

Older Drivers (England)

November 2019

Wherever they live, older people should be able to reach key services, friends and family at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease.



Key statistics

5 million

people aged 70+ have a driving licence.ⁱ

The risk of an driver over 70 killing a pedestrian is **less than that of middle-age drivers** and half that of younger driversⁱⁱ

40%

of pedestrian deaths are among older people aged 60+ⁱⁱⁱ

Driving and essential services

Our towns and communities have increasingly been designed around travelling by car and this continues to be the main form of transport used by people in later life. There are now over 5 million people over 70 with a driving licence^{iv}. DVLA statistics show that 41 per cent of women and 78 per cent of men aged over 70 hold a driving licence, although not all may be active drivers.^v Continuing to drive is vital for many older people to get to shops, services and health care, allowing them to travel to exactly where they want to go at a time of their choice. It also allows them to remain socially connected, especially in rural places with poor public transport. This is essential for many older people who experience mobility problems as they age - as well as their carers. A car may become the only practical form of independent transport in some places. It has been estimated that 35,000 people aged between 65-84 are restricted in their use of public transport and have difficulties walking

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even a short distance^{vi}. Many older people need transport from door-to-door which often makes a car vital.

Most older people are safe drivers

Caricatures of 'bad' older drivers mean there is an on-going debate about road safety and people in later life. Coverage of a serious road accident involving a small minority of older drivers is used as an argument for more stringent testing. However, this stereotypical representation of older drivers is not reflected in the road safety statistics.

In 2018 drivers aged between 20-29 represented the highest number of those killed or injured on the roads (185 per million population), whereas the lowest level was for the 60-69 age group at 97 per million population. Figures for those in the 70-79 age group were lower than the 30-39 age group - although numbers start to increase for drivers who are 80+.^{vii} These figures provide an indication of the risks for different age groups but do not tell us the causes of an accident. Older people are generally more vulnerable to death or injury in a road accident as a driver, passenger or pedestrian.



Police data show that the risk of an older driver aged over 70 killing a pedestrian is less than that of middle-age drivers and half that of drivers aged up to 25^{viii}. However, there is evidence that a minority of drivers over 80 are disproportionately involved in major accidents^{ix}. This requires proportionate safety interventions that recognise the vast majority of older drivers are safe. Calls for additional testing based on current evidence cannot be justified and could deter older people who are safe to carry on driving, while it would make little difference to collision rates for older drivers^x.

Managing increased risk

As people age there is an increasing risk of physical or cognitive impairment affecting their driving ability. However, how the point at which drivers might be affected by a condition varies so that drivers are affected differently as they age. However, most older people successfully manage any increased risk by, for example, sticking to familiar routes, reducing their speed, not driving at night or avoiding difficult junctions. The ability to manage risk means the emphasis should be placed on supporting older people to continue driving safely for as long as possible.

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Declaring a medical condition and eye tests

The DVLA may refer an older driver with a medical condition to a mobility centre for a free assessment, which can lead to giving up driving. Alerting the DVLA to a medical condition relies on self-declaration, although a GP or healthcare worker may provide advice including referral to a mobility centre to assess a driver's abilities. The General Medical Council (GMC) has provided guidance^{xi} to GPs to persuade patients with a specified medical condition to inform the DVLA. GPs are advised to tell the DVLA directly, as a last resort, where persuasion has failed, which is a difficult issue because it involves patient and doctor confidentiality. A referral to a mobility centre for an assessment can help determine whether or not someone should drive, or can return to driving, and is free and faster than a self-referral.

The DfT is currently reviewing whether to ask older drivers to give evidence of an eye test when they renew their licence at 70 – although it acknowledges that further research is required to justify this measure. This proposal is based on a recommendation of the Older Drivers Taskforce which linked requirements for eye tests to raising the licence renewal age from 70 to 75, arguing they should be assessed in conjunction. In principle, Age UK does not believe that older drivers should be treated any differently from other drivers unless there is strong evidence to show that a different approach, such as a new eye test requirement, would be effective, and proportionate to the risk.

