

Few Older Drivers Discuss Driving Safety With Physician, Survey Finds

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Alice Pomidor, a physician and professor of geriatrics at the FSU College of Medicine.

Although motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury-related deaths among adults 65 years and older, very few older Floridians have discussed driving safety with a physician, according to a new survey conducted by Florida State University to support the Florida Department of Transportation's Safe Mobility for Life Program.

Only 5 percentage of survey respondents, all over age 50, said a physician or other health professional talked with them about their ability to drive safely, despite the fact that 15 percent of them had been involved in a crash in the past five years, according to John Reynolds, the Eagles Professor of Sociology and director of Florida State's **Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy**. Reynolds received grants from **FDOT** to conduct the 2013 Florida Aging Road User Survey and analyze the results.

"Physicians and other health professionals are in a unique position to spot changes related to aging that can make driving riskier," Reynolds said. "This reticence on the part of health professionals and their older adult patients is an important missed opportunity for prevention."

Dr. Alice Pomidor, a physician and professor of geriatrics at the FSU College of Medicine who helped design the survey, agreed.

"All health professionals should be asking their patients about how they are getting around the community, just like we ask how well they are getting around their homes," Pomidor said. "Physicians can help patients identify and treat health issues to help extend their ability to drive safely, such as drug side effects, vision problems, arthritis or diseases that affect the brain and nerves. We can also help caregivers recognize when driving ability is limited so they can prepare to use other transportation as needed."

Further, only 13 percent of survey respondents (8 percent of the younger group and 18 percent of those 65 and older) said they have planned ahead for the day when they can no longer safely drive. When asked what the most likely way they would get around if they couldn't safely drive, 65 percent said they would rely on family and friends.

What's more, 71 percent of respondents said they were not interested in receiving information about safe driving and transitioning from driving.

The findings reflect a serious issue in Florida — and across the nation — that older drivers are at a disproportionate risk for being involved in a fatal vehicular crash, Reynolds said. To address the problem, **FDOT** has awarded the Pepper Institute grants totaling \$875,000 since 2010 to support its multidisciplinary statewide **Safe Mobility for Life Coalition** as the coalition implements the **Aging Road User Strategic Safety Plan**.

"The core aim of the coalition is to reduce crash-related injuries and fatalities involving older adults in Florida," Reynolds said. "This is the key outcome, and in 2011 they have declined despite an increasing number of older drivers in Florida."

The number of fatalities involving drivers 65 and older declined from 270 in 2007 to 241 in 2011 and the number of serious injuries dropped from 1,681 to 1,577 during that same period, according to Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicle data. The number of deaths and serious injuries to others from crashes involving a driver over 65 also declined.

More than 1,000 Floridians participated in the Florida Aging Road User Survey, which will help the coalition monitor the success of the strategic safety plan and identify additional needs. Of those survey participants, about half ranged in age from 50 to 64 years old, while the other half were 65 and older. The telephone and Internet survey was conducted in summer 2013.

"We hope to see more awareness among Florida's older adults of the existing programs that help them maintain their mobility and evidence that family members are talking to one another and to medical professionals about older driver safety and alternatives to driving," Reynolds said.

Florida leads the nation with more than 17 percent of the state's population 65 and older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. By the year 2030, more than 27 percent of the state's population will be 65 and older, compared to 19 percent for the rest of the nation.

"As the population of citizens 65 and older increases, an increasing proportion of licensed drivers also are getting older," said Gail Holley, program manager for the Safe Mobility for Life Program at FDOT. "The coalition, with the support of FSU's Pepper Institute, is helping Floridians remain safe and mobile throughout their lifetime."

Source: <http://news.fsu.edu/More-FSU-News/Few-older-drivers-discuss-driving-safety-with-physician-survey-finds>