

Older Drivers (England)

December 2022

Wherever they live, older people should be able to reach key services, friends and family at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease.

Driving and essential services

Cars continue to be the main mode of transport used by people in later life. There are now 5.6 million people over 70 with a driving licenceⁱ, an increase of 1.1 million since 2016. Older drivers now make up 13.6% of all licence holders. Continuing to drive is vital for many older people to get to shops, services and health care, and allowing them to remain socially connected, especially in rural places with poor public transport. This is essential for many older people who experience mobility problems as they age - as well as their carers. A car may become the only practical form of independent transport in some places.

Most older people are safe drivers

Caricatures of 'bad' older drivers mean there is an on-going debate about road safety and people in later life. Media coverage of a serious road accident involving a small minority of older drivers is used as an argument for more stringent testing. However, this stereotypical representation of older drivers is not reflected in the road safety statistics, with the rate of pedestrians killed by older drivers lower, and driver fatalities on a par with younger age groups. However, there is evidence that 80+ drivers are disproportionately involved in major accidents.ⁱⁱ If people may need to give up, assessments are available at local mobility centres.

Declaring a medical condition and eye tests

The DVLA may refer an older driver with a medical condition to a mobility centre for a free assessment, which can lead to giving up driving. Alerting the DVLA to a medical condition relies on self-declaration,ⁱⁱⁱ although a GP or healthcare worker may follow guidance from the General Medical Council to provide advice, including referral to a mobility centre to assess a driver's abilities, persuading them to give up driving, or informing the DVLA.

The Older Drivers Taskforce, of which Age UK is a member, has recommended that compulsory eye tests be included for licence renewals from age 70. While there may be a case for this, in principle Age UK does not believe that older drivers should be treated any differently from other drivers unless there is strong evidence to show that a different approach, such as a new eye test requirement, would be effective, and proportionate to addressing the risk. This requires further work.

Accessibility schemes

The Blue Badge scheme is important for many older and disabled people to allow them to get to shops and services and to remain mobile and independent. It has been extended to people with hidden disabilities, including people living with dementia. Although welcome, this measure does not provide any additional parking spaces or designated parking bays which are often needed.

Some older people struggle to make a Blue Badge application where it has to be made online. Local Age UKs have told us that some local authorities fail to offer older people any assistance to complete application forms. With no automatic entitlement linked to benefits and no mobility component to Attendance Allowance, it is important that the process is accessible for all.

Public Policy Proposals

- It is every driver's responsibility to ensure they are driving safely, but older drivers need the support to do so, including better advice from their GP.
- The licence renewal age should be raised to 75 in recognition of improvements in the general health of older people and statistics demonstrating older people are safe drivers.
- Prior to introducing compulsory eye testing for older drivers, the Government must provide evidence that it would be a proportionate measure that will enhance road safety. It should be a general principle that older drivers should not be treated differently to younger drivers unless there is strong evidence to justify it.
- The Department for Transport, local authorities and transport providers should develop transport solutions to make it easier for older people to give up driving.
- Insurers' data and research findings involving major claims by older drivers should be pooled and shared to understand the detailed causes of accidents and to take appropriate action.
- Local authorities should administer the assessment for a Blue Badge in a straightforward and consistent way, ensuring that offline applications are available.
- A lack of alternative transport is a significant deterrent to older people giving up driving at the appropriate time. There should be an obligation on local authorities to facilitate a minimum level of access to public or community transport, particularly in isolated rural areas.

Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money, health and care, housing and communities, and crosscutting themes such as age equality and human rights.

www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/

ⁱ Department for Transport (2022), Reported road casualties Great Britain: older drivers factsheet 2020

ⁱⁱ Musslewhite, C (2018) Transport, Travel and Later Life (Emerald Publishing)

ⁱⁱⁱ Available online: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/confidentiality---patients-fitness-to-drive-and-reporting-concerns-to-the-dvla-or-dva>