

Maryland's Older Drivers: Ensuring Road Safety

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The Problem

Older drivers are expected to triple in number over the next fifteen years: Road safety policies are needed now. Federal recommendations, national and state-based research, and rapidly changing demographics indicate that state driver licensing and highway policies are now needed to address older driver safety. Best practices suggest that beginning at a certain point, older drivers should be screened every two years to determine cognitive and physical function that affects driving ability. States across the country have begun to shorten driver license renewal period for older drivers to every two years.

Changing Demographics

Rapidly changing demographics will double the number of Maryland drivers over 70 in just 7 years and more than triple the number of drivers over 70 in 15 years. The baby boomers, the largest generation in American history, total 83 million and represent about one-quarter of the U.S. population. Sometimes referred to as a 'senior tsunami,' the number of Americans 65 and older is expected to grow from 40 million today to 88.5 million by 2050. In just 20 years all baby boomers will be over 70 years of age. The figure below documents the expected growth of Maryland's older licensed driver population over the next 25 years. The number of Maryland drivers over 70 is expected to double in 7 years and more than triple in 15 years.

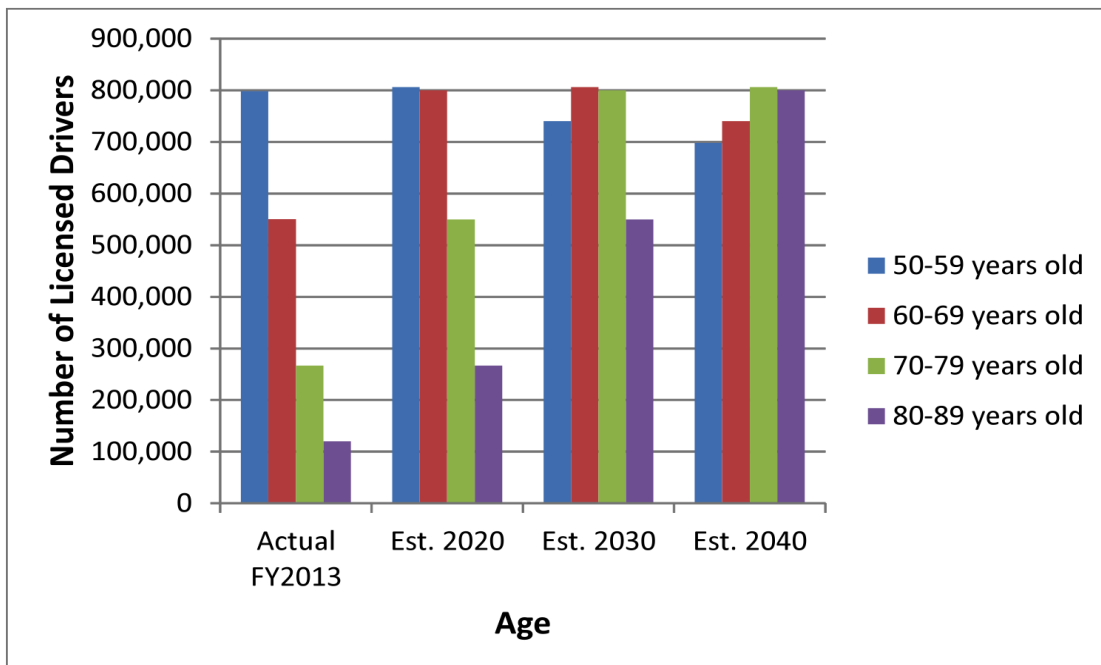


Figure 1: Maryland Older Licensed Driver Population – 2013 to 2040 - Projections Based on Maryland FY 2013 Actual Licensed Drivers

License Renewals

States vary in their approach to license renewal for older drivers. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have special provisions in place for older driver's license renewal. Several states require in-person renewal of a driver's license in combination with a shorter renewal period for older drivers. In 2012, Maryland extended its license renewal for all drivers from five to eight years; there are currently no special provisions in place for older drivers.

