

engagement makes drivers more forthcoming in self-reporting, creating a stronger platform for effective education and early intervention.

Healthy Heads has submitted a request to the Federal Government to fund the expansion of its national mobile screening capability. ALC supports this proposal and urges the NTC to highlight this initiative as a critical enabler of non-regulatory screening capacity.

Importantly, Healthy Heads reaches drivers who may not be captured by licensing-based screening due to their jurisdiction, age, or licence class. Their neutrality fosters trust, and the model is scalable with government support. Healthy Heads has already submitted a proposal to expand its fleet of mobile health screening units, after delivering 350 free screenings last year with a single vehicle. ALC encourages NTC and governments to endorse and help scale this effort.

## Aligning Regulation, Accreditation and Non-Regulatory Support

To ensure health screening reforms are effective and enduring, ALC recommends the following enhancements to the NTC's proposed options:

### 1. National Consistency in Periodic Screening Requirements

- Reform the licensing framework to ensure uniform baseline requirements for periodic health assessments across all jurisdictions and licence classes (MR and above). This could be modelled on the ACT's five-yearly requirement or better aligned with public passenger vehicle frameworks, which often include 3- to 5-year cycles and age-based checks. Fragmentation creates gaps that compromise national freight safety and workforce management.

### 2. Integrate Non-Regulatory Health Promotion into Reform Design

- Include a formal recommendation that non-regulatory education and preventative screening programs—led by trusted organisations such as Healthy Heads—be supported alongside any changes to AFTD or medical screening obligations. These initiatives play an essential behavioural role not addressed by formal compliance measures.
- Include Objective Mental Health Screening Tools: While the focus of this review is on physical conditions, poor mental health is widely acknowledged as a contributing risk factor for both driver wellbeing and road safety. ALC encourages the NTC to consider the potential inclusion of mental health indicators in future iterations of AFTD screening protocols. We recommend that advice be sought from psychologists and mental health professionals to inform the use of objective screening tools appropriate for the commercial driving context. This may include brief, validated self-report instruments used in workplace health settings that can identify early signs of psychological distress, without impacting licence status.

### 3. Clarify the Interface Between Screening and Fitness to Drive Decisions

- While ALC supports greater use of tools such as the AUSDRISK and STOP-Bang questionnaires, the NTC should clearly state how outcomes of screening will be managed. For example, screening should remain a trigger for further clinical investigation—not an immediate basis for licence withdrawal—unless validated by a full medical assessment.

### 4. Ensure Employer and Driver Support Mechanisms Are in Place

- Before implementation of prescribed screening options (1C–3C), further consultation with employers, industry bodies and health professionals is required to ensure that affected drivers have appropriate access to follow-up testing and treatment. Employers must also be equipped with clear guidance on their responsibilities and limitations under privacy law.

## Recommendations

ALC makes the following recommendations to strengthen the NTC's reform package:

1. **Adopt Option B and prescribed screening options (1C–3C) in principle, but ensure they are accompanied by a nationally consistent implementation framework across all states and territories.**
2. **Formally recognise Healthy Heads as a key delivery partner for preventative, non-regulatory health promotion and education. Endorse expansion of its on-road health check initiative.**

3. **Mandate baseline periodic health screening for MR and above licences nationally, with frequency aligned across jurisdictions and harmonised with existing accreditation schemes.**
4. **Clarify how screening results will be used and protected, particularly regarding fitness-to-drive decisions and driver privacy.**
5. **Ensure access to follow-up care and education is integrated into the implementation model, particularly for drivers in remote or mobile work environments.**
6. **Investigate the development of objective mental health screening protocols, with advice from psychologists, to support early identification of psychological risk factors affecting driver health and safety. These should be separate from fitness-to-drive determinations and focused on wellbeing support.**

## **Conclusion**

Improving commercial driver health screening is not only a regulatory issue—it is a workforce and wellbeing challenge. ALC supports a reform pathway that combines improved formal screening through AFTD with strong, trusted engagement by organisations like Healthy Heads. This dual-track approach will help Australia deliver a safer, healthier, and more sustainable freight transport system.

We look forward to continued engagement with the NTC and broader government to shape the next phase of implementation.