

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

You will soon be heading off to work, study or travel, and tasting freedom like never before. But with it comes responsibility and a whole raft of laws that you might not be familiar with. Read on for all the latest information.

DRIVING

By the age of 18, many of you will be on your provisional driver's licence. Last year, some tough new driving laws were introduced for young drivers, including a three-month suspension for speeding; a ban on all mobile phone use; and a prohibition on having more than one passenger under the age of 21 between 11 pm and 5 am. At 18, you can also get a licence for a heavy vehicle, tractor or truck, and at 21, you can drive a taxi, bus or commercial vehicle.

Obviously, it's an offence to drink and drive. The blood alcohol limit on your provisional licence is zero. Drink driving can carry heavy penalties including fines, loss of licence or jail, depending on the severity of the charge.

RENTING

If you're going to rent a flat or house, you have to sign a Residential Tenancy Agreement. This is a legal agreement or contract between the person who rents the property (the tenant), and the person who owns it (the landlord). As the tenant, you should receive a copy of the agreement and a condition report of the premises. Read this agreement carefully, make sure you feel it's fair and understand all its terms before you sign it.

DISCRIMINATION

It is illegal to treat somebody unfairly just because of their sex, race, religion, marital status, sexuality, disability or age. Some examples of discrimination can be obvious—like if you have been overlooked for a job because of your race—or they can be more subtle, like when a certain rule or policy prevents you from doing things that other people can do freely.

If you think you have been discriminated against and would like to make a complaint, you need to take your case to the Anti Discrimination Board of New South Wales (ADB) or the Australian Human Rights Commission, which are both

government agencies. Visit www.humanrights.gov.au for more information.

VOTING

Voting in Australia is compulsory and you can be fined if you do not vote. To be eligible, you need to be an Australian citizen over the age of 18.

SMOKING

From the age of 18, you are allowed to buy cigarettes, but smoking laws have changed dramatically over the past few years. You're no longer allowed to smoke in enclosed bars, clubs and pubs, enclosed work spaces, covered areas of train station platforms, tram shelters and bus shelters or restaurants and other places that serve food. Passive smoking contains many chemicals that are toxic, which may have harmful effects. Remember, cigarette butts are litter that cause environmental damage and therefore should be disposed of appropriately.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

At 18, you are legally allowed to drink alcohol and are free to enter licensed pubs and clubs. However, getting caught using, carrying or selling illegal drugs is a different ball game altogether and can land you in very hot water. Check out the liquor laws at druginfo.nsw.gov.au, www.olgr.nsw.gov.au, or go to police.nsw.gov.au and find out all the facts for yourself. If you are under the age of 18, you cannot be supplied with alcohol—this applies to licensed premises and anywhere else, including schools, homes, halls, parks or other places. Sanctions include hefty fines and possible imprisonment. If you try to use a fake ID to gain entry to a licensed premises or to buy alcohol, you can face fines of up to \$220, and your details will be passed on to the RTA, who can automatically add an extra six months to your provisional plates, taking the time you spend on your P Plates to three and a half years.