State	Standard Renewal	Age-based Requirements
Illinois	4 years	Every 2 years beginning at 81 years; Annually beginning at 87 years
Iowa	5 years	Every 2 years beginning at 70 years; In-person renewal
Hawaii	8 years	Every 2 years beginning at 72 years
Maryland	8 years	None
New York	8 years	None
Wisconsin	8 years	None

Figure 2: Comparison of Select States License Renewal Frequency

Crashes and Injuries Increase as We Age

Older drivers become more crash prone with age, even though they drive less. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, fatal crash rates per mile traveled begin to grow starting at age 70, and increase notably after age 80. This is largely due to a susceptibility to injury and fragility among older drivers. Age-related declines in vision, physical mobility, reaction time, and cognitive impairments may affect

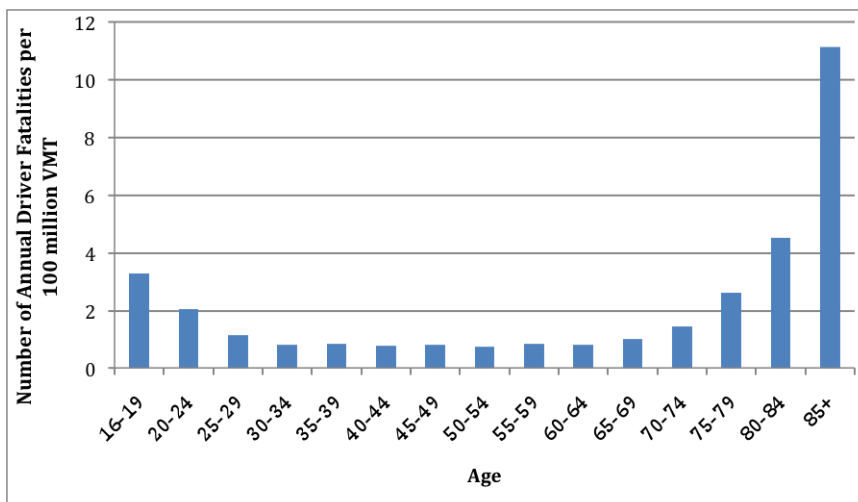


Figure 3: United States Annual Fatalities of Drivers per 100 Million Vehicle Miles Traveled

some older adults' driving abilities. After age 70, typical changes include slower information processing in the brain, and therefore a lengthening of the amount of time it takes to make quick decisions on the road. Studies have shown that distractions are more difficult to ignore as people age. Figure 3 documents the annual number of U.S. deaths of drivers by age per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.

Federal Recommendations to States

Federal agencies recommend that states improve licensing policies for older drivers. Driver licensing is a state function with no federal oversight. The aging baby boom generation and the results of federally funded research have prompted The U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, to urge State Departments of Motor Vehicles to develop renewal procedures specifically for older drivers, including:

- Accelerated renewal cycles
- In person renewals
- Screening such as vision or road tests (not routinely required of younger drivers)

NHTSA recommends enhanced training programs for law enforcement officers and health care providers on when and how to refer older drivers to the Medical Advisory Board; and for MVA counter staff to identify cues of possible physical or cognitive impairments that can interfere with a driver’s ability to drive safely. In new proposed guidelines, NHTSA recommends that states implement driver-licensing policies to address older driver safety:

- In-person renewal should be required of individual drivers over a specified age that the State determines based on an analysis of their individual crash records.
- Medical review policies should align with the Driver Fitness Medical Guidelines published by NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators.
- Medical providers of all kinds who provide a referral regarding a driver in good faith to the driver licensing authority should be provided immunity from civil liability.

