

# Older Road Users

## Involved in Road Crashes - 2017-2021

### Overview

During the five-year period 2017-2021, on average there were 21 older road users lost their lives and 97 suffered serious injuries each year. Persons aged 70 or above are overrepresented in road deaths, whereby they make up 14% of the population yet account for 22% of lives lost and 14% of serious injuries. Research shows that although older drivers are involved in a small number of crashes, these crashes are often higher severity, probably because of the frailty of older road users. Older drivers are generally more cautious and tend to exhibit less illegal and dangerous driving behaviour than other age groups, and older drivers typically control their exposure to risk when driving by avoiding driving at night or in peak hours.

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury at intersections involving right angle crashes, and as they get older they are also more likely to be responsible for crashes they are involved in.

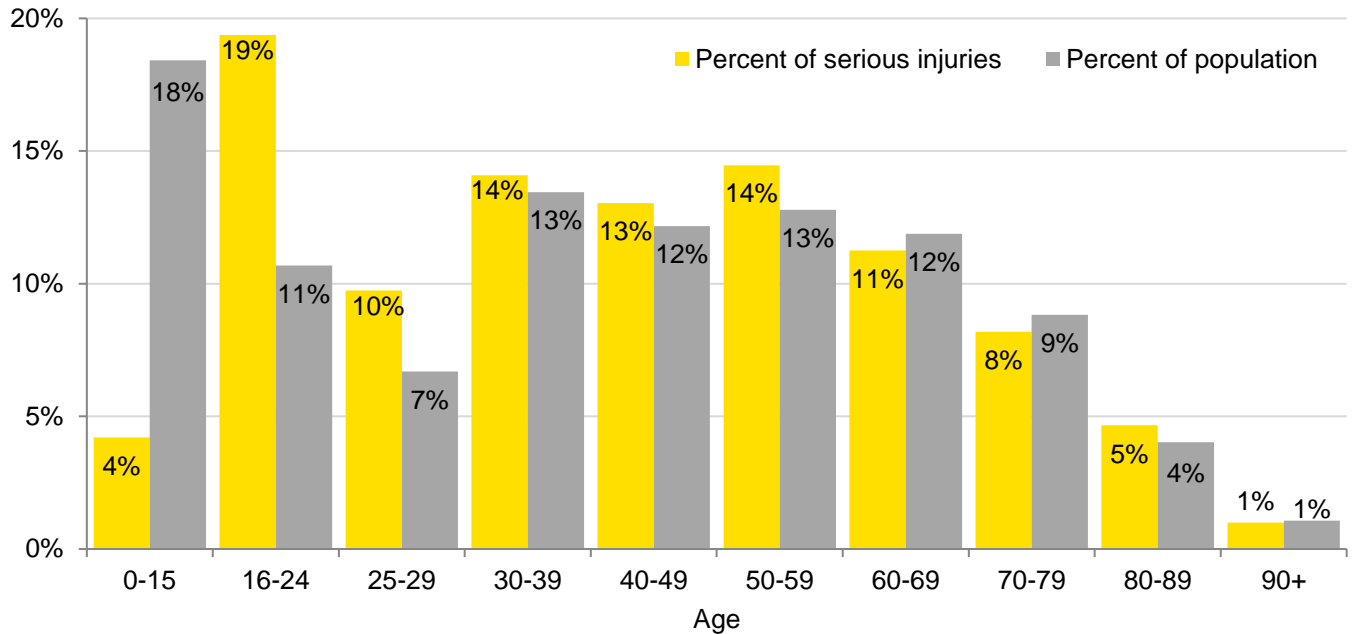
Table 1 provides a breakdown of older road user casualties by year. The number of road users killed aged 70 and over has decreased by an average of 4.6% per year over the past 5 years. Serious injuries also decreased on average by 2.1% per year and minor injuries declined by an average of 3.5%.

