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# **Older Driver Program Five-Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017**

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**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
Older Driver Program  
Five-Year Strategic Plan  
2012-2017**

**Introduction**

The mission of the Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is to “save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes.” NHTSA has focused attention on the safety needs of older drivers since 1989, when it established its Older Driver Program with the goal of reducing traffic-related fatalities and injuries.

Older drivers (defined as people 65 and older) represent a significant and increasing proportion of American drivers. As of 2008, 32.2 million drivers in the United States were at least 65 years old. It is estimated that by 2020, there will be more than 40 million licensed drivers 65 and older. At the onset of this increase in numbers of older adult drivers, NHTSA has a unique opportunity to help the Nation plan and prepare for its transportation safety needs.

In 2005, NHTSA synthesized a large body of research findings and expert opinions and developed the Older Driver Traffic Safety Plan, which has guided research, programs, and outreach conducted through a collaborative effort involving NHTSA, its 10 regional Offices, State highway safety offices, and partners during the past 5 years. (“Partners” are State, local, and community organizations that are initiating and implementing some type of older driver effort in their respective areas.)

Building on that seminal work, this strategic plan focuses on how NHTSA will address the safety needs of older drivers over the next 5 years. To inform this plan, in 2009 and 2010 NHTSA conducted nationwide research to determine how to address the evolving needs of regional, State, and local older driver program planners. NHTSA conducted 28 in-depth telephone interviews with its regional office staff, State highway safety offices, and local partner organizations; and also convened a panel of 14 experts working in various capacities in the older driver arena.

**Results of Current Research**

The results of the in-depth interviews and expert panel meeting underscored the importance of enhancing and coordinating ongoing older driver efforts to ultimately prevent an increase in older driver traffic crash fatalities and injuries. Based on this research, NHTSA identified the following program initiatives to guide the implementation of its Older Driver Traffic Safety Plan for 2012-2017:

1. Build communications for older drivers and caregivers.
2. Establish and maintain partnerships to enhance older driver safety efforts.
3. Develop and promote driver licensing policies.

## **Overview of Current Challenges and Opportunities**

The Older Driver Program is tasked with encouraging States to anticipate and plan for the arrival of more than 40 million licensed drivers 65 and older over the next 10 years. Although approximately 25 States include older drivers as a priority area in their State Highway Safety Plans, few include them in their Section 402<sup>1</sup> plans, and only one State has identified a specific older driver performance measure in its Section 402 plan. Furthermore, many older driver countermeasures involve roadway changes (better signage, protected left turn lanes) or licensing regulations (examination procedures, graduated licensing), making them the primary responsibility of offices other than State highway safety offices.

Along with these challenges, many opportunities exist to promote older driver safety over the next 5 years and in years to come. These challenges and opportunities are highlighted in the next section, based on input from the expert panel.

### **1. Build Communications About Older Drivers**

Fundamental to building communications about older drivers is the need to reframe the goal of older driver programs to emphasize the importance of keeping older drivers mobile and safe. Along with this reframing comes the need to promote the idea that, as they age, people must plan for eventual adjustments to their driving habits. NHTSA's development and promotion of communications for program planners and older drivers and their support networks will encourage changes in older adults' attitudes, perceptions, and social norms about driving.

#### **Challenges**

##### ***Reframing the Issue***

It is important to distinguish between medically at-risk drivers and healthy older drivers. Without this distinction, publicized crashes involving older drivers often lead to reactive legislative attempts to overly restrict the driving privileges of older drivers (e.g., by mandating screening at the age of 68 without using research to justify the choice of age).

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<sup>1</sup> Section 2001 of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) reauthorizes the State and Community Highway Safety formula grant program -- Section 402 of chapter 4 of Title 23 -- to support State highway safety programs, designed to reduce traffic crashes and resulting deaths, injuries, and property damage. A state may use these grant funds only for highway safety purposes. At least 40% of these funds are to be used to address local traffic safety problems.

### ***Increasing Communications Among the States***

- Insufficient sharing of information about older driver programs among the States is an ongoing issue.

