

already financially pressed, are forced to travel greater distances to purchase the goods of life and to mix with others in society. Public and/or private transportation is needed to ensure mobility and independence for a population that must depend on community assistance.

Actions

Public Transportation should be expanded to provide safe, rapid, convenient, and economical service to the total community. While citizens in all age groups would benefit, the people who have little or few alternatives to public transport would profit most. Senior riders need the benefits that public transportation can provide.

The majority of seniors live within range of a senior center operated by town, county, or state government. With a public need for expanded mobility, seniors can turn to their senior organizations and centers for help. Mini-vans, small buses, and automobiles must be mobilized to provide the necessary transportation to a variety of destinations.

The private sector stands to profit from increased senior mobility. Shopping centers from coast to coast have come to recognize seniors as major customers in an ever more competitive market. Older citizens, many with financial resources beyond their needs, spend millions of dollars annually on goods ranging from food and other necessities to pricey restaurants and boutiques. As the shopping centers have identified this lucrative and growing market, they must also recognize that their customers may need help to get to the retailers. An increasing number of merchants now run buses from rural and distant locations to attract business. The buses, either free or heavily subsidized, are operated on a scheduled basis so that buyers can travel with ease and in comfort from their homes to the retailers. This practice should be expanded through communications with area merchants and business organizations.

Similarly, churches should be encouraged to provide members of their congregations with transportation to and from places of worship. The vehicles used for this purpose can be utilized during other times to carry seniors to a variety of other locations.

Seniors who recognize that it is no longer safe to drive their personal automobiles, have the option of a "transportation co-op" in some areas. Car services, available to seniors, respond to telephone requests for local transportation needs. Rides are available for singles or groups with fees charged on a time and mileage basis. The drivers are known to the callers and provide an economical, clean, and safe alternative to taxi cabs. Car pooling has long been identified as a method to reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and to remove drivers from the road. While efforts have met with limited success in the majority of locations, there is a great potential to provide transportation services to

seniors. A well-publicized and organized campaign to encourage car pooling should be implemented within the senior community. AARP, AAA, and senior centers could easily reach out to thousands of older citizens to spread the word.

TRAINING ELDERLY DRIVERS

Alma M. Fonseca, Ed.D.

Concern is growing over the ability of the aging population to drive safely. Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of accidental death for persons ages 65 to 74. Older drivers who suffer from declining physical skills eventually are unable to drive safely and become dependent on others for their transportation needs, thus losing cherished independent mobility. Some older drivers do recognize declining skills, such as reduced range of motion, but fail to take advantage of programs which can teach compensation techniques. Coupled with reduced physical abilities, lack of knowledge about the effectiveness of occupant restraints is an obstacle to safe driving. A negative attitude and overconfidence in one's ability to drive safely are also obstacles to safe driving.

Problem

While maturity and driving experience enhance driving ability, many experienced older drivers never completed formal training or developed safe practices. Older drivers often fail to (1) keep up with the latest traffic law changes, (2) adopt new safety measures, and (3) recognize physical changes that impair driving and learn skills to compensate for those changes.

Some of the driver improvement courses currently offered lack the content depth to meet specific needs of the aging driver in a complex driving environment. Other training programs offered in the past failed because instruction was not tailored specifically to older drivers. Current driver training programs, such as 55 Alive/Mature Driving and Coaching Mature Drivers, reach only a small fraction of the people who could benefit from them and do not include hands-on training to improve driving skills. Those who do participate tend to be drivers who already have unusually good records.

Needs

Particular measures must be taken to attract the older population, including the undereducated, the very old, the rural elderly, and the socioeconomically disadvantaged, to training programs to improve driving skills. Driver training instructors must (1) provide

instruction in proper procedure for older drivers who lack awareness of appropriate performance and (2) help older drivers compensate for perceptual and cognitive deficiencies by helping them anticipate and overcome the specific mistakes they are liable to make.

If it is not possible to teach all the content needed to fully address all the problems with which older drivers are confronted in the 8-hour length of the national programs, then organizations developing the programs should consider lengthening the programs. In-car instruction provides an effective way of identifying the specific deficiencies of individual drivers, both to the instructor and to the student. The American Automobile Association program, Safe Driving for Mature Operators, offers in-car instruction as an option but reports that only about 5 percent of the students elect to take it.

Some physical skills lost in the aging process can be compensated for through training and exercise. A positive attitude and openness to learning can lead to less defensiveness about declining driving skills and, thus, to swifter action toward improvement. What is needed to meet safety needs and resolve problems of older drivers are driver training and retraining programs tailored explicitly to older adults' learning patterns.

Two types of courses are needed for older drivers. First, refresher courses and periodic driver training are needed by experienced older drivers. Training can teach safe driving principles and changes made since most older drivers first learned how to drive. Second, a beginner's course for older drivers is needed. Data show an increasing trend of older adults who are learning to drive for the first time. Many of these older beginners are females who are recently widowed and will become responsible for their own transportation.

