

Driving to Health

Healthy activities for taxi drivers



Melbourne
Networked Society
Institute



Australian Government
National Health and
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driving FOR CHANGE



FEATURE

THERE IS NO OTHER PROFESSION QUITE LIKE TAXI DRIVING. INSTEAD OF BEING STUCK BEHIND A DESK, DRIVERS EXPLORE AUSTRALIA'S CITIES AND TOWNS AND CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WHO VISIT FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

Many drivers appreciate the flexibility of the job and the opportunity to be their own boss. But at the same time, there are things about driving taxis that put people at risk of poor health. Long periods of sitting can cause back problems and weight gain; limited access to toilets can put a strain on the kidneys and relying on take away food means too much salt, sugar and saturated fats, which can lead to high blood pressure and heart disease.

Research on New York taxi drivers show that, despite these risk factors, people working in the taxi industry are much less likely than other people to have regular health checks. Working as a driver also has risks for psychological wellbeing. Although customer contact is a feature of the job, some drivers find it a lonely profession and lack the social support necessary for good mental health.

Taxi drivers are also more likely than almost every profession, except the police, fire brigade and first responders, to be exposed to violence. This violence comes in the form of being abused, threatened or actually assaulted and in witnessing abuse and violence.

“THE VTA AND ATIA HAVE JOINED WITH RESEARCHERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE HEALTH OF TAXI DRIVERS AND IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT.”

perpetrated against others. Experiencing or witnessing violence is a traumatic event that can have a serious negative effect on psychological wellbeing.

Despite these risk factors, remarkably little is known about the physical and mental health of people who work in the taxi industry. This is in contrast to other driving professions, such as long-haul truck drivers, who have been the focus of health studies in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. These studies showed high rates of obesity, smoking and depression among truck drivers – findings which prompted Safe Work Australia to introduce free truck driver health checks at road stops.

Now it's time to focus on taxi drivers. The Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) and

the Australian Taxi Industry Association (ATIA) have joined with researchers from the University of Melbourne to find out about the health of taxi drivers and identify opportunities for improvement.

Funded by the Melbourne Networked Society Institute, the Driving for Change Project is led by Dr Sandra Davidson from the University of Melbourne. In early 2016, Sandra and her team will visit places like the holding bay at the Melbourne Airport where they will conduct short interviews with drivers to find out more about their physical health and psychological wellbeing. To make sure the results reflect the broad population of taxi drivers they will conduct over 300 interviews. The results of the Driving for Change Project will be reported in future editions of VICTAXI.

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380 drivers were surveyed at the Melbourne Airport holding yard