### ***Identifying and Promoting Effective Products***

- The lack of identification and promotion of effective products reduces the usefulness of older driver program efforts.
- Consumers have a low level of awareness of older driver safety material developed by organizations, including NHTSA.
- Little information is available about the effectiveness of older driver safety products (e.g., trainings and tools) currently on the market.
- NHTSA and other organizations have begun to evaluate older driver training programs. Although the research is improving, the designs vary and often are not rigorous.
- Many consumer products for older drivers are Internet-based. Internet usage rates are lower in rural areas; therefore, older drivers and their support networks in these areas may have less access to these products.

### **Opportunities**

- Several nonprofit organizations, including some funded by NHTSA, are actively engaged in developing products and promoting accurate information about older driver safety.
- Many effective State and local older driver programs are willing to share their experiences with other communities.
- Other DOT agencies and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are mandated to promote effective information for older drivers.
- Baby boomers are more computer literate, are healthier, and have been driving longer. These attributes may make them more open to receiving and acting on accurate information about changes to their driving habits.
- Older drivers have opportunities to adapt their vehicles, undergo occupational therapy, and take driver-wellness training courses to prolong their ability to drive.
- There are existing tools to address medical conditions, medications, and driver fitness among a range of audiences.

## **2. Establish and Maintain Partnerships**

An important part of NHTSA's efforts to build partnerships is to connect States with highway safety partners, along with aging and other organizations that work with seniors, which have not traditionally been directly involved in highway safety (e.g., senior centers and area agencies on aging).

## **Challenges**

### ***Increasing Awareness of the Issue Among Potential Partners***

- Many potential partners are not aware of the importance of older driver safety.
- Not enough partnerships exist, particularly at the local level.
- Organizations that work with seniors typically do not designate a single staffer to work solely on older driver issues. Instead, interested staff members typically carry out activities on their own time.

### ***Facilitating Partnership Development***

- Coordination appears to be lacking among local organizations that provide services and goods to seniors.
- Older driver programs are not aware of existing mobility options or of networks that can inform them of such options (e.g., Administration on Aging's Aging Network).
- Local organizations often lack the funding and time staff members need to commit to and complete partnership tasks. In addition, without strong leadership and attainable objectives, partners with different missions may lose interest in older driver partnerships.

## **Opportunities**

- Many national public and private sector highway-safety-related organizations work on issues related to older driver safety.
- Many national public and private sector organizations that work with seniors also are working on issues related to older driver safety.
- Agencies within DOT are working together to address older driver issues.
- Groups at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the NIH are working on projects related to older driver safety.
- Models for effective older driver partnerships exist and some States and communities are using them.

## **3. Develop and Promote Older Driver Licensing Policies**

An important starting point when developing and promoting new older driver licensing policies is recognizing the roles and responsibilities of DMVs, law enforcement officers, medical professionals, medical advisory boards (MABs), and older drivers and their support networks. In addition, it is important to recognize the need for political support when undertaking these efforts.

## **Challenges**

### ***Making Changes to Licensing Policies***

- Updating older driver licensing policies is currently not a priority for most States.
- Many elected officials view older driver licensing policies as political issues they prefer to avoid.
- Most States have not dedicated the funding necessary to evaluate a driver's fitness to drive.
- Methods for determining a driver's fitness to drive vary from State to State, and many are inadequate.

### ***Expanding the Role of Medical Advisory Boards***

- The structure and function of MABs vary by State and only 32 States have them.
- DMVs must provide more incentives for physicians to participate as MAB board members.
- Most physicians are not aware of appropriate referral avenues or of the existence of their States' MABs.

### ***Training for Law Enforcement***

- Law enforcement officials need training about when and how to make referrals.
- Law enforcement officials are often unaware of the role of MABs.

## **Opportunities**

- Licensing policies can restrict rather than rescind older driver's licenses.
- DMVs can use low-cost interventions to support policies such as older driver screening by DMV counter personnel.
- NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrator's *Driver Fitness Medical Guidelines* are available to help States develop policies and regulations.
- All States allow the police to report older drivers to the DMV. This could be extended to other informed individuals.
- Law enforcement officials are getting much better at recording what they are finding in the field.

## **Program Plan**

This plan addresses the three major initiatives NHTSA will undertake to promote older driver safety. Each of the sections below begins with a brief introduction that addresses the key issues raised by expert panel members, followed by a basic approach to addressing the initiative that includes program activities and action steps.

