

The Driving Health Study – Survey of the physical and mental health of Australian professional drivers

Plain language summary

The Driving Health report number 6 presents results from a large online survey on the health and wellbeing of Australian truck drivers. The aim of the survey was to get a snapshot of drivers' health and to better understand what can be done to help them be healthy and stay healthy at work. The survey asked the drivers a number of questions about themselves, their work and their health. The responses were analysed to find out what has the biggest impact on health and driving performance.

Almost 1,400 drivers from all over Australia filled out the survey between September 2019 and May 2020. It included long-haul drivers (who drove more than 500km in a day) and short-haul drivers (who drove less than 500km in a day), as well as owner operator and employee drivers. Most drivers drove B-doubles and worked between 40-60 hours per week. Most long-haul drivers worked more than 60 hours per week.

The study found that most drivers were overweight or obese and report dealing with medical conditions while at work. One in every two drivers was obese, compared to one in every three Australian men of a similar age. Almost a third of the drivers had three or more diagnosed medical conditions, which is four times greater than the average for Australians. The most common medical conditions were back problems, high blood pressure and mental health problems.

Mental health is a big concern for young drivers, where 1 in 5 drivers under 35 years had severe levels of psychological distress, compared to 1 in 9 Australian men of the same age. In the survey, drivers of all ages were more likely to report severe psychological distress if they worked longer hours, drove short-haul and if they had more than one medical condition.

When asked to rate their general health, over half said they were in good to excellent health. However, twice as many drivers rated themselves as being in fair to poor general health than the average for Australian men. Poor general health was more common in those who worked longer hours, were obese and had more than one medical condition.

Chronic pain was also common among drivers. Two in every three reported pain, with the majority saying their pain had lasted three months or more. Drivers with more than one medical condition were more likely to have severe pain and pain lasting longer than a year.

The survey measured driving performance by the number of crashes reported in a year and number of near misses reported in a month. A total of 181 crashes were reported. Near misses were much more common, with over two thirds saying that on average they had one near miss per week. Younger drivers, those who worked longer hours and had more than one medical condition were more likely to have more near misses.

Health was also important to how a driver rated their own ability to work. Most of the drivers said their work ability was good or excellent. However, drivers who were overweight or obese and had more than one medical condition were more likely to say that their work ability was poor.

These results show that a driver's level of health changes their ability to do their work safely. This means that the health of truck drivers cannot be overlooked. More needs to be done to help drivers to be healthy and stay healthy at work.

The next report from the Driving Health study will show results from a follow-up telephone survey and will find out more about what impacts a driver's health at work.

This report would not be possible without the contribution of the thousands of Australian Truck Drivers who completed the survey. Thank you!

If you experience any discomfort after reading this information, or want to improve your physical or mental health, please schedule an appointment with your GP, speak to your local health professional or search online for professional psychological services in your area.

You can access immediate support through [Mensline](#) (call 1300 78 99 78), [Lifeline](#) (call 13 11 14) or [Beyond Blue](#) (call 1300 224 636).

If you or your organisation would like to know more about what the transport industry is doing to improve mental health, please visit [Steering Healthy Minds](#) or [Healthy Heads in Trucks and Sheds](#) for two new initiatives focused on mental health.

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