**Table 1: Lives lost, serious and minor injuries of road users aged 70 years of age and over, South Australia, 2017-2021**

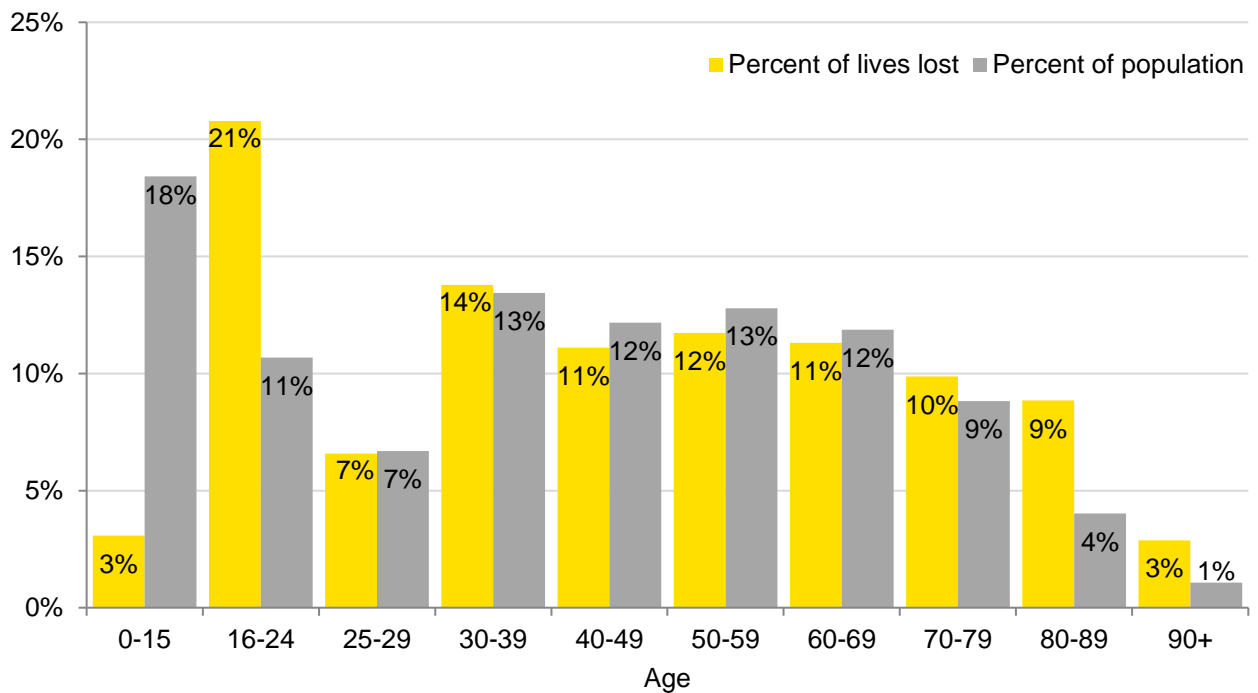
Year	Lives lost	Serious Injury	Minor Injury	Total
2017	25	110	438	573
2018	15	83	425	523
2019	29	109	446	584
2020	18	90	371	479
2021	18	95	393	506
<b>Average</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>533</b>
Trend Change	-4.6%	-2.1%	-3.5%	-3.3%

Figure 1a & 1b highlight the differences in the distribution of lives lost and serious injuries amongst age groups. Road users 70+ are under-represented in serious injuries, yet they are overrepresented in lives lost.

