

# Vaaler Senior Care Educational Post

## Senior Drivers

Author: Cyndi Siders RN, MSN, DFASHRM, CPHRM, CPPS  
Executive Consultant | Siders HealthCare Consulting, LLC

### A Fatal Crash Kills a Local Senior and Seriously Injures a Young Family of Four

Mrs. Jones is 85 years young and enjoys the benefits of her assisted living apartment-style home. She has a history of hypertension, congestive heart failure, atrial fibrillation, type 2 diabetes mellitus, macular degeneration, and osteoarthritis. Care providers notice that she is having increasing difficulty walking while using her cane. She is also having challenges reading, with her glasses, while attending activities such as BINGO.<sup>1</sup> She still drives to a local church for services, and she enjoys shopping at the mall. Is Mrs. Jones a safe driver? Is your facility prepared to have a conversation on driving alternatives and driving retirement?



### The Facts

“Motor vehicle injuries persist as the leading cause of injury-related deaths among 65- to 74-year-olds and are the second leading cause (after falls) among 75 to 84-year-olds. While traffic safety programs have had partial success in reducing crash rates for all drivers, the fatality rate for drivers over age 65 has consistently remained high.”<sup>2</sup>

Older drivers, particularly those aged 75+, have higher crash death rates than middle-aged drivers (aged 35-54).<sup>3</sup> “Higher crash death rates among this age group are primarily due to increased vulnerability to injury in a crash.” “Age-related declines in vision and cognitive functioning (ability to reason and remember), as well as physical changes, might affect some older adults’ driving abilities.”<sup>3</sup> “The proportion of the 70-and-older population with licenses went from 73 percent in 1997 to 83 percent in 2019.”<sup>4</sup>

Senior Care staff can be instrumental in identifying residents/tenants at-risk for driving due to declining cognitive and functional status. Seniors who have self-imposed restricted driving practices (e.g., not driving after dark or during busy traffic times) may also be at driving risk during other times of the day.<sup>5</sup>

Recommending clinical evaluation, driving rehabilitation services and resources for safer driving practices may optimize functional ability for continued safe driving.<sup>6</sup> If safe driving is not an option, having a conversation about driving retirement is an important next step. In some cases, the State licensing authority will become involved at the time of licensure renewal or for a referral for an unsafe driving investigation.



## Warning Signs

Seniors may not recognize, may be in denial or may be defensive about unsafe driving behaviors. Having a trusted family member or friend offer specific examples may be helpful. Here are signs to watch for: 7,8

- New scratches or dents, side mirrors damaged or knocked off or fender benders that can't be recalled.
- Tickets for moving traffic violations and accidents.
- Not following standard "Rules of the Road" procedures – not stopping at stop signs; stopping on green lights; driving through red lights; improper lane changes or weaving in and out of lanes; having difficulty maintaining lane position; going an improper speed for the conditions.
- Getting lost on familiar routes or consistently missing a familiar exit.
- Coordination challenges with the brake and gas pedal or confusing them; difficulty turning the steering wheel and using turn signals.
- Visual changes that impact night, perception, and distance sight.
- Auditory changes that impact the ability to hear safety warnings, such as train warnings.

## Recommendations for Healthcare Providers

Be alert to signs and symptoms of declining physical and cognitive functioning that could impact driving. Some examples include:

- History of falls
- Impaired ambulation
- Vision and/or hearing impairment
- Decreased ability to turn the head to fully visualize an area
- Decreased short-term memory
- Decreased or impaired way finding
- Inability to recognize unsafe situations<sup>9</sup>

A physician's assessment of the resident's physical and cognitive ability to operate a motor vehicle is an important element of a senior's ongoing medical care. The social and physical history and clinical exam should include questions about driving practices and challenges. Many seniors consider physicians trusted authorities when discussing driving safety.<sup>10</sup>

