

U.S. Department of Transportation: Aging Licensing Policies

This study will examine how the various types of special screening and testing that State driver licensing agencies apply to older drivers affect older driver crash rate, licensing administration and older person quality of life.

Lead Agency:

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

Agency Mission:

Save lives, prevent injuries and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes through education, research, safety standards and enforcement activity.

Principal Investigators:

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General Description:

Some States attempt to screen out high risk older drivers (65+) using various administrative procedures and specific testing. This ongoing study focuses on assessing the effects of these licensing procedures on the crash rates of older drivers. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Identify safety benefits and unintended consequences of licensing policies that are specific to older drivers
- Conduct a process evaluation of driver license renewal policies and procedures that apply to the general public and those that apply specifically to older drivers across the United States
- Collect information about licensing processes and procedures from each of the States as well as the District of Columbia
- Select Special Emphasis States for a more comprehensive examination of general and older driver licensing procedures
- Gather information from DMV officials, older drivers who have recently renewed their licenses and older adults who no longer drive in each of the Special Emphasis States.

Excellence: What makes this project exceptional?

This project is exceptional because it combines a scientific examination of the effect on crashes of various licensing policies for older drivers with a rigorous process examination

of the way these policies are applied. A coordinated examination of outcome and process measures can facilitate identifying the mechanisms through which various State approaches work or whether ineffective implementation may be the reason for the absence of a safety benefit. The combination of a practical examination of the implementation of interventions with a fully coordinated crash-based assessment of safety benefit is unusual and should provide decision-makers with the best possible information.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

The literature on prior research well establishes that the aging process *can* affect safe driving. Older drivers who are still safe, however, do not want to be denied the driving privilege simply because they reach a chronological milestone. The challenge is to develop and successfully apply performance-based criteria determining older driver fitness. This study will identify whether the current specialized licensing practices for the older driver *as presently applied* are effective as safety interventions, are accepted by older drivers and licensing officials and can reasonably be implemented. As such, the results of this study will influence licensing policies with respect to older drivers for the foreseeable future.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

Older drivers want fair treatment. The literature indicates that they want to continue driving as long as they are safe and that they are willing to forego driving when their abilities are no longer capable of coping with the modern traffic environment. This research will quantify the effectiveness and consistency of application of some of the most widely used licensing interventions. The quantitative results this study will produce should allow all concerned to make data-driven and unemotional decisions with respect to licensing approaches for the older driver.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

The older population is growing and covets its mobility and independence. Crash studies show an increased rate of involvement as a function of age, but the effects are far from uniform. Licensing authorities and the older driver each need well-founded information upon which to base decisions concerning who should be prohibited from driving and how those prohibitions will be implemented.

Current licensing policies for older drivers have evolved based on general studies of the capabilities of older persons and the professional judgments of State officials. This study will not only examine multiple implementations of popular approaches, but will also assess the extent to which approaches are actually implemented and the reactions of older drivers and license administration personnel to them. This appears to be the first time that a crash-based assessment has been coupled with an in-depth process examination of

older driver licensing policies. As such, the study will provide government decision-makers, advocates for the older person and older drivers themselves with better information to make informed decisions on older driver fitness.