**Figure 1a: Serious injuries by age and population distribution, South Australia, 2017-2021**



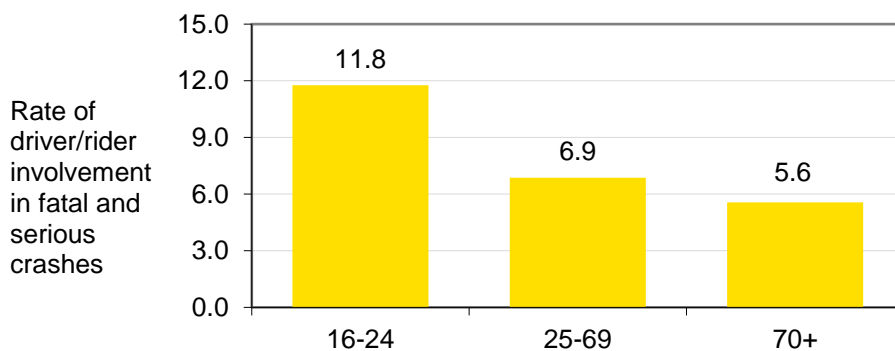
**Figure 1b: Lives lost by age and population distribution, South Australia, 2017-2021**



### Older Driver Crash Rates

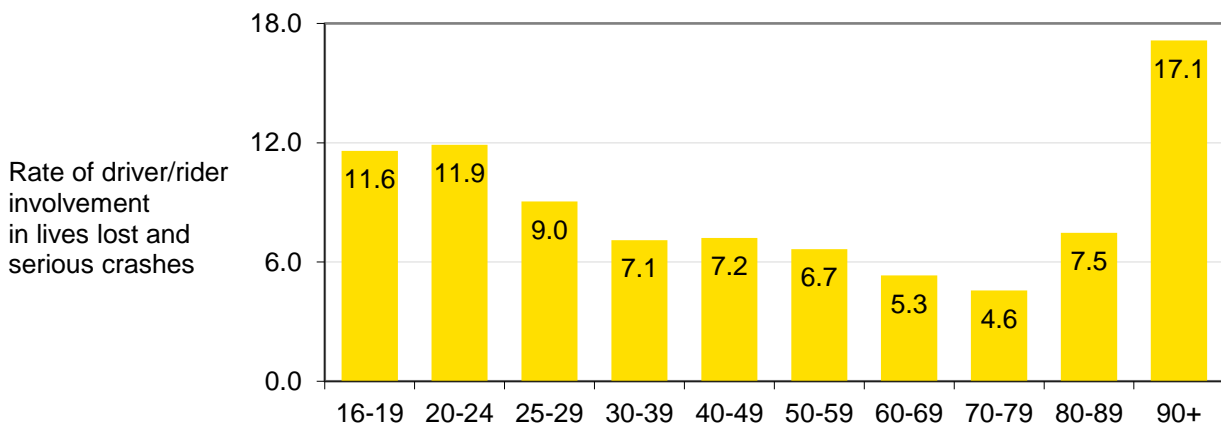
Older drivers are much less likely to be involved in a crash resulting in a life lost or serious injury than younger drivers. For 16–24-year-old drivers/riders, the rate of involvement in a crash resulting in a life lost or serious injury was 11.8 per 10,000 licence holders per year. The rate of involvement in a crash resulting in a life lost or serious injury for the 25–69-year age group was 6.9, and this dropped to 5.6 for drivers aged 70 and over as indicated in figure 2.

**Figure 2: Rate of driver/rider involvement in lives lost and serious crashes per 10,000 licences held by age, South Australia, 2017-2021**



Older drivers are generally more cautious and exhibit less illegal and dangerous driving behaviour than other age groups. Figure 3 shows that the rate of involvement in a casualty crash for older drivers increases as a driver ages. Licence holders aged 90+ have a involvement rate of 17.1 per 10,000 licence holders per year the past 5 years. Yet this age group represent less than one percent of all licence holders and less than one percent of all drivers involved in a serious casualty crash.

**Figure 3: Rate of driver/rider involvement in lives lost and serious crashes per 10,000 licences held by age, South Australia, 2017-2021**



As a driver ages, they are more likely to be responsible for the crash they are involved in. In South Australia, over the past 5 years, 56% of drivers aged 60-69 involved in crashes resulting in life lost or serious injury were responsible, drivers aged 70-79 were responsible in 73% of cases and drivers aged 80 years and over were responsible in 79% of cases.

