

Opportunities for improvement in the use of interlocks in Australia

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Guardian Interlock

Abstract

Interlock programs began in Australia in 2001, and more than 30,000 drivers have completed programs. Approximately 100,000 drink drivers are convicted annually in Australia, and there are about 10,000 active interlock participants. Clearly we only apprehend a minor portion of offenders – so we need to keep those we catch under close control and supervision. The Australian programs are apace with any in the world, and could, with minor modifications, become models. A key deficiency in Australia is the legislated selective access that only applies the interlocks to specific groups. Then, in some cases, drink drivers are allowed to “sit out” the interlock periods. There is a general aversion to including “first offenders” in programs, but first offenders generally become repeat offenders. There is active oversight of programs in Australia, but only the more recent programs are performance based. With a few exceptions, participants can travel anywhere in Australia and have their interlock serviced routinely. We should build on the sound basis in Australia to improve the community benefits of interlocks while improving road safety. This can be achieved by the wider use of interlocks. This would act as a screening tool enable the identification of problem drinkers with access to cars. It would reduce road trauma and hospital costs. But there are other victims as well – consider the family and social effects of drink driving convictions, as well as the economic effect on business. Decriminalisation of our youth is another important issue – the use of interlocks in lieu of criminal convictions would prevent wasted lives, while allowing potential of youth to be realised.