Department for Transport road safety strategy

In 2016 Age UK worked with the Older Drivers Taskforce, coordinated by the Road Safety Foundation, to consider measures to improve older driver safety. This work was supported by national motoring organisations, expert bodies and academics. The Taskforce set out a series of recommendations to the Department for Transport (DfT) and the DVLA.

Since then the DfT have announced a number of measures described in their '*Road Safety Statement 2019: A Lifetime of Road Safety*'^{xii}. These include:

- Ongoing funding for the 13 local mobility centres^{xiii} providing advice to older and disabled drivers
- Commissioning research to understand how driver vision affects road safety
- Making older drivers a permanent item to the Medical Advisory Panel^{xiv}
- Providing funding for the RoSPA website^{xv} resource for older drivers and information for GP surgeries.
- Assessing the recommendations of the Older Drivers Taskforce.

There are also technological developments, such as the development of autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles that could benefit older people, as long as they are inclusively designed with the needs of older people in mind.

Accessibility schemes

The Blue Badge scheme is important for many older and disabled people to allow them to get to shops and services and to remain mobile and independent. The Government has now extended the blue badge scheme to people with hidden disabilities such as a learning disability or mental health condition, including people living with dementia. Although welcome, this measure does not provide any additional parking spaces or designated parking bays. Limited parking capacity is the reason the Government has given for not providing a temporary blue badge for people with a short term injury or illness affecting their mobility, although there is scope for local discretion.

Some older people struggle to make a blue badge application where it has to be made online. Local Age UKs have told us that some local authorities fail to offer older people any assistance to complete application forms. Automatic entitlement for a blue badge is linked to certain criteria including receiving the higher rate of the mobility element of Personal Independence Payments (PIP), however if people have reached State Pension age they are ineligible for PIP and there is no mobility element in its equivalent for this age group, Attendance Allowance (AA). Older drivers who do not qualify under the automatic entitlement rules need to apply for an assessment by their local authority to qualify for a blue badge.

Although there are Government guidelines on best practice, there are variations in how local authorities handle the local administration of the scheme. Measures to tackle the fraudulent use of a blue badge can mean councils taking an inflexible and unsympathetic approach to older people with mobility issues.

The Motability scheme allows a disabled person to lease a vehicle covering some or all of the costs. To benefit from the scheme you need to be claiming a qualifying benefit. Because of the upper age limit for new PIP (and in the past DLA) claims, people with health conditions or disabilities that occur after they have reached State Pension age cannot get help through the benefits system for their mobility needs. It also means that they do not qualify for help under the Motability or exemption from Vehicle Excise Duty. This discriminatory treatment should be addressed.

Giving up driving

The decision to stop or continue driving can be a stressful event because it can result in a loss of independence. Before deciding whether to give up, older drivers can have their driving assessed at their nearest driver mobility centre. Alternatively, if they have reduced confidence in their driving abilities they may consider taking a refresher course such as those offered by the Institute for Advanced Motoring (IAM)^{xvi}. Both these options involve a fee, although in Scotland can be offered through social prescribing. If an older driver has no choice but to give up driving it is important they are aware of the alternative transport options available. Many older people who have driven all their lives may find it difficult to adjust using public transport, so having inclusive public transport that is

comfortable, supportive, accessible, reliable, regular and affordable makes it easier for older drivers who need to give up driving - especially in rural places