Snapshot of drivers who completed the survey



Gender

98% male

Age

58% aged between 30 – 49 years

25% aged over 50 years

Relationships

16% never married

74% currently married or de facto

10% currently divorced or separated

Social life

57% had contact with family nearly every day

48% had contact with friends nearly every day

Snapshot of drivers who completed the survey

Country of birth

93% born overseas

46% of drivers who were born overseas
settled in Australia in the last 10 years

Work patterns

71% worked more than 48 hours a week

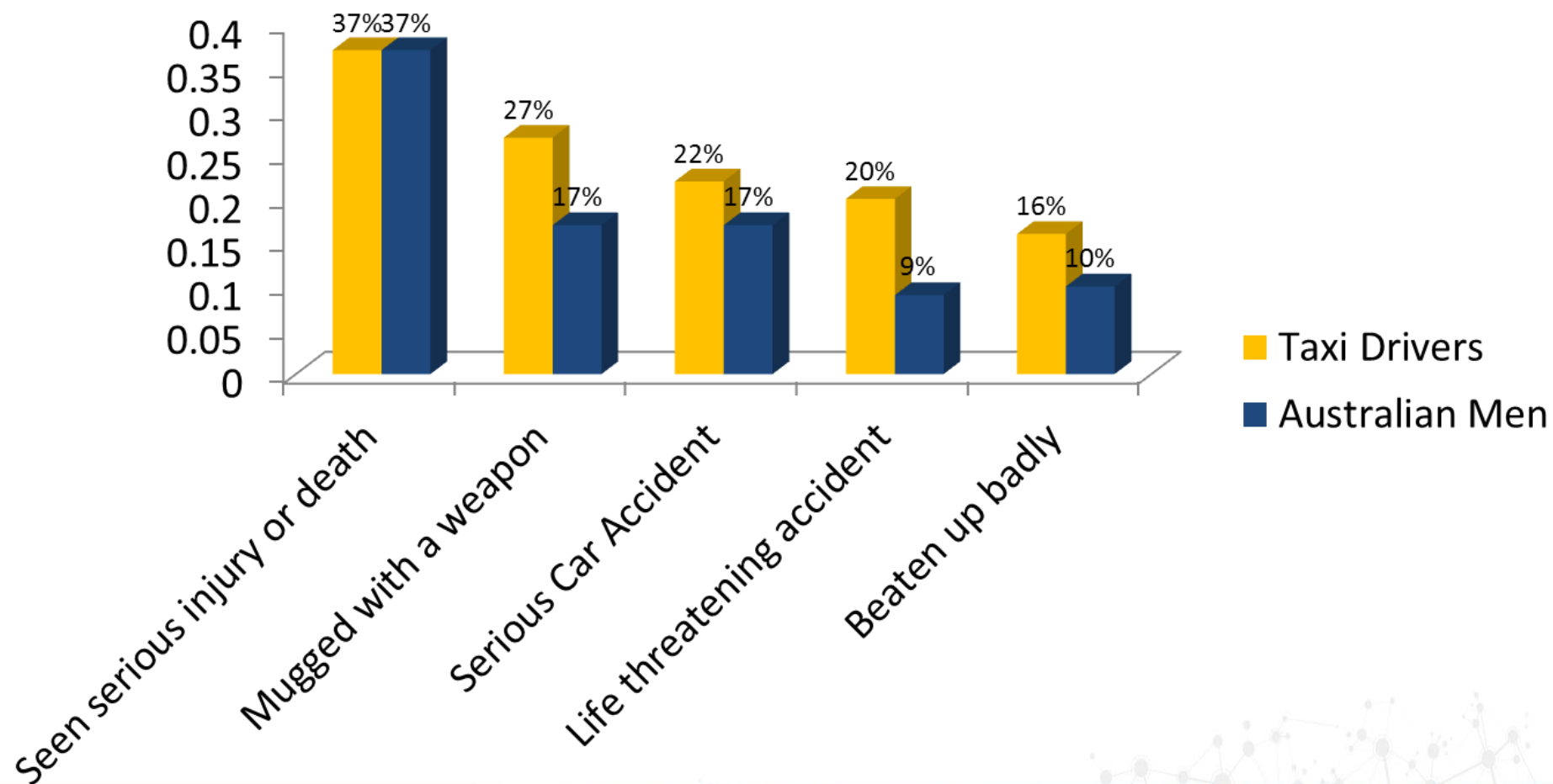
