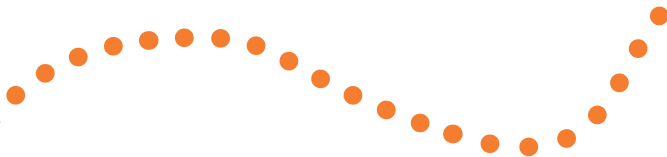




DB-SAFE

Deafblind - Safer Access For Everyone

A practical road safety and active mobility guide for deafblind people and the people who support them.



The issues

Deafblind people have been interviewed and report the same road safety concerns whether they are travelling with a communication guide or moving independently. Common issues include:

- Difficulty judging speed, distance and direction of traffic to be able to make a road crossing decision.
- Moving safely from kerb to road.
- Difficulty judging steps, edges and depth.
- Uneven or inconsistent walking surfaces can lead to falls when entering a road crossing.
- Low contrast between road and pavement and therefore difficulty in interpreting when on the road crossing.
- Obstacles and hazards in the environment.
- People not knowing how to assist them.

The biggest concerns are falls, reduced confidence and near misses with cars.

While crossing the road without a guide may not always be appropriate, there are still practical ways to improve mobility and road safety outcomes for deafblind people, especially when navigating uneven surfaces and kerbs. A key focus is helping the person get as much information as possible about what is ahead, so their body has time to:

- prepare
- respond, and
- move more safely.

Why Active Mobility Matters in relation to road safety



Active mobility means a deafblind person is supported to:

- initiate
- control
- make decisions about their own movement.

They do this using:

- their available senses
- mobility aids
- orientation skills.

This approach builds:

- confidence
- safety
- engagement
- meaningful participation in everyday life.

Being active in mobility means that the deafblind person understands the features in the environment when approaching the road and reduces the risks of entering the road without awareness.

Active Mobility and Passive Mobility

Passive mobility happens when another person makes most of the movement and safety decisions. For example, a person may hold onto someone's arm and rely on them to interpret the environment. This can sometimes be necessary, especially when a person is tired or in an unfamiliar setting. It can also reduce opportunities to use and maintain orientation and mobility skills.

Where possible, it is important to support independent movement in ways that are safe and realistic for the individual. Independence looks different for everyone. For one person it may mean travelling more actively with a communication guide; for another, it may mean confidently walking to the letterbox or in the familiar local area.



Tools, and Previewing the Environment

Tools such as a long cane can help a deafblind person gather information about what is ahead, including:

- changes in surface
- kerbs
- edges
- obstacles.



This supports safer foot placement and gives the body more time to respond.

Long canes are effective at road crossings as they:

- interpret road crossing features so that deafblind person understands when they have entered and exited the road crossing and the length of how far they need to cross. Examples of features include Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (T.G.S.Is), kerb cuts or change of surface.
- make the deafblind person more visible to vehicles and traffic so that cars will adjust their speed, allow more time to cross or offer assistance if required.

There are also a range of mobility aids that give haptic feedback such as the mini guide, which can give information about:

- where a clearway or doorway is
- when there are obstacles in the pathway
- when a train or other vehicle has arrived.



Safe Road Crossings

The safest road crossings are crossings with traffic lights. If there are no crossings with traffic lights nearby, wombat crossings and pedestrian crossings at a roundabout are two of the next best options.

A '**wombat crossing**' is a pedestrian '**zebra crossing**', built on a raised platform. The crossing elevates pedestrians to improve visibility. The raised crossing physically forces drivers to slow down like a speed hump.



Crossing near single lane **roundabouts** is safer than at traditional intersections because they force drivers to slow down and travel in a single direction. Pedestrians only have to deal with traffic coming from one direction at a time, and the slower speeds give drivers more time to stop.

If you are crossing at a multi-lane roundabout, take even more care and choose a safe time to cross.



Tips for crossing the road more safely

Use your body language and your long cane to indicate to drivers that you plan to cross the road.

- Always plan your journey.
- Once on the road, don't hesitate and walk confidently and smoothly.
- Allow time to cross the road – don't rush.
- Help drivers see you by wearing clothes that are bright colours.
- Avoid stepping on to roads between parked cars, trees or other obstacles that stop you from being seen by drivers.
- Use median strips and traffic islands when available to break up the road crossing into two crossings instead of one.
- Consider body language and your long cane as tools to indicate intention to cross the road.
- Once on the road, don't hesitate and act predictably.
- If another pedestrian is nearby, ask them for assistance with crossing the road.

Safer options include:

- Crossings with traffic lights.
- Pedestrian crossings like zebra crossings.
- Known routes where you are familiar with conditions and time of day.
- Where you only need to attend to one direction of traffic at a time. For example, when there is a two lane road with a traffic island in the middle.
- Walking further down the street from an intersection so that you are not crossing where there is turning traffic.



