

**Are senior drivers more risky?
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As I travel and speak, I often hear about the growing proportion of seniors in the ranks of volunteer drivers. This makes sense, because seniors are the fastest growing segment of the driving population in Canada.

More seniors are keeping their licenses

As of 2004 (most recent data from Transport Canada), 71% of Canadians aged 65 to 69 hold a driver's license, as do 23% of Canadians 85 and older. There are roughly 2.7 million drivers over 65 in our country and that number will likely double by 2040.

Data: Seniors and accident frequency

It has long been believed that older drivers are the safest drivers on the road. Data on the total number of accidents per age of driver seemed to support this belief. However, a new study that looks at accidents per distance driven, using Canadian collision data from the past 10 years, shows that this isn't true.

[The National Blueprint for Injury Prevention in Older Drivers](#) reveals the following:

- The leading cause of accidental death for 65 to 75 years olds in Canada today is driving-related accidents.
- Those over 75 have a 3.5 times higher crash rate per mile driven compared to 35 to 44 year olds.
- Current statistics indicate that older driver mortality and morbidity is on the rise, and thus, older driver safety is of great concern.

How does age affect safety?

According to the report, “advancing age can lead to changes in vision, perceptual skills, attention, memory, decision-making, reaction-time, processing speed, and physical abilities, in addition to specific medical conditions that can affect safe driving Changes in cognition and perception have been shown to be associated with an increased risk of accidents.”

AAA in the U.S. posts the following information on its [website](#):

Age 40: Mental sharpness begins to diminish; thought processing slows; multitasking is more challenging; night vision and sensitivity and recovery from glare diminish.

Age 50: Many people require bifocals; reaction time slows.

Age 60: Muscle strength and range of motion decrease by as much as 25%.

Age 70: Arthritic joints may make movement painful and restrict mobility; conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, hypertension and diabetes may affect perception and behavior.

The report acknowledges that there is a debate about whether these changes are related to advancing age or deteriorating health. More studies are needed. In the meantime, nonprofit organizations that engage seniors as drivers need to manage the risk. Here are a few ideas:

Tips on managing the risks associated with senior drivers

1. Ask about medical or physical conditions on your application form and discuss with all applicants any concerns they might have related to their health and driving.
 - Questions asked by [Calgary Meals on Wheels](#)
2. Avoid night driving if at all possible. If night driving is necessary, talk to your drivers and confirm that they are comfortable with this. Go through tips found in training below.
3. Provide regular training to your senior drivers. Talk to them and listen to them. Here are two excellent documents from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation.
 - [The Senior Driver: Driving Safety Cycle](#)
 - [Senior Driver Group Education Curriculum](#)

4. Throughout the year, use various communication tools (e.g., thank-you letters, phone calls, training sessions) to ask about senior drivers' experiences and concerns. Use these opportunities to show appreciation for them, but also to reinforce key points from your senior driving training. Use "real person" stories where possible, ensuring you have the individual's approval first.
5. Consider using random customer service phone calls to clients who are being driven by your volunteer drivers of all ages. Ask about their experience. Reassure your drivers with positive comments and consider how best to deal with negative comments. This is one way of finding out about drivers who may speed, not wear their seatbelt, and yes, senior drivers who may be having some issues.
6. Reinforce the benefits of having seniors driving for you. This is important. Spending the majority of time pointing out concerns does not present a fair, full picture. Use positive stories of senior drivers who have been with you for a long time.
7. Ensure that all of your drivers have someone in your organization to call when they don't feel well or aren't comfortable driving on a particular day (e.g., rain, snow, too cloudy, vehicle issues). Give them an easy way out. Our motto is: "protecting your people should be your first priority, even ahead of the good work that you do."

What are the benefits of senior drivers?

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation, in the [curriculum](#) noted above, lists the following strengths of older drivers:

- *Judgment.* The best judgment comes with experience. History is full of leaders who made their best contributions later in life. Many current world leaders are in their 60s and older.
- *Experience.* Seniors have a wealth of experience. By the time we reach 80, most of us have been driving for years, on all kinds of roads, and in all kinds of situations.
- *Vitality.* Seniors are now living longer, healthier, and more active lives.
- *Responsible.* As a group, seniors are quite responsible. For example, seniors have a low rate of drinking and driving.
- *Ability to adapt.* Seniors have shown they can adapt to the many changes that have occurred in roads and motor vehicles over the years. Many seniors also make changes in their driving habits, for example choosing not to drive at night, in bad weather, or in heavy traffic. This ability to adapt is very important as we experience the effects of getting older.

Additional resources:

[Ontario's Senior Driver Renewal Program](#)

[Alberta's Tips for Senior Drivers](#)

[Vehicle features that maximize the safety of mature drivers](#)