29% worked more than 60 hours a week

77% worked night shift

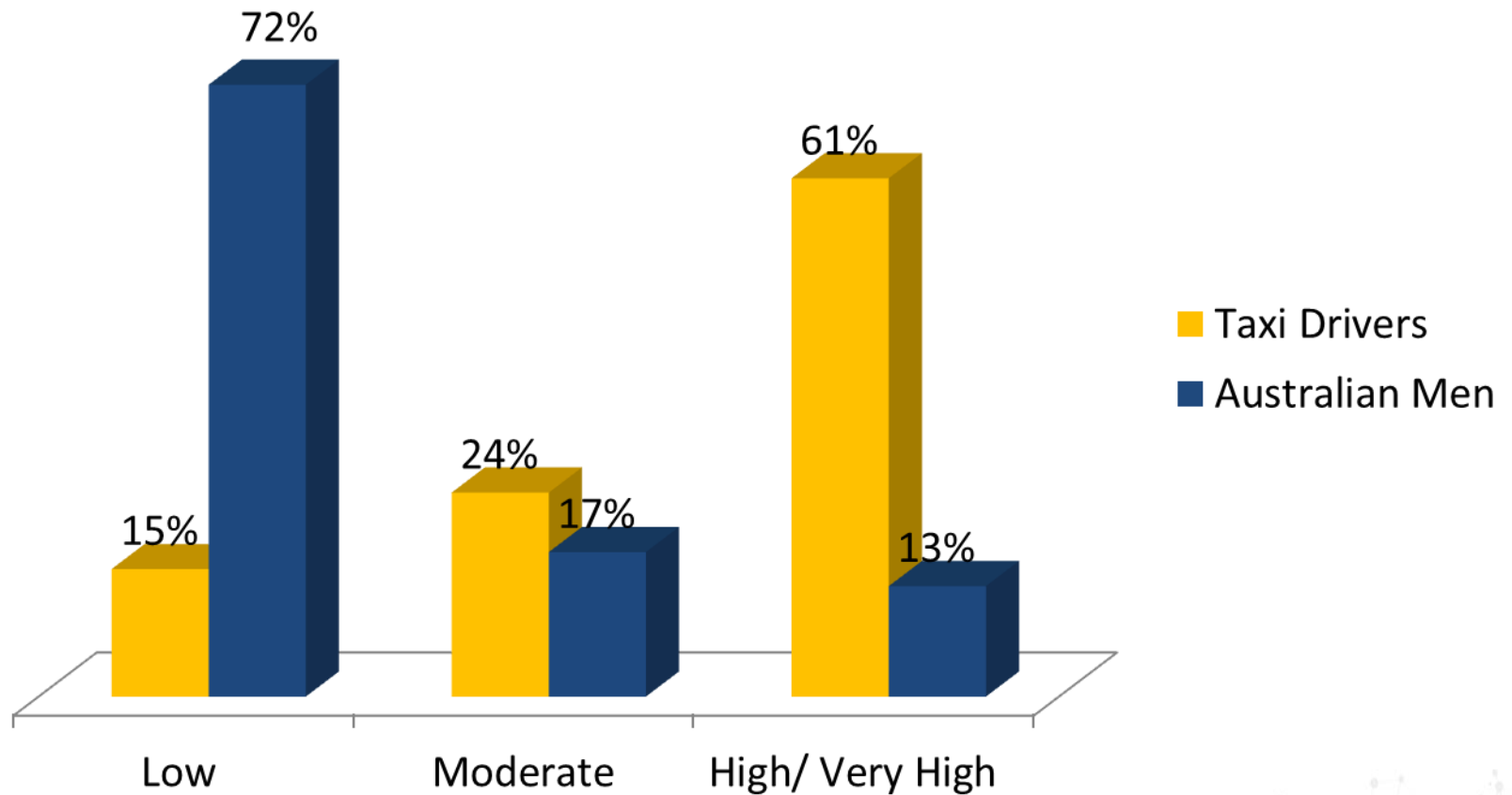
22% do other work or study



Exposure to potentially traumatic events



Psychological Distress



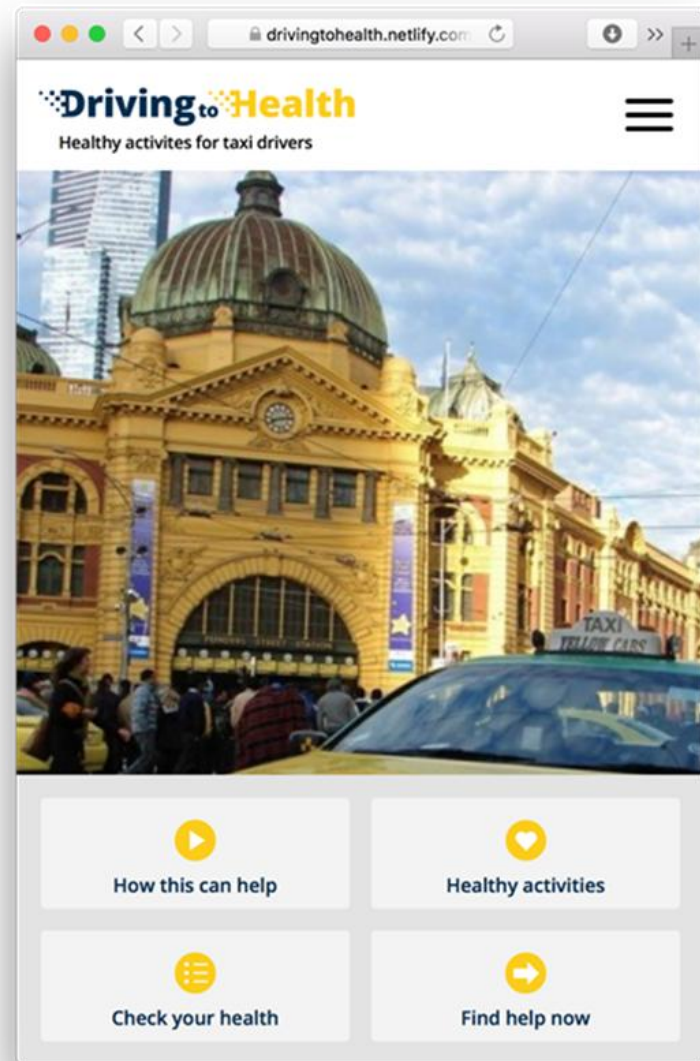
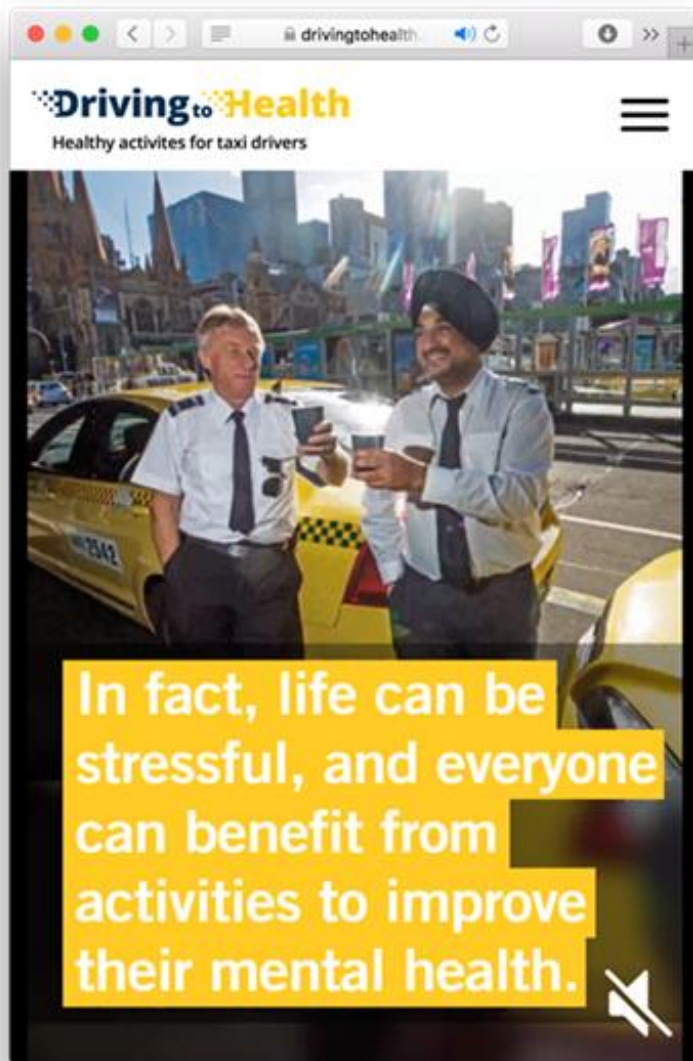
Drivers use of Technology