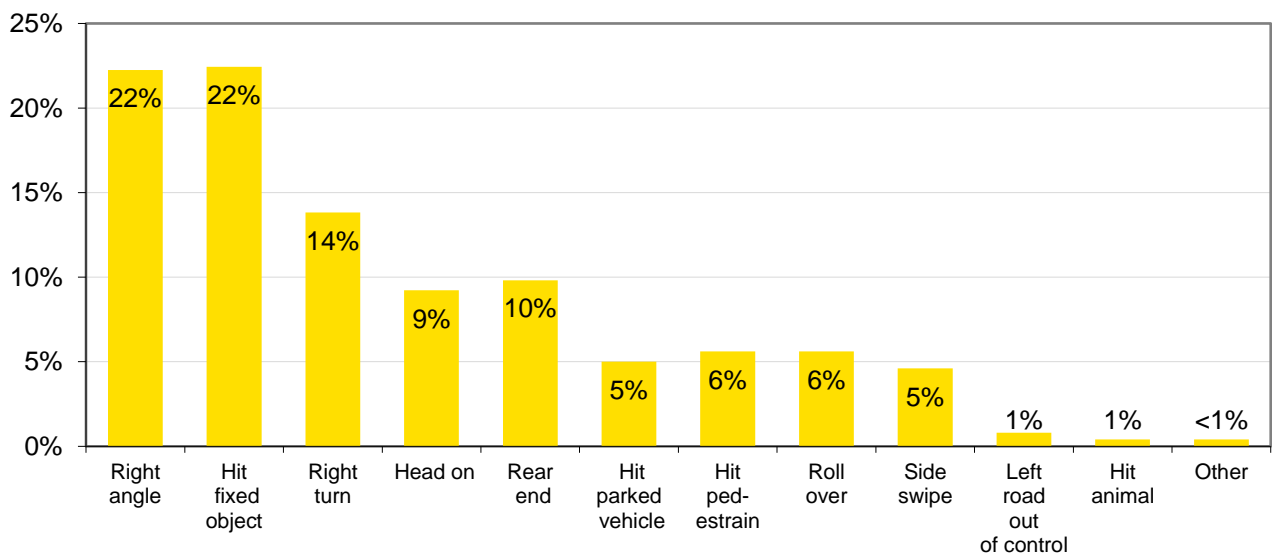
### Types of Crashes Involving Older Drivers

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury at intersections than other drivers. 44% of older driver crashes occur at intersections, compared to 33% of all crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury generally.

As seen in Figure 4, 22% of crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury involving older drivers are right angle crashes. This compares to 14% of crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury for all road users. Intersections and junctions are complex traffic environments, in which the driver has to attend to a variety of information while under time pressures. Personal conditions that may impair driving ability include: diminished hearing and eyesight, slower decision-making, slower reflexes, reduced agility, and reduced muscle strength.

Other common crash types for older drivers include hit fixed object, right turn and head on crashes but older drivers are less likely to be involved in roll over crashes compared to crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury for the population in general.

**Figure 4: Types of lives lost and serious crashes involving drivers aged 70+ years, South Australia, 2017-2021**



### Crash Location and Speed Limits

The majority of crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury involving drivers aged 70 and over occur in metropolitan areas. Table 2 shows the breakdown of crashes by speed limits and area and these figures are consistent with crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury for all South Australian road users.

