Indigenous Drink Driving and Licensing: Understanding the Big Picture and Strategies for Change in Western Australia

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Indigenous people in Western Australia are highly over represented in road trauma statistics. They are also over-represented in drink driving convictions, which increases with the number and seriousness of drink driving offences. The level of imprisonment of Indigenous people for drink driving is 25 times that of non-indigenous people and indigenous people are much more likely to drive unlicensed or to have never held a driver’s licence.

Responding to this difficult problem is a challenge. Aboriginal people in Western Australia, particularly in regional and remote areas, continue to experience a high degree of social, economic and cultural disadvantage and face a range of difficulties in participating in a number of systems, including licensing and drink driving programs. Such initiatives have, in the main, been developed for English speaking ‘middle class’ urban populations.

The Indigenous Drink Driving and Licensing Project (IDDL) was established in September 2006 to examine the extent and nature of drink driving and unlicensed driving amongst Aboriginal people in Western Australia and to make recommendation for evidence based measures to reduce the level of drink driving and unlicensed driving amongst Aboriginal people. Specifically the project aims to introduce a series of practical interventions related to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention specifically for Aboriginal communities.

The development of the strategy acknowledges the importance of creating ways to respond to the specific dynamics of contemporary Aboriginal communities, so as to reflect the cultural complexities and rather than using generalist models, its development was guided by the following principles:

- Action must align with the aspirations of Aboriginal people for their community’s wellbeing and safety and involve Aboriginal people in all phases of the strategy’s development;
- Full and equal participation by Aboriginal people must be achieved in the licensing system through applying principles of equity and access;
- Partnerships between government, the corporate sector, non-government organisations and Aboriginal communities should be encouraged;
- Observation of successful practice in other jurisdictions (not limited to road safety), that considers the unique needs of remote communities which this strategy serves should be incorporated; and
- Initiatives must be appropriately resourced and sustainable.

This paper will provide an overview of the Indigenous Drink Driving and Licensing program in Western Australia including detailed information on the range of measures to be roll out across the state between 2007 and 2009 to reduce the level of drink driving and unlicensed driving amongst Aboriginal people. It will be of interest to researchers, policy makers and those working with Aboriginal people in the area of road safety.

Keywords: Indigenous, Drink driving, Unlicensed driving, Licensing