96% of drivers own a smartphone

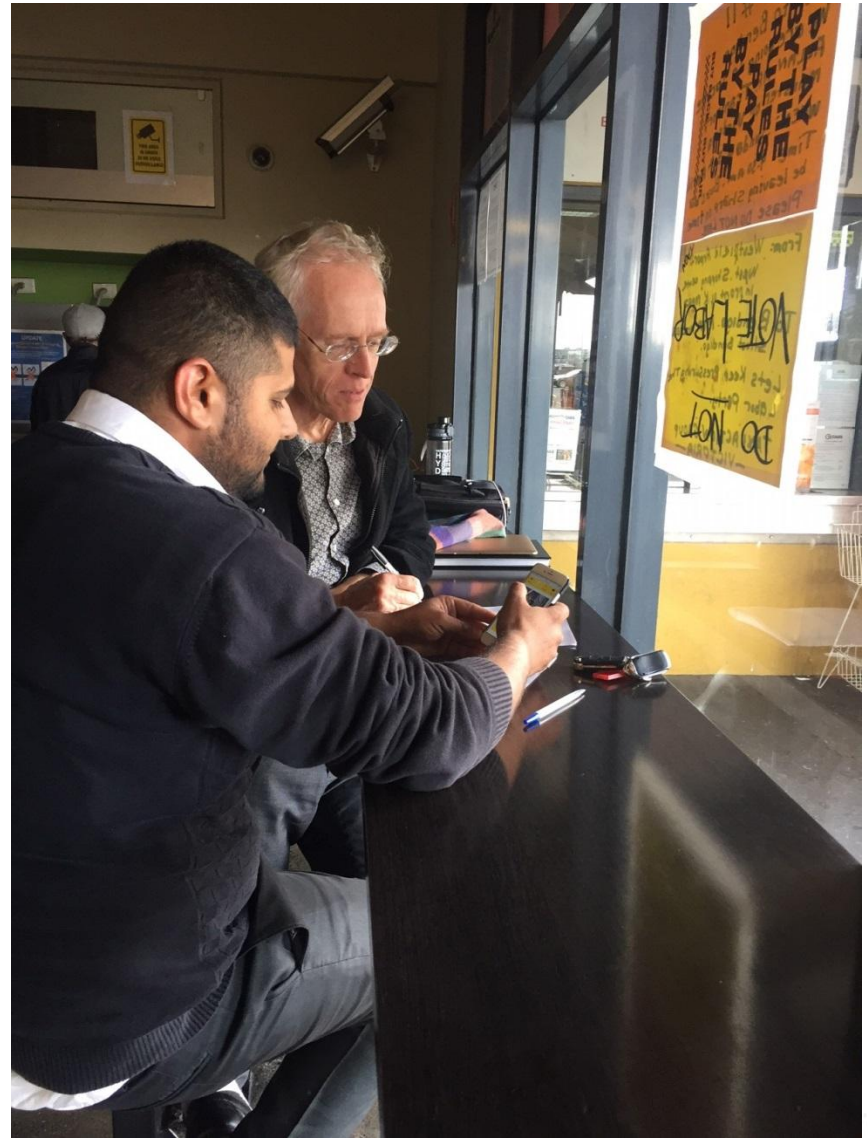
- ✓ Search the web: 89%
- ✓ Instant messaging: 85%
- ✓ Social media: 80%
- ✓ Video calling: 56%
- ✓ Email: 54%
- ✓ Video games: 42%