Public Policy Proposals

- It is every driver's responsibility to ensure they are driving safely, but older drivers need to support to do so, including better advice from their GP. A GP has the ability to inform the DVLA without patient consent but this must always be a last resort to protect other road users. All health professionals should be aware of the support and information available on safe driving.
- At 70 drivers are required by the DVLA to renew their licence (and then every three years) which gives an opportunity to review any medical condition that might affect their driving. The licence renewal age should be raised to 75 in recognition of improvements in the general health of older people and statistics demonstrating older people are safe drivers.
- It should be a general principle that older drivers should not be treated differently to younger drivers unless there is strong evidence to justify it. So before introducing compulsory eye testing for older drivers on licence renewal the Government must provide evidence that it would be a helpful and proportionate measure that will enhance road safety and be in the best interests of older drivers.
- The Department for Transport should introduce improvements in road design, signs and markings to meet the highest international standards which will aid older drivers and others.
- The Department of Transport should look at ways of encouraging more older people to have a driving assessment or take a refresher course by funding reduced fees for those aged 70+, promoting the lowering of car insurance premiums for those completing courses, and by providing public information about the benefits of taking a course. All referrals by a GP to a mobility centre, where requested by a patient, should be free of charge.
- The Department for Transport, local authorities and transport providers should pilot new approaches which offer better transport solutions for older people to make it easier to give up driving.
- Insurers' data and research findings involving major claims by older drivers should be pooled and shared with the Department for Transport and road safety groups to understand the detailed causes of accidents and to take appropriate action.
- The Government must introduce a mobility component to Attendance Allowance. In the absence of this, local authorities should administer the assessment for a Blue Badge in a straightforward and consistent way and the Government should consider extending the Motability scheme to older people receiving Attendance Allowance who have mobility problems.
- A lack of alternative transport is a significant deterrent to older people giving up driving at the appropriate time. There should be an obligation on local authorities to facilitate a minimum level of access to public or community transport, particularly in isolated rural areas.

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Want to find out more?

An Age UK advice leaflet for older drivers is available at: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/information-guides/ageukig44_in_the_driving_seat_inf.pdf

Other advice resources for older drivers are available at <https://www.olderdrivers.org.uk/>

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of issues, including money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities. There are also crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice

Further information

You can read our policy positions at www.ageuk.org.uk/ourimpact/policy-research/policypositions/ Individuals can contact us for information or advice here; <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/> or call us on 0800 169 8787

ⁱ GB Driving Licence Data (DfT 2019). Available online: <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/d0be1ed2-9907-4ec4-b552-c048f6aec16a/gb-driving-licence-data>

ⁱⁱ Supporting safe driving into old age

(Older Drivers Taskforce 2016) Available at: <https://roadsafetyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/modsfl.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Department for Transport (2017) 'RAS30002: Reported casualties by road user type, age and severity, Great Britain, 2016' Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents>

^{iv} See ref i

^v RAC Foundation (2013). Driving choices for the older driver. Available online: https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/driving_choices_for_the_older_motorist_lang_parkes_and_fernandez_medina_0213.pdf

^{vi} The Future of Transport in an Ageing Society (ILC 2015) Available at: https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_june15_the_future_of_transport_in_an_ageing_society.pdf

^{vii} Department for Transport (September 2019) RAS30025: Reported casualty rates by age band, road user type and severity, Great Britain (2018) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents#casualty-rates-and-risk>

^{viii} See ref ii

^{ix} Musslewhite, C (2018) Transport, Travel and Later Life (Emerald Publishing)

^x Musslewhite, C (2016) "The Drive for Life: academic challenges older driver safety myths". <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/humanandhealthsciences/news-and-events/latest-research/thedriveforlifeacademicchallengesolderdriversafety myths.php>

^{xi} Available online: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/confidentiality---patients-fitness-to-drive-and-reporting-concerns-to-the-dvla-or-dva>

^{xii} Department for Transport (2019). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817695/road-safety-statement-2019.pdf

^{xiii} Details at: <https://www.drivingmobility.org.uk/>

^{xiv} An advisory panel that provides expert advice to the Secretary of State for Transport on road safety. Further details at: www.gov.uk/government/groups/secretary-of-state-for-transport-honorary-medical-advisory-panel-on-driving-and-psychiatric-disorders

^{xv} <https://www.olderdrivers.org.uk/>

^{xvi} Available online: <https://www.iamroadsmart.com/courses>