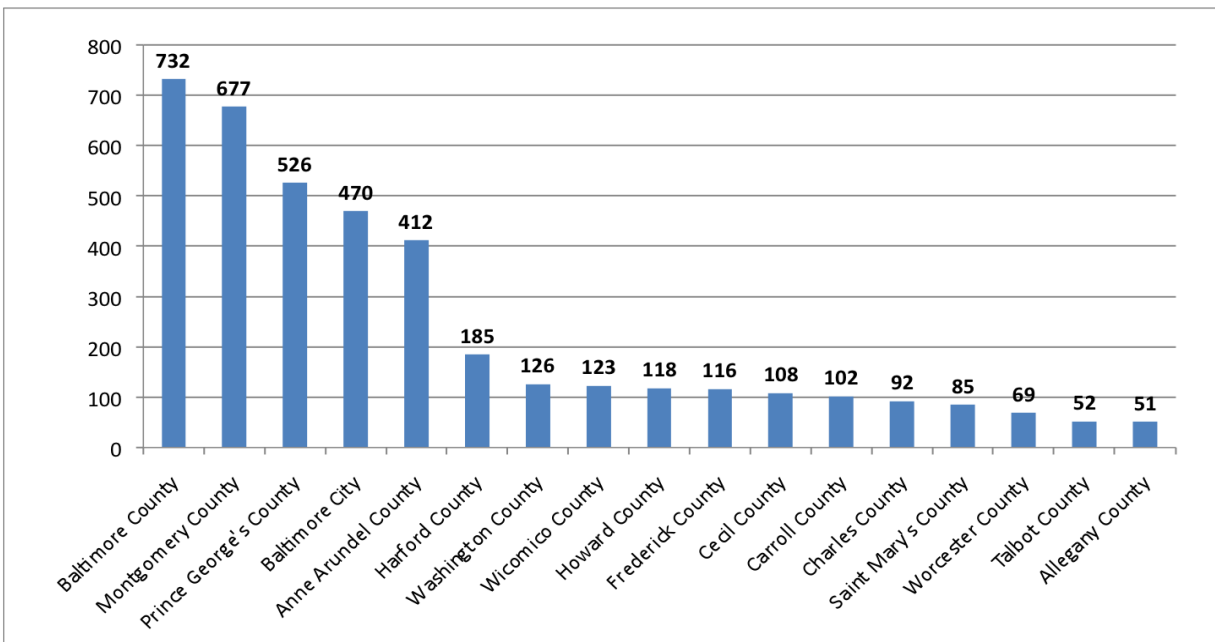


Figure 4: Maryland Older Driver Injury Crashes by Jurisdiction, 2011

Recommendations for Maryland

Road safety policies must be crafted and implemented to address the growing number of older drivers in Maryland. Based on national and state-based research and federally recommended best practices, it is clear that older drivers require screening of their physical and cognitive functionality every two years. As Maryland policymakers review the literature and determine a course of action, there are certain steps Maryland can take immediately to improve road safety:

1. Increase referrals to Medical Advisory Board
 - Inform health care professionals of the role of the MAB and urge them to identify and refer patients with problems that affect driving.
 - Provide training to law enforcement on identifying drivers with problems that affect driving.
 - Allow electronic referrals for law enforcement and health care professionals to ease referrals to MAB.
2. Shorten driver license renewal period for older drivers to every two years
 - Reduce the fee of each renewal to avoid a greater financial burden on older drivers from more frequent renewals.
 - Educate drivers of the cognitive and physical problems that affect driving.
 - Inform older drivers of driver education classes for older drivers and rehabilitation services available from occupational therapists to improve driving safety.
3. Raise Awareness
 - Educate drivers and their families of the cognitive and physical problems that affect driving
 - Distribute information on driver education classes for older drivers that will help them stay safe.
 - Provide local agencies on aging with the training and materials necessary for them to counsel older drivers.

Americans for Older Driver Safety

Our aim is to make roads safer for older drivers and all Americans. Susan Cohen and Mitchell Krasnopoler founded Americans for Older Driver Safety in 2012 following the 2011 death of their 20-year-old son, Nathan. An 83-year old driver making a right turn crossed into the bicycle lane where Nathan was riding, resulting in the fatal crash that took his life. The mission of Americans for Older Driver Safety (AFODS) is to advocate for safer roads through driver education, assessment, retraining and transitioning; and to raise public awareness of the safety risks related to unmonitored changes in driver abilities. For more information on Americans for Older Driver Safety, contact Susan Cohen at scohen@afods.org or 443.520.9716.

“When you hear the thunder, it’s too late to build the ark, yet states are not doing enough to prepare for the flood of older drivers that will be behind the wheel in the coming years. Nobody should have their car keys taken away simply because they reach a certain age. Instead, states should screen all drivers applying for new or renewed licenses to ensure they are medically and functionally fit to drive through procedures like eye exams and in-person renewal – but that is not happening. If remedies aren’t put in place today, we can expect a significant rise in highway safety deaths in the years ahead. That should concern all of us, young and old alike.”

AAA Foundation President and CEO Peter Kissinger

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