## Initiative 1: Build Communications About Older Drivers

The experts identified gaps in two major areas in communications about older drivers: communications to and among program planners at the State and local levels, and direct communications to older drivers and their support networks. NHTSA will conduct the program activities outlined below to close these communications gaps.

The experts identified a major need to change the attitudes and behaviors of older drivers and their support networks. To encourage this change, communications must focus on the concept of prevention, i.e., helping older drivers plan for the physical and mental changes they will likely experience in the years ahead, and making the necessary adjustments before they have problems on the road. Related to this, products and messages will encourage the older driver to consider and choose driving transitions (for example, choosing to eliminate night-time or highway driving, or choosing to stop driving altogether). In addition, older drivers' support networks—their family, friends, and neighbors—will require information about how and when to seek professional help for an older driver (e.g., seeking an evaluation from a driver rehabilitation specialist).

To begin the process of behavior change, the experts suggested that the agency develop and test key messages. Activities to support reframing older driver messages include the following.

**Conduct research.** Formative research will provide the basis for creating draft program messages and developing language targeted to older drivers and members of their support networks. (Results from the needs assessment and expert panel will contribute to this research.)

**Develop key messages.** These messages will be routinely incorporated into older driver material. Ultimately, NHTSA will want to develop key messages for each of the target audiences. Messages targeted to older drivers may need to focus on such issues as benefits of choosing appropriate driving transitions, the costs involved in unsafe driving, and self-efficacy. Messages aimed at older driver support networks may encourage them to help older drivers make driving transitions or address other health issues.

**Pretest messages.** NHTSA will pretest these messages with the target audiences via partner agency networks and State and local senior centers and networks. Pretesting results will provide important information about tone, content, and incentives.

**Disseminate messages.** NHTSA will work with the organizations within its partnership network to convey the key messages to older drivers and their support networks. NHTSA will request that partners add the key messages to any



older driver communications they issue. In addition, NHTSA will incorporate the key messages into any revised or new product it releases.

### ***Increasing Communications to and Among Program Planners***

Older driver programs are functioning across the Nation, yet many program planners are not aware of existing material and resources they can use to develop and enhance their programs. They also often are unaware of possible grants and networking opportunities to help them identify best practices in the field. As a result, they may be duplicating efforts, expending unnecessary resources to recreate material, or missing opportunities to obtain additional program funding. Below are activities to increase communications to and among program planners.

**Create an online clearinghouse for information on older driver programs.** Program planners need an accessible central resource to identify existing information and material applicable to their needs. This information can be organized in a variety of ways; however, at a minimum, it should clearly identify the target audience for each product and include grant announcements, updates on workshops and conferences, and case studies.

**Design an interactive Web page on NHTSA's Web site or create a separate link for the clearinghouse.** In addition to static lists of products and information, the webpage will include interactive web tools to encourage networking, resource sharing, and feedback on product effectiveness. These tools also will reduce duplication of efforts and enhance the more efficient use of available resources. To ensure that a wide range of targeted individuals and organizations have access to this resource, site design should employ all available search engine optimization techniques. Site visitors will be encouraged to register, which will enable NHTSA to reach out to users when the agency or its Federal partners host webinars or teleconferences on older driver issues.

NHTSA will use agency criteria to determine the material and other information for inclusion in the clearinghouse. In addition, NHTSA will consider requesting that a national partner or panel of experts periodically review and assess the material and products in the clearinghouse and determine whether or not to "rate" these resources.

**Promote the clearinghouse.** Once the clearinghouse is operational, NHTSA will begin a layered and continuous promotion effort to alert potential users and contributors. NHTSA will launch the clearinghouse via a series of webinars that will announce the clearinghouse, demonstrate its use, and host a question-and-answer session. The first webinar will include a live audience of partner agencies invited to NHTSA headquarters (or whichever central location the agency chooses to broadcast its webinar). Subsequent webinars will be scheduled to accommodate time zones across the country. The agency will invite its regional offices

and request that the regional offices share the webinar dates with the State highway safety offices within their respective regions. Regional offices will request that each State highway safety office disseminate the webinar announcements to other appropriate agencies in their State, as well as local nonprofits interested in the issue. The agency will also invite its partner organizations to participate in the webinars.