Avoid crossing where possible:

- At high speed/multi-lane roads.
- At bends in the road.
- Over crests of a hill.
- If the environment is unfamiliar.



Professional Roles in mobility and road safety

Orientation and Mobility Specialist

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists help people who are blind, have low vision, or are deafblind, learn how to move through environments:

- safely
- confidently
- as independently as possible.

In crossing roads safety, O&M specialists:

- assess the person's skills
- assess the crossing environment
- teach safer use of sensory information
- teach safe use of mobility aids such as a long cane
- support judgement about when and where it is safe to cross.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) support should not be seen as a one-time service. Many Deafblind people receive O&M training when first diagnosed. Skills may need refreshing over time. It is a good idea to explore O&M training if:

- vision changes
- health changes
- living environments change
- vision or health conditions are progressive
- starting at a new place of education or work.

When people are supported to explore their environment safely, the benefits can include:

- More independent decision-making.
- Greater trust in the body and developing proprioception.
- Better environmental awareness.
- Safer and more meaningful participation in daily life.
- Improved confidence.

Physiotherapist

Physiotherapists focus on the physical skills that support safer mobility. In relation to road crossings, a physiotherapist may assess:

- gait
- balance
- lower limb strength
- joint movement
- endurance
- posture
- falls risk

They can provide treatment and exercises to improve:

- stepping up and down kerbs
- recovering balance after small trips or stumbles
- turning safely
- walking at a consistent pace
- managing physical conditions that affect confidence and stability.



Exercise Physiologist

Exercise physiologists design safe, individualised exercise programs to improve:

- strength
- balance
- coordination
- stamina
- functional movement.



For road crossing safety, this can include:

- building the physical capacity needed to walk further
- responding more quickly to surface changes
- maintaining stability on uneven ground
- managing fatigue
- practising movement patterns that support safer community mobility.

Exercise physiologists often work alongside physiotherapists and O&M specialists when a person needs both physical conditioning and mobility-specific training.

Communication Guide and Support Worker

Communication Guides and Support Workers who work with deafblind people should be trained in guiding.

Communication Guides and Support Workers can work together with O&M Specialists and deafblind people to ensure deafblind people:

- Are supported and guided in the way they want to be.
- Maintain orientation and mobility skills.
- Improve orientation and mobility skills.
- Work together to achieve orientation and mobility goals.



Reporting Hazards with Snap Send Solve

Hazards in the environment can make mobilising unsafe, force people closer to traffic, reduce ability to make safe road crossing decisions and increase falls near roads. Snap Send Solve is a free smartphone app used across Australia to report local problems such as:

- damaged footpaths
- unsafe kerbs
- potholes
- broken tactile indicators
- poor lighting
- blocked dumped rubbish.

These hazards can:

- force people closer to traffic
- increase chance of falls.

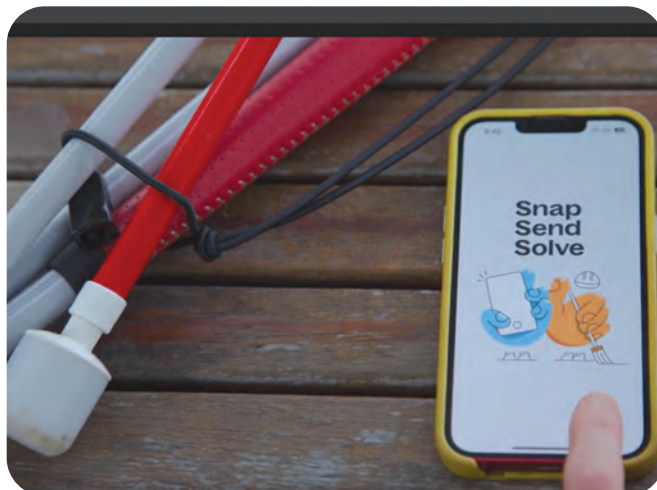


With **Snap Send Solve**, a person can:

- ✓ take a photo
- ✓ confirm the location
- ✓ choose the issue type
- ✓ add notes about why the hazard matters
- ✓ send the report to the relevant council.

The app sends the report to the relevant council or authority so the issue can be reviewed. It can be a practical way for:

- deafblind people
- family members and friends
- communication guides and support workers to help identify and report road crossing and footpath safety concerns in the local community.



For more information see:

<https://www.snapsendsolve.com/>



Understanding Proprioception

When the senses of hearing and vision are impacted developing the sense of proprioception for the deafblind person is important for understanding where you are in space and how you are moving. Developing this sense of where your body is in space is essential in keeping yourself safe. This is important for balance, movement and preventing falls.

