

Senior Driver Safety & Mobility



Background

Older Americans today are healthier and more active than ever before. With the aging of the baby boomer generation, people over 65 are the fastest-growing population in the U.S. By 2030, there will be more than 70 million people age 65 and older, with between 85–90 percent of them licensed to drive.

Senior drivers are among the safest drivers since they often reduce their risk of injury by wearing safety belts, not drinking and driving and by observing speed limits; however, seniors are more likely to be injured or killed in a crash due to age-related fragility. Seniors outlive their ability to drive safely by an average 7–10 years depending on gender, so for the first time in history, we must plan for our driving retirement just as we plan for our financial retirement.

Addressing the Problem



Risk Factors

Increasing age is generally associated with a decline in the functional abilities important for driving, including vision, reaction time, and dividing attention between tasks. Older adults also have a greater occurrence of medical conditions such as impaired vision, physical limitations, dementia, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, and may use medications for their treatment, which can affect safe driving. So, the true risk for seniors on the road is not age but rather their medical fitness to drive. Seniors with decreasing functional abilities face an increased risk of crashing and require appropriate interventions to keep them safe and mobile for as long as possible.



What Works

Just because someone is 75, 85, or even 95 years old does not mean that their ability to drive safely has been compromised. Policies and practices designed to improve senior safety and mobility must take this reality into account and decisions about driving should be made on a case-by-case basis, not chronological age.

In the U.S., state driver licensing agencies have the responsibility to carry out policies related to driver fitness and decisions about licensure. Drivers who may be considered at-risk are often brought to the agency's attention at license renewal periods or after referral by law enforcement, physicians, concerned family members, or others. Many state licensing agencies then conduct a more formal review of individual drivers, including any medical

conditions that might impact safe driving. This process varies considerably from state to state, and in many states, policies and practices could be improved.

After a careful review of available research evidence, AAA has identified the following recommended policy approaches that are designed to increase safety and to help extend safe mobility for the older and medically at-risk driver including:

- ▶ In-person license renewal every 5 years, starting no later than age 75
- ▶ Vision testing at license renewal
- ▶ Electronically accessible referral form for health care providers
- ▶ Electronically accessible referral form for law enforcement
- ▶ Healthcare provider immunity for referral in good faith
- ▶ Observational training/guidelines for DMV Staff
- ▶ DMV access to objective medical expertise
- ▶ Restricted or conditional license for medically-at-risk drivers
- ▶ Driver rehabilitation or remediation

AAA Resources to Keep Seniors Safe and Mobile

AAA is dedicated to keeping seniors driving for as long as safely possible. We also are committed to promoting viable transportation options for seniors who can no longer drive independently.



CarFit

The community-based CarFit program improves the “fit” between older adults and their vehicles, and recommends steps to enhance comfort and safety behind the wheel. Developed in collaboration with the American Society on Aging, AAA, AARP and the American Occupational Therapy Association, the program offers specific, practical community resources to help older drivers maintain and strengthen their wellness to extend their safe, independent driving years.



Smart Features for Older Drivers

In partnership with the University of Florida's Institute for Mobility, Activity, and Participation, AAA developed a resource guide that identifies vehicle features that can assist drivers with visual, physical and mental changes frequently encountered as they age. Smart Features for Older Drivers addresses conditions often faced by seniors, highlights features that best address each condition and provides examples of vehicles exemplifying those features.



AAA RoadWise Driver and RoadWise Driver Online

Created specifically for drivers age 55 and older, RoadWise Driver is a driving refresher course specifically designed for experienced drivers. It offers tips and techniques to help drivers understand how natural aging affects driving abilities, and how to compensate for changes in vision, flexibility, response time and other factors. Drivers will also learn defensive driving techniques to reduce their risk, including how to avoid the most common types of crashes for older drivers. Drivers can choose between the convenience of a classroom or an online course.

Groundbreaking Research to Help Protect Older Drivers

Recognizing that lifestyle changes, along with modern day technologies and medical advancements will have a significant impact on the driving experiences of the baby boomer generation, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety developed the LongROAD Study to collect insight on the driving patterns and trends of older drivers in the United States. This groundbreaking study will be one of the biggest assets to senior driver safety and mobility moving into the future.