Following the initial series of webinars, NHTSA will host a brief teleconference with its partners to solicit their assistance in spreading the word about the clearinghouse. The agency will encourage partners to use their communication channels to promote the clearinghouse within their own networks of affiliates (e.g., via their websites; in member mailings and other correspondence; in newsletters and journals; and at conferences, meetings, and workshops).

As part of its ongoing promotional effort, NHTSA will promote the clearinghouse at every conference that agency staff attend. Staff will distribute promotional materials (e.g., cards with the clearinghouse Web site address, sample listing of materials) to conference attendees. When possible, staff will also have a computer available so that conference participants can access the clearinghouse in real time.

The clearinghouse will be most useful if it is kept current and refreshed with new material, such as grant announcements. NHTSA will send out brief e-mail announcements to registered users to alert them when new information is added to the clearinghouse. If the new material is particularly important, NHTSA will consider hosting a teleconference to promote the new material.

NHTSA will also include information about the clearinghouse in all Older Driver Program content; and, when appropriate, will include it in other agency material.

### ***Identifying and Promoting Effective Products – Providing Implementation Guidance for Program Planners***

**Update the Drive Well Toolkit.** NHTSA's Drive Well Toolkit is an excellent product for program planners. It contains tools for educating professionals to assist older adults, their families, and concerned community members who are dealing with driver safety and community mobility issues. However, it does not address how to market an older driver program or how to conduct media outreach, which the expert panel identified as a gap in communications products. The following are ways in which NHTSA will fill this gap by repackaging and promoting its existing Drive Well Toolkit:

- Provide information on reframing older driver safety using an evidence-based approach to demonstrate that most older drivers are safe drivers.
- Create practical guidance on how to implement and sustain older driver programs.

- Provide a section on media outreach to help programs better market their offerings. This section will include a crisis management plan to facilitate a timely and coordinated response to a dramatic accident caused by an older driver.
- Include suggestions for ways to use recommended resources from NHTSA and its partner organizations.
- Encourage program planners to build local partnerships and include suggestions on how to seek out opportunities and establish partnerships.

## **Initiative 2. Establish and Maintain Partnerships for Older Driver Safety**

Partnerships amplify and diversify program impact, and often help sustain and extend a program. The expert panelists pointed to the power of partnerships as one of the critical factors for success for older driver programs. They emphasized the need for NHTSA to foster partnerships at all levels—national, regional, State, and local. Experts also identified a specific need for NHTSA to support State and local older driver program efforts to develop partnerships, which are particularly important to help leverage limited resources. The needs assessment cited the importance of NHTSA leadership in partnership development and in working with national partners to foster political support to make older driver safety a higher priority across the country. They added that State and local programs need support from local stakeholders to expand program reach and share best practices across both existing and emerging networks.

NHTSA has a long history of partnering with public and private sector groups that support traffic safety, many of whom currently support the agency’s older driver program. However, there are still many opportunities to further develop our existing partnership network and to help State and local programs expand their older driver partnerships. The following activities will support these efforts.

**Examine existing older driver partnerships.** A review of existing partnerships will help the agency identify expansion potential within these relationships and opportunities to work with new partners. Special attention to the differences between the goals and objectives of national partnerships, as compared to State and local ones, will help the agency develop strategies for sharing information and resources. This review will include partnerships with and among Federal agencies; national associations that work in the fields of traffic safety and law enforcement; national associations that work with older adults; national, State, and local organizations involved in alternative transportation and transportation planning; and regional and State older driver partnerships.

**Develop partnership criteria.** General criteria for potential partner organizations will guide NHTSA efforts to identify appropriate support for our older driver program activities. These criteria might include:

- Demonstrated interest in issues impacting older adults
- Ability to reach older drivers and/or individuals who work with older adults
- Established relationships with other potential partner organizations, including nontraditional partners
- Support for the goal of older driver safety
- Ability to commit to a specified period of time to establish and maintain the partnership.
- Willingness to establish a Memorandum of Understanding if appropriate or necessary.