For deafblind people, proprioception at a road crossing assists with:

- orientation
- building the muscle memory to understand the distance of a road crossing
- foot placement
- aligning feet to travel in a straight line and feeling in your legs if you are veering when crossing the road
- knowing how the body is moving through space
- being able to determine that you are standing on a tram ramp and understand the camber of the road so as to not veer into intersection when crossing the road
- making body adjustments to stop from falling.

When travelling from road to kerb and managing ground and depth changes. Understanding how high to lift your foot.

The Environment and Practical Support

To support safer mobility think about:

- the deafblind person
- the environment
- the type of support.

Sometimes the most helpful strategy is to step back slightly and create safe opportunities for exploration. Do **NOT** always interpret every part of the environment for the person.

This means encouraging direct connection with:

- surfaces
- landmarks
- signals
- other environmental cues.

For example, a person may benefit from:

- standing on tactile ground surface indicators
- feeling the position of a traffic signal
- exploring a familiar route at their own pace.

If a deafblind person becomes fully reliant on another person to provide all environmental information, safety can be reduced when that information is:

- delayed
- incomplete
- unavailable.

Supporting active mobility helps reduce that risk and allows the person to stay engaged in their own safety.



For People Supporting Deafblind Clients

- Look for safe ways to step back and allow exploration when safe.
- Ask the deafblind person if they want assistance rather than assuming.
- Talk with the person about what helps them feel safe and informed.
- Build time into support for active participation, not just getting from one place to another.
- Consider referrals when extra support is needed.
- Learn the roles of professionals who can assist, including:
 - O&M specialists
 - Physiotherapists
 - Exercise physiologists.
- Understand how O&M supports road safety.
- Recognise that O&M may be needed across the person's lifetime, not only at diagnosis.
- Learn about the person's functional senses and how to make the most of them.
- Consider how your language about road safety can affect deafblind person's perception of road crossing. Using words like "dangerous, tricky" can cause deafblind person fear and affect their confidence.



- Discuss road safety with deafblind people. For example, if you are crossing a 4 lane road with a deafblind person let them know how far the distance is that they are going to cross.
- Identify features in the road crossing that can make the road crossing more active for the deafblind person. For example, standing on the tactile ground surface indicators (T.G.S.Is) giving time for deafblind person to feel the transition point between kerb and road with their can and or/ guiding their hand to feel the haptic feedback in the traffic light pole.
- Understand the difference between passive and active mobility, and why it matters.
- Notice environmental barriers and advocate for safer, more accessible spaces.
- Intervene if a person is unsafe.

For Deafblind People and Families

- Learn what road safety challenges are most relevant to you, such as kerbs, uneven surfaces, and low contrast environments.
- Consider whether tools such as a long cane could improve previewing and safety.
- Refresh O&M skills when vision, health, mobility, or living arrangements change.
- Use your available senses as actively as possible to support safer movement.
- Plan routes that include safe road crossings.
- Practice road crossing skills in local familiar environments under the guidance of an Orientation and Mobility Specialist.
- Consider how time of the day will affect the safety of a road crossing. A road crossing may be safe during the middle of the day but at school drop off could be unsafe due to traffic flow.

Useful resources

Ensure you read this guide together with watching:

- ▶ The **DB-SAFE video**
- ▶ The **DB-SAFE Road Crossing and Deafblind People video**

Scan for
DB-SAFE
videos



Other useful resources

Crossing the road safely (webpage) - <https://transport.vic.gov.au/road-and-active-transport/activetransport/pedestrians-and-walking/crossing-the-road-safely>

Crossing the road when you are blind or have low vision (video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gujjA-6Y3F8>

Training reflections for staff (support workers and communication guides)

1. What do you know about your clients' experience of working with an Orientation and Mobility Specialist? What skills have they gained? Are there skills they are currently working on?
2. How do each of these professionals assist with mobility and road safety of deafblind people?
 - a. Orientation and Mobility Specialist
 - b. Physiotherapist
 - c. Exercise Physiologist
 - d. Communication Guide / Support Worker
3. Where are places the clients you work with can walk independently without guiding?
4. How can road safety hazards be reported?
5. Where are three places that are safer to cross the road and why?
6. List three tips for safe road crossings.
7. List three things to avoid when crossing roads.
8. What senses do the clients you work with use to help them move about safely?

Please read this guide together with watching both the **DB-SAFE video** and the **DB-SAFE Road Crossing and Deafblind People video**, which can be found via the QR code below.

NATIONAL OFFICE

413 Canterbury Road,
Surrey Hills VIC 3127.

WEBSITE

ableaustralia.org.au

MAILING ADDRESS

Locked Bag 4000,
Surrey Hills VIC 3127.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

1300 225 369



Able Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land, sea and sky on which we live, work and provide our services. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. They hold the connection to this country through their people, culture, traditions and their dreamtime. We will continue our learning and support of the oldest continuous culture on earth and stand united in their voice that this land is and always will be Aboriginal land.

Able supports and celebrates all human diversity.