**Table 2: Location & speed limits involving drivers aged 70+ years, South Australia, 2017-2021**

Speed Limit	Metropolitan	Rural
50 km/h and under	26%	16%
60 km/h	51%	9%
70-90 km/h	17%	9%
100 km/h and over	5%	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

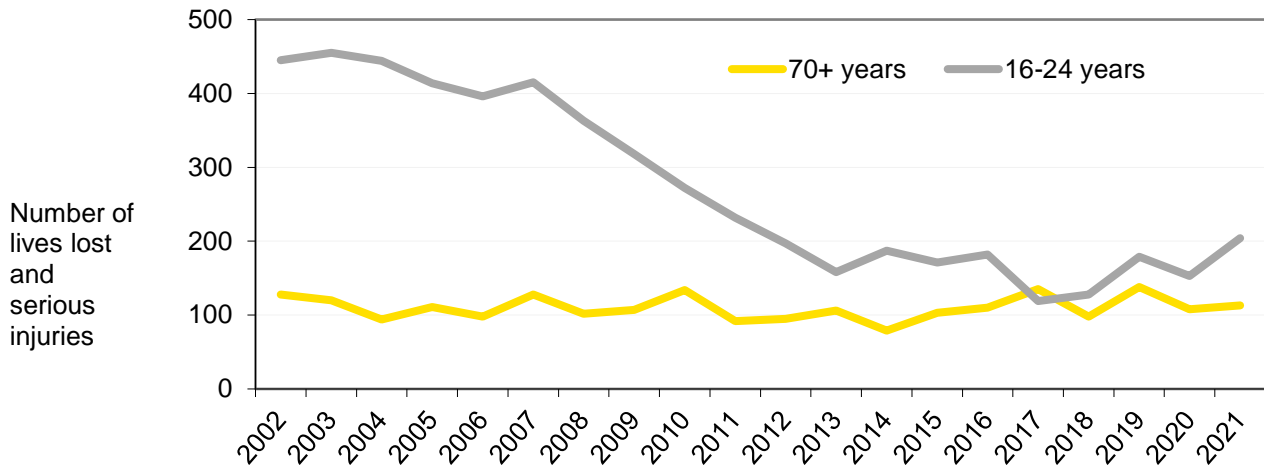
Research shows that older drivers typically control their exposure to risk when driving by avoiding driving at night or in peak hours whereby 71% of crashes in the past 5 years occurred between the hours of 9am and 5pm compared to 50% of serious casualty crashes occurring during those times in general.

Older drivers are also more likely to take short trips in familiar areas. In the past 5 years, 30% of older drivers crashed in their resident locality, compared to 20% of drivers under the age of 70.

### Trend over the past 20 years

In 2002, the number of lives lost and serious injuries for the 16-24 age group was significantly higher than the 70+ age group. Over the past 20 years, the number of lives lost and serious injuries for the 16-24 age group has decreased at a rate of -6.7%. For the 70+ age group there has also been a no decrease in rate during the same time.

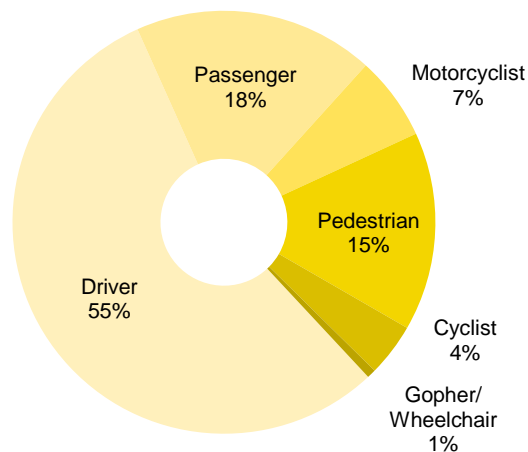
Figure 5: Lives lost and serious injuries, 70+ years and 16-24 years, South Australia, 2002-2021



**Road User Types**

Figure 6 shows that for the five-year period 2017-2021, 74% of older road user lives lost and serious injuries were drivers or passengers, 16% were pedestrians (includes gopher and wheelchair), 6% motorcyclist and cyclist (4%).

