

moving rightalong

OBLIGATIONS AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
OLDER DRIVERS



Information Sheet 1

Road safety and older drivers



Government of South Australia

Department of Planning,
Transport and Infrastructure

Moving Right Along: Obligations and Opportunities for Older Drivers encourages safer, greener and more active travel for older South Australians.

It comprises a series of Information Sheets about fitness to drive and legal responsibilities, driver assessments, ideas for maintaining the ability to drive safely and planning for the time when you, a family member or friend will decide to drive less or stop driving altogether.

Road safety and older drivers

Older drivers

Older drivers are generally safe, experienced and careful but a characteristic of their age group is that aspects of the ageing process can affect driving skills.

- The ability to process information slows as people age. Older drivers must be aware that their reactions to unexpected situations can be slower than they previously were.
- Good health and flexibility are also very important in driving safely and being able to respond quickly and correctly to road and traffic conditions.
- Many people experience deterioration of vision and hearing.
- Medications can change the perception of hazards, reaction time, judgement and decision making skills while driving.
- Many medical conditions seem to commence or worsen with age.

Why are you reading this?

You are probably an older driver and just want to know more, or you may be concerned about a family member or friend and need information to help you discuss their driving with them.

You could be interested because you are concerned about your driving and aware that your driving skills are not what they used to be. Maybe there are a few little scrapes along the side of the car that were not there last year.

Are you finding that driving is difficult but you still need to drive for specific reasons?

Maybe you want to continue driving and cannot imagine ever giving up your licence.

Has someone said that they will not travel with you any more because they feel unsafe when you are at the wheel?

You could have already decided that driving is just too hard and you want to hand in your licence but do not know how to go about it.

Has someone told you that you have to find out more about the responsibilities of being an older driver?

Amongst all of these reasons, one thing is mostly true - few of us like being told what to do; we prefer to get the information and make up our own minds.

Moving Right Along: Obligations and Opportunities for Older Drivers consists of Information Sheets designed to give you facts and ideas to help you make decisions for your driving future.

Statistics and older drivers

In South Australia, 10% of licensed drivers are aged 70 and over. Deaths and serious injuries among road users aged 70 and over have decreased over the last 10 years despite the continuing and increasing growth of that age group. However, the proportion of deaths and serious injuries is expected to increase, relative to the ageing trend of the State's population.

In the age group 70 years and over during 2011:

- of 46 driver casualties, seven were fatalities and 39 were serious injuries
- of 22 passenger casualties, five were fatalities and 17 were serious injuries
- five of the occupant serious casualties were not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the crash
- twenty pedestrians aged 70 years and above were seriously injured or killed. One person killed was operating a motorised mobility scooter at the time of the crash¹.

¹ Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure Road Crash Database

² CASR. 2008. Medical conditions as a contributing factor in crash causation [12 Nov 2009] <http://casr.adelaide.edu.au/casrpubfile/707/CASRmedicalconditioncontributecrash1040.pdf>



During 2007 and 2011 about 71% of older driver fatalities occurred in crashes where more than one vehicle was involved. Two thirds of these crashes occurred at intersections.

Statistics also show that when older people are involved in crashes they are more likely to suffer more serious injuries and take longer to recover because of their frailty. In the same crash circumstances, a 75 year old is four times more likely to suffer serious injuries than a younger person, or suffer minor injuries when a younger person may remain uninjured.

In the period from 2007 to 2011 people in the 60+ age group represented almost 20% of road fatalities and 16% of serious injuries in South Australia. The same age group represents 23% of all licence holders so they are not over-represented in the crash statistics, as young people are.

However, a 2008 survey of serious crashes in Adelaide found that a medical condition was the main cause of 13% of crashes and accounted for 23% of all hospital admission and fatal crash outcomes across all age groups. This data highlights the role of medical conditions as a contributing factor in crashes and indicates that people must be aware of any issues affecting their ability to drive safely².

Your legal responsibility

As a licensed driver in South Australia and regardless of your age, you are **legally required** to advise the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure in writing as soon as you are diagnosed with an illness, disease or disability, or take medication that could impair your ability to operate any motor vehicle effectively and safely.

Also, health professionals are **legally required** to notify the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure as soon as they consider that you suffer from a physical or mental illness, disability or deficiency, or take medication that would be likely to endanger the public if you drive a motor vehicle.

The health professional does not need your permission as this notification is **compulsory by law**.

Department of Planning,
Transport and Infrastructure
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The consequences for failing to notify the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure of a reportable medical condition and continuing to drive are severe.

If involved in a crash:

- you may be charged with related driving offences and with failing to notify the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure of a reportable medical condition
- you may be sued for any damages to people or property caused by the driver in that crash
- your private car insurance coverage may be affected.

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For resources and contact details of relevant government departments and other organisations refer to:

Information Sheet 11 Version 2

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