After hospitalization, surgery or a significant change in clinical condition or illness, older adults are often told not to drive until cleared by their primary physician. Additionally, new medication prescriptions may carry a warning regarding operating a motor vehicle while taking the medication.<sup>11</sup>

## Driving Laws for Seniors

### North Dakota: North Dakota Driving Laws for Seniors and Older Drivers

- License Renewal Rules for Older Drivers
- Possible License Restrictions
- How to Request an Unsafe Driver Investigation in North Dakota
- How to Get Parking Placards or License Plates for a Disabled Driver
- [North Dakota Driving Laws for Seniors and Older Drivers | Nolo](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
- [Senior Drivers in North Dakota | DMV.com](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)

### South Dakota: South Dakota Driving Laws for Seniors and Older Drivers

- License Renewal Rules
- Possible License Restrictions
- How to Request an Unsafe Driver Investigation in South Dakota
- Reporting for Doctors
- South Dakota Driver Improvement Programs (specially developed for older drivers)
- How to Get Parking Placards or License Plates for a Disabled Driver
- [South Dakota Driving Laws for Seniors and Older Drivers | Nolo](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
- [Senior Drivers in South Dakota | DMV.com](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)

### South Dakota Department of Public Safety – Aging Drivers

- [South Dakota Aging Drivers | SD DPS](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)

### Minnesota: Minnesota Driving Laws for Seniors and Older Drivers

- License Renewal Rules for Older Drivers
- How to Request an Unsafe Driver Investigation in Minnesota
- How to Get Parking Placards or License Plates for a Disabled Driver
- [Minnesota Driving Laws for Seniors and Older Drivers | Nolo](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
- [Senior Drivers in Minnesota | DMV.com](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)

### Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety – Older Drivers

- [Older Drivers - Older Drivers \(mn.gov\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)

### Minnesota Driver and Vehicle Services. Just the Facts.

- [MedicalConditions and YourLicense.pdf \(mn.gov\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)



*This educational document, which does not reflect any official policy or opinion for Vaaler Insurance, a Marsh & McLennan Agency LLC Company or Siders Healthcare Consulting, LLC, is provided for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide legal or medical advice, nor is it intended to be an exhaustive list of all risks that need to be addressed for a healthcare organization. While every effort is made to provide accurate information, changes may occur, and inaccuracies happen despite best efforts. This information is not a substitute for individual consultations with professionals in these areas and should not be relied on as such. Please work with your legal counsel and business advisor(s) for a plan that is specific to your organization. © 2016-2022 Vaaler Insurance, a Marsh & McLennan Agency LLC Company*

## Sources

1. Pomidor A, ed. *Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th ition*. New York: The American Geriatrics Society; 2019. [Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition \(geriatricscareonline.org\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
2. Ibid.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Motor Vehicle Safety. Older Adult Drivers. [Older Adult Drivers | Motor Vehicle Safety | CDC Injury Center](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
4. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Highway (IIHS, HLDI). Older Drivers [May 2019]. [Older drivers \(iihs.org\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
5. Pomidor A, ed. *Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition*. New York: The American Geriatrics Society; 2019. [Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition \(geriatricscareonline.org\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Marlo Sollitto. Aging Care. 20 Warning Signs That an Elderly Driver is No Longer Safe Behind the Wheel. [20 Warning Signs an Elderly Driver Is No Longer Safe Behind the Wheel - AgingCare.com](#) Updated November 29, 2021. (Accessed January 17, 2022)
9. Pomidor A, ed. *Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition*. New York: The American Geriatrics Society; 2019. [Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition \(geriatricscareonline.org\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
10. Ibid.
11. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Some Medications and Driving Don't Mix (Updated March 9, 2021) [Some Medicines and Driving Don't Mix | FDA](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)
12. Pomidor A, ed. *Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition*. New York: The American Geriatrics Society; 2019. [Clinician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers, 4th Edition \(geriatricscareonline.org\)](#) (Accessed January 17, 2022)