

ADVOCACY POSITION STATEMENT
Indiana Association of Area Agencies on Aging
- Safe Older Drivers -

POSITION:

IAAAA supports community/driver educational opportunities, public policies, and state regulations which enable drivers to determine whether they are able to continue to drive safely. Driver assessment, ongoing training, education, and adaptation provide a means of enhancing senior mobility and independence.

IAAAA supports furthering the research and planning of livable communities that incorporate public transportation, safe bicycling and walking environments, and the general planning of roadways which accommodate older drivers including lighting and signage.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Older driver safety is an important public health issue. Providing seniors the opportunity to age in place and improve their quality of life with safe mobility options is a societal benefit for those of all ages. The US Census Bureau estimates that by 2030 one of every four drivers on the road will be over the age of 65 years. Seniors are generally safe drivers: they have fewer crashes per licensed driver than any other age group, the highest rate of seatbelt use, and the lowest level of alcohol-related incidents. However, they are more likely than drivers in other age groups to be injured or killed in the event of an accident, regardless of who is at fault.

Physical, cognitive, and sensory changes occur during the normal human aging process, some of which can affect the ability to operate a vehicle comfortably and safely. The changes that come with aging affect each person to a different degree, however, chronological age of a driver is not an indicator of her or his fitness to drive. More than 50 percent of non-drivers over the age of 65 stay home on most days because of lack of transportation. The lack of transportation opportunities decrease people's ability to participate in their community and the economy.

ISSUES:

Community Education: Despite the transportation options that may be available to older people, use of the private automobile has increased over the last several decades, a trend that will likely continue in the future. Many communities support educational opportunities for older individuals, their families and caregivers, and the general public to learn more about issues related to older drivers and their communities.

Mobility: As people grow older, they may become less willing or able to operate a motor vehicle. The preservation of mobility as one grows older is a vital component to healthy aging.

Alternatives: Access to healthcare, social networks, shopping, religious activities, volunteering, cultural events, and other activities remains important, as does maintaining one's sense of independence. Alternatives to driving a personal vehicle are needed in more rural and smaller town communities.

CURRENT ACTION NEEDED:

Funding: Advocates must speak out for older Hoosiers to see that they have a choice in the level of personal transportation that is comfortable for them. Supporting funding for public transportation specific to older and disabled Hoosiers is crucial in prolonging and preserving of one's independence.

Guidelines: Advocates should speak to lawmakers and public planners and ask them to support the Federal Highway Administration's established guidelines for older driver-friendly road designs, such as intersection improvements and better signage, lighting, and road markings. These improvements will help drivers and passengers of all ages.

Awareness: Promote awareness within the social service and medical field of the need to speak honestly and tactfully with patients and their caregivers when illness, medications, or physical changes may impede the skills needed when driving.

SOURCES:

http://www.n4a.org/older_driver_safety/media_toolkit.cfm

http://www.ncsl.org/programs/pubs/slmag/2006/06SLDec06_TandT.htm

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/whatis/regions/Archive/Region5/05older.html>

<http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/olderdrivers/>

<http://www.tfrc.gov/humanfac/01105/cover.htm#toc>

IAAAA routinely updates these position papers. Please contact IAAAA at 317-818-0702 for the most up-to-date version of this document.

Date Adopted by IAAAA Board of Directors: _____