



Highlights of [GAO-07-413](#), a report to the Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

As people age, their physical, visual, and cognitive abilities may decline, making it more difficult for them to drive safely. Older drivers are also more likely to suffer injuries or die in crashes than drivers in other age groups (see fig.). These safety issues will increase in significance because older adults represent the fastest-growing U.S. population segment.

GAO examined (1) what the federal government has done to promote practices to make roads safer for older drivers and the extent to which states have implemented those practices, (2) the extent to which states assess the fitness of older drivers and what support the federal government has provided, and (3) what initiatives selected states have implemented to improve the safety of older drivers. To conduct this study, GAO surveyed 51 state departments of transportation (DOT), visited six states, and interviewed federal transportation officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretary of Transportation direct the FHWA and NHTSA Administrators to implement a mechanism to allow states to share information on older driver safety practices. The Department of Health and Human Services agreed with the report. The Department of Transportation provided technical corrections but did not offer overall comments on the report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-413.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. To view the e-supplement online, click on www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-517SP. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-6570 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

OLDER DRIVER SAFETY

Knowledge Sharing Should Help States Prepare for Increase in Older Driver Population

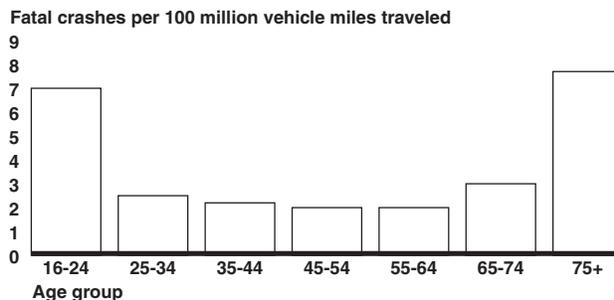
What GAO Found

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has recommended practices—such as using larger letters on signs—targeted to making roadways easier for older drivers to navigate. FHWA also provides funding that states may use for projects that address older driver safety. States have, to varying degrees, adopted FHWA’s recommended practices. For example, 24 states reported including about half or more of FHWA’s practices in state design guides, while the majority of states reported implementing certain FHWA practices in roadway construction, operations, and maintenance activities. States generally do not place high priority on projects that specifically address older driver safety but try to include practices that benefit older drivers in all projects.

More than half of the states have implemented licensing requirements for older drivers that are more stringent than requirements for younger drivers, but states’ assessment practices are not comprehensive. For example, these practices primarily involve more frequent or in-person renewals and mandatory vision screening but do not generally include assessments of physical and cognitive functions. While requirements for in-person license renewals generally appear to correspond with lower crash rates for drivers over age 85, the validity of other assessment tools is less clear. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is sponsoring research and other initiatives to develop and assist states in implementing more comprehensive driver fitness assessment practices.

Five of the six states GAO visited have implemented coordination groups to assemble a broad range of stakeholders to develop strategies and foster efforts to improve older driver safety in areas of strategic planning, education and awareness, licensing and driver fitness assessment, roadway engineering, and data analysis. However, knowledge sharing among states on older driver safety initiatives is limited, and officials said states could benefit from knowledge of other states’ initiatives.

Fatal Crashes by Driver Age Group per 100 Million Vehicle Miles Traveled (2001)



Sources: GAO analysis of NHTSA and USDOT data.