Self-reported frequency of smartphone use: low = 15%; moderate = 59%; high = 26%



***What did drivers
think of our
prototype?***



Q38 Comment

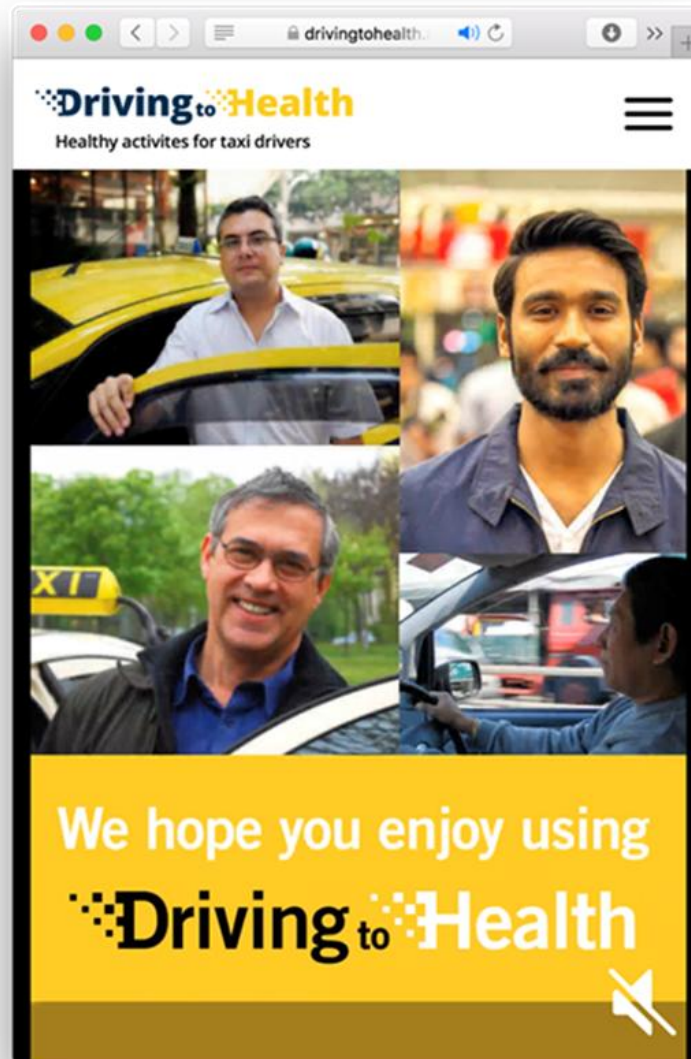
Answered: 5 Skipped: 0

#	Responses	Date
1	#Check-up# Check-up - that's a good idea.They tell you what you can do - see a GP. What you are feeling. #Help# Help right now, find a doctor, telephone counselling #Check-up# You can go through those questions. #Did full quiz#	5/3/2017 12:08 AM
2	#Activities# It's not there. #Check up# Nice #Did all questions# #Greyed-back question - tried to click - he thought it was a bug in the program# This one's not working.	5/2/2017 11:43 PM
3	#Help / Telephone Counselling# #Activities# #Check up# Yes, here's check-up. I didn't understand your question at first. It's helpful actually. Honest answer - this taxi job is like this [stress and depression].It's a hard job. Links will take us to the internet. #Design note - Check-up engages when people do it, but it is less visually engaging than the Activities. Could we make it more visual?#	5/2/2017 11:18 PM
4	It's just about mental health. "Check-up" - it doesn't say check-up for what. Can I check up for a bad back or a dicky knee? Maybe different scenarios for that - joints, back, weight, nutrition. These are the biggest problems. It should start here (Dept Cafe) - maybe some exercise equipment, and healthy food	4/24/2017 11:32 AM
5	I went to Activities. #Showed tester the mental health checklist# This is good because you could take the quiz - it tells you the answers. #On seeing the greyed-back question# - that one doesn't work.	4/21/2017 9:37 AM

Q52 Comment on final impressions

Answered: 5 Skipped: 0

#	Responses	Date
1	It's a good idea	5/3/2017 12:09 AM
2	Some taxi drivers have no idea of fitness and what to do. [They are] sitting in the car all the time. This kind of exercise really help - what they can really do when they have time before the next job. Good for every single driving job - not just taxi.	5/2/2017 11:50 PM
3	Especially that Check-up thing	5/2/2017 11:24 PM
4	Needs more work but it's a great idea.	4/24/2017 11:32 AM
5	I think it would be very helpful for myself. Most drivers don't care about stuff like that. I'm new, so I would use it. They won't follow it. You need proof. Like, who created it? and why? It needs to be someone I trust. Contact details.	4/21/2017 9:45 AM





A mobile website for taxi driver health

The *Driving to Health* website has been created by researchers at *The University of Melbourne* to improve the health of people working as taxi drivers.

Before we finalise the website, we want to test what works and what needs to be improved.

We are looking for taxi drivers who are interested in taking part in a study to test the *Driving to Health* website.

What is involved?

Completing a set of questionnaires at the start of the study and again four weeks later

Downloading and using the website as much or as little as you want over four weeks.

To find out more or take part, please email:
teresa.soderlund@unimelb.edu.au
text/call: **0435 962 848**

This study has been approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee 1749740
Funding by: Shepherd Foundation