Examples of the types of organizations NHTSA will consider for partnerships follow:

- Organizations with a membership of older adults—An organization that supports older adults will provide a wide and direct channel for reaching older drivers with messages about driving transitioning.
- Organizations that reach the support networks of older adults—Family members of older adults often need more information and support to make informed decisions. Geriatric care managers are a good resource to connect families of older drivers with driving assessment tools and screening programs. Care managers also may be a first line of defense in recognizing at-risk driving behaviors.
- Organizations with a membership of health care providers who treat older adults—These organizations will provide a channel for reaching providers who treat and assess older drivers and who may counsel older drivers about driving transitions. The partnership could renew interest in the *Physician's Guide* and spark more webinars or other courses to educate health care providers about older driver issues.
- Organizations with a membership of public health professionals—A national organization of public health professionals could generate more national discussion about issues older drivers face. The increased attention could spark better policies directed to older drivers.
- Organizations that reach law enforcement professionals—Law enforcement professionals are often the first to identify at-risk drivers. They need more training and information to help them better assess warning signs and understand what next steps to take and what actions are mandated by laws within their jurisdiction.

**Facilitate information sharing among partner organizations.** The expert panel identified a lack of coordination and information sharing among organizations serving older drivers as an area of concern. Webinars, teleconferences, e-mail blasts, and workshops at conferences are among the many

communications vehicles NHTSA will use to promote information sharing and to nurture partnerships.

**Modify and distribute existing partnership development material to address older driver programs.** Many NHTSA programs rely on partnerships to expand its reach. Partnership development material created to promote occupant protection and impaired driving programs, for instance, can be easily modified to address the needs of older driver programs.

### **Initiative 3. Develop and Promote Driver Licensing Policies**

Members of the expert panel identified a need for improved driver licensing policies in three areas: renewal procedures, medical advisory boards, and law enforcement training.

#### ***Renewal Procedures***

Renewal procedures deal with licensed drivers of any age. Specific renewal procedures for older or medically at-risk drivers may include accelerated renewal cycles; a requirement to renew a driver's license in person rather than electronically or by mail; and testing that is not routinely required of younger drivers, such as vision and road tests. The panel recommended that NHTSA continue to provide States with information on screening drivers by identifying protocols for informal screening by DMV counter personnel and reviewing driver screening protocols and licensing policies from other countries.

**Develop a model screening protocol for DMV counter personnel.** DMV counter staff members are in a position to identify older drivers who have physical or cognitive impairments that can interfere with their ability to drive safely. The protocol will identify cues of possible decline in driver functioning and indicate actions to take if someone exhibits them. A training module on its use will accompany the protocol.

#### ***Medical Advisory Boards***

Independent medical advisory boards play an important role in assessing the potential impairment of older drivers and recommending appropriate licensing actions, from restricted licenses to complete revocation. The structure and practices of these boards vary widely from State to State, and 18 States do not have them. Expert panel members strongly supported the need to strengthen the structure of medical advisory boards and to encourage their formation in States that do not have them. Program activities to support use and effectiveness of MABs will include the following:

**Develop a model for the inclusion of MABs in State licensing policies.** The model will incorporate best practices for MABs and offer guidance on the need for additional legislation and regulations for their inclusion in licensing policies.

**Develop guidelines on the structure, roles, and responsibilities of MABs.** Exemplary practices from existing MABs will form the basis for these guidelines, which will be designed to encourage States to employ medical advisory boards and improve the effectiveness of existing boards.

**Develop informational prototypes for States to use to inform health care providers about older driver licensing and medical advisory board practices.** States could adapt these prototypes to explain the role and utility of medical advisory boards and the laws and process for reporting to these boards.

**Create a template for a cue card for law enforcement officers and health care providers on when and how to refer older drivers to an MAB.** Health care providers and law enforcement professionals need to know how to refer someone to their State's MAB. The template will identify key information about the referral process for States to include.

## **Conclusion**

NHTSA has a timely opportunity to proactively begin to assist current older drivers and the rapidly emerging generation of older drivers to prevent injuries and fatalities from motor vehicle accidents. This 5-year strategic plan is intended to be a dynamic guidepost rather than a static statement. In the years ahead, NHTSA will revisit and adjust this plan in response to new information and emerging issues that impact the older driver community.

The initiatives outlined in this strategic plan are based on expert recommendations NHTSA gathered during months of formative research. NHTSA will continue to rely on expert counsel as the agency and its partners implement the actions outlined here and others that will evolve over the next 5 years.

By increasing communications to and about older drivers, by expanding and enhancing partnerships addressing older driver issues, and by improving driver licensing policies and practices, NHTSA and its partners will continue to improve the safety of our nation's drivers.

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