Figure 6: Road users 70+ years, lives lost and serious injuries, South Australia, 2017-2021



**Sex**

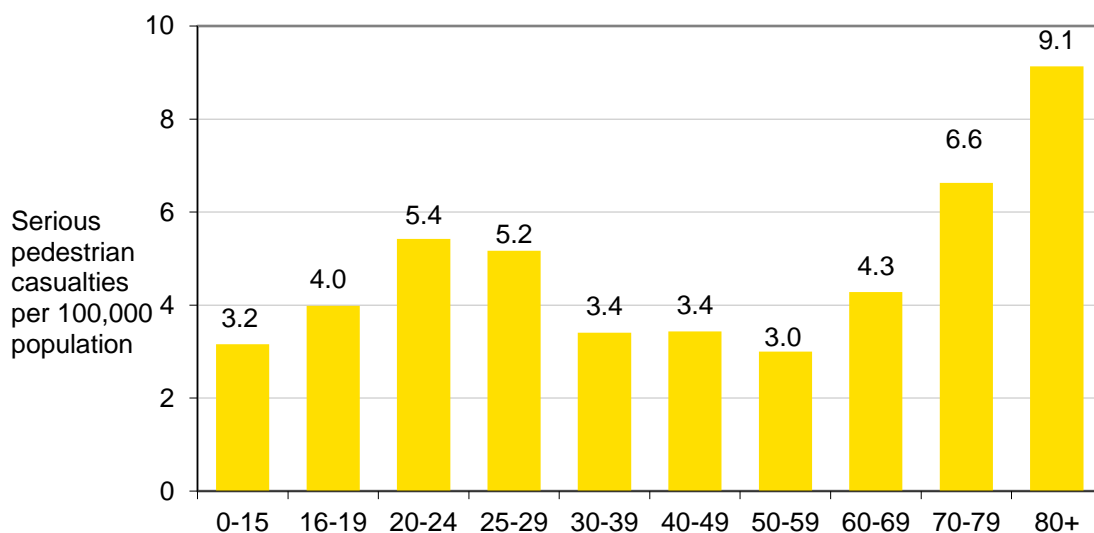
For the five-year period 2017-2021, 6% of lives lost and serious injuries were male and 32% female. However, for the older road user population, the difference was much smaller whereby 54% of lives lost and serious injuries were male and 46% were female. This can be partly explained by the longer life expectancy of females and a reduction in risk taking behaviour by older males.

Older drivers are far less likely than young drivers to be involved in crashes characterised by loss of control, speeding, risky overtaking or drink driving.

**Older Pedestrians**

Figure 7 shows the number of pedestrian lives lost and serious injuries per 100,000 population by age group. Elderly pedestrians have a higher risk of collision with road vehicles due to the perceptual, cognitive and physical deterioration associated with ageing. If an older person is hit by a car, the outcome is likely to be more severe, resulting in a life lost rather than an injury. Many elderly people also have a greater reliance on walking and are therefore more likely to be exposed to traffic as pedestrians than younger age groups<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 7: Pedestrian lives lost and serious injuries per 100,000 population, South Australia, 2017-2021**



<sup>1</sup> Page 203 'Road Safety in Australia. A publication commemorating World Health Day 2004' Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

**Definitions of police reported casualty types:**

**Casualty Crash** – crash where at least one life lost, serious injury or minor injury occurs.

**Casualty** – A life lost, serious injury or minor injury.

**Fatal Crash** – A crash for which there is at least one life lost.

**Life lost** – A person who dies within 30 days of a crash as a result of injuries sustained in that crash.

**Serious Injury Crash** – A non-fatal crash in which at least one person is seriously injured.

**Serious Injury** – A person who sustains injuries and is admitted to hospital for a duration of at least 24 hours as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor Injury Crash** – A crash in which at least one person sustains injury but no person is admitted to hospital or dies within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor Injury** – A person who sustains injuries requiring medical treatment, either by a doctor or in a hospital, as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Property Damage Only Crash** – A crash resulting in property damage in excess of the prescribed amount in which no person is injured or dies within 30 days of the crash.

**Data sources**

The data presented in this report was obtained from the Department for Infrastructure and Transport Road Crash Database. The information was compiled from police reported road casualty crashes only.

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