The decade of the 1980s brought national programs specifically designed to meet the physiological and psychological needs of the older driver, particularly the older driver with no formal instruction in driving. Programs being offered today have improved in content and methodology over those introduced in the 1960s and 1970s; however, more comprehensive information on occupant protection is needed. In some of the earlier courses, instructor guides included little or nothing about occupant protection. In light of the fact that the consequences of a crash are more severe for older drivers than for younger drivers and some studies have shown that older occupants have low usage rates, the implementation of older driver training programs related to increasing the use of safety belts is recommended. Class time must be allowed for older adults to practice proper use of safety belts in all positions of their vehicles. An Instructional Guide on Occupant

Protection for Older Adults, developed by the author, can supplement an existing driver training course or be used to teach a stand-alone course on occupant protection.

Action

As the American population grays, the potential for an untapped consumer market for organized and informal training programs becomes greater. Significant steps toward increasing enrollment must be taken if training is to have a real impact on the safety of older drivers. Driver licensing offers an ideal point of contact for educational interventions because it is the only state program that has the potential for reaching all drivers on a routine basis.

Licensing agencies can induce drivers to enroll in and complete training programs through the renewal process. The state of Illinois offers a training program, "Seniors On the Go!," which combines classroom instruction with behind-the-wheel simulation experience where participants can practice driving skills. A special movie takes participants through a variety of driving situations, measuring such things as braking, signaling, and speed. Upon completion of the program, participants receive a performance printout. Personnel review the results with participants, pointing out safety tips to remember when on the road. Upon completing the course, participants can take a vision examination which, if successfully completed, entitles them to receive a certificate. This certificate is valid for one calendar year to present to the Secretary of State personnel at the time of license renewal.

Licensing agencies can encourage participation in training programs by including information about courses and promoting the positive benefits of attending courses through the mail when renewal notices are sent. Those states which require in-person license renewal could inform older drivers of training opportunities, provided license examiners had a list of available training programs for older adults and phone numbers of contact persons who could provide course information.

Another method of encouraging participation in training programs is to include course information with letters sent to drivers, who have a record of persistent traffic violations, requesting they come in for reexamination. Some licensing agencies have specially trained driver improvement counselors or analysts who meet individually or in small groups with drivers who have repeated convictions and assist them in identifying training programs or driving alternatives. Oregon's "Re-

Examination Evaluation Program" accepts drivers whose driving qualifications are in question. Upon referral by letter, a private meeting is scheduled with a specially trained counselor who compassionately (1) checks the person's medical history and medications; (2) gives a simple reflex test, a simple test for dementia, an oral examination on traffic rules and regulations, and a special vision test; and (3) gives a driving skills assessment ride. The counselor then makes recommendations for further tests and informs the examined driver of the areas in which improvements are needed and strategies for taking tests in the future.

A different option from the one chosen by Oregon is to make training a condition of license retention for everyone. This requires legislation, which states are often reluctant to pass.

One characteristic of older drivers that tends to be an obstacle to their participation in training programs is their reluctance to admit that their driving has become deficient. Licensing agencies could distribute self-evaluation checklists designed to help older drivers assess their own skills and pave the way for improvement.

In addition to self-evaluation and driver records, personal observation during the examination process can be used to identify problem drivers. Licensing agencies which have adequate manpower and expertise can have examiners assess functional impairment through license renewal, but periodic in-person renewal for all drivers would be necessary. Special training to equip examiners with skills needed to accurately identify persons with conditions leading to unsafe driving would be necessary.

Reexamination of older drivers occurs in response to complaints from members of the driver's family and reports from courts, police, insurance companies, and physicians. Licensing agencies can also identify problem drivers when they receive requests from public assistance agencies to review driving qualifications of older drivers who show signs of declining skills. Although the reexamination may result in a written or road test, or both, it could also take the form of an instruction program.

Licensing agencies that refer older drivers for training can certify or approve courses for voluntary enrollment, insurance discount, or license renewal or reinstatement or develop their own training programs to help drivers prepare for reexamination such as in the case of Oregon. A licensing agency who certifies courses would need to (1) learn what courses designed to meet the needs of older adults are available; (2) examine the curriculum and delivery methods, such as scheduling, handouts, and in-car versus classroom instruction, for each course; and (3) sit through each course to be able to recommend or approve a particular course. Those

who certify courses need expertise in curriculum development, delivery, gerontology, and subject matter. If a licensing agency lacks this expertise, an outside consultant can be asked to review and make recommendations to the licensing agency. A program which is well run and well designed can be approved and older drivers can be referred to the program.

If a training program for older drivers has some weaknesses or is not tailored specifically to older drivers' learning patterns, the licensing agency or consultant should point out the necessary changes to the program developer and request a revision. When modifications are made, the program is approved for referral.

Licensing agencies that develop their own training programs encounter advantages and disadvantages. The advantages to this alternative are uniformity and control. The disadvantages are time, cost, and special qualifications needed to develop a course, train instructors or counselors, conduct the program, and evaluate the program.

Regardless of whether an existing, modified, or newly developed course is approved, licensing agencies should require the course to have performance standards and ways to measure the performance. Cognitive performance can be measured by written or oral exams. Driving performance can be measured through driving simulators with feedback provided to drivers through performance printouts. Behind-the-wheel performance can be assessed through driving skills road tests. These road tests should relate to the licensing agency's road test. Personnel can review the results of both the driving simulator and road test with participants, pointing out safety tips to remember when on the road.

One final step that can be taken by licensing agencies in educating older adults is to develop a comprehