

Anger and aggressive driving are all the rage on Australian roads

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Nowhere is space more contested in the urban setting than on our roads.

Despite the fact they're designed as shared spaces, the combative frame of mind of many road users, be they [drivers](#) or cyclists, contributes to [aggressive driving](#), and often disproportionate responses to perceived slights. At its most extreme, this can manifest as what is commonly referred to as road rage.

Aggressive driving can and often does lead to crashes, which often result in serious injury or death. Without significant improvements in road safety in Australia, approximately 12,000 road users will lose their lives on Australian roads in the next decade, and almost 500,000 will be seriously injured.

Aggressive driving is the risky use of a vehicle to display anger or intimidate other drivers. This includes speeding, tailgating, dangerous overtaking, cutting off drivers, beeping the horn excessively, and making rude gestures.

These behaviors have been well-established as a problem, with almost 50% of drivers engaging in them.

Further, when drivers are aggressive, the odds of being involved in a crash increase by up to 15-fold. To put this into perspective, aggressive driving poses a similar risk to distracted or impaired drivers, but with more serious injury consequences.

Despite this threat to road safety, most countermeasures are reactive, and rely on punitive actions such as fines.

Amanda Stephens is a senior research fellow at the Monash University Accident Research Centre who wants to better understand the reasons drivers become aggressive. She's been involved in road safety research for the past two decades, and has a background studying the psychology behind driver behavior. Her research team has developed the Reduce Aggressive Driving (RAD) program.

Fundamental to RAD is the idea that behavior is not a singular concept, and so interventions to improve road safety need to understand that not all behaviors are the same, and not all drivers will react in the same way in the same situation.

Last year, 10 RAD sessions were conducted between April and June, with participants drawn from most states and territories. They each drove between 10,000 and 30,000 kilometers a year, and had self-selected as being angry and aggressive drivers.

Each session involved firstly educating participants about the road toll and crash risk of aggressive driving, and the reasons for anger and aggression. The latter half of the sessions focused on further exploring the triggers for anger and subsequent aggression, then generating strategies to manage those triggers. Some of the triggers included slow drivers, indecisive drivers, illegal maneuvers, discourteousness, and travel delays.

Dr. Stephens recently published a paper that evaluated the RAD program, and its effectiveness in reducing anger and aggressive driving.

The "Preliminary evidence of the efficacy of the Reducing Aggressive Behavior program," recently published in the *Journal of Safety Research*, showed the RAD program demonstrated excellent effectiveness at reducing self-reported anger and aggression in participants.

Among the key findings were:

- Almost all drivers said the RAD program was helpful in managing frustrations (97%) and aggression (92%).
- Almost all participants were using the strategies from RAD. At the one-month follow up, 94% said they tried at least one of the strategies they generated in the RAD session. At the four-month follow-up 86% were still using the strategies generated in the RAD program.
- Reasons for not using strategies from the program included forgetting them, or not driving due to COVID restrictions.
- The most common strategy used and maintained was to play music or listen to the radio, and the 5 x 5 x 5 [strategy](#) ("Will this matter in five minutes, will this matter in five hours, will this matter in five days?").
- Four months after the RAD program, 74% of participants who were using the strategies said they had also helped manage anger outside of driving.
- Significant decreases in anger and aggression were noted after the program, and these were sustained at the four-month follow-up.
- Overall, reductions in [anger](#) and aggression after the RAD program were similar between drivers aged 18 to 25 and those older.

Dr. Stephens and her team are keen to undertake a longer-term follow-up to see how the RAD program may impact crashes or near crashes. Some of the suggested strategies to avoid aggressive driving before hitting the road include planning the drive, allowing plenty of time, making the car comfortable (with music and good temperature), and being aware of your state of mind.

Once on the road, be prepared to pull over, drive in the left lane,

acknowledge the needs of other drivers, show courtesy to other drivers, and avoid triggering routes.

More information: Amanda N. Stephens et al, Preliminary evidence of the efficacy of the Reducing Aggressive Driving (RAD) program, *Journal of Safety Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jsr.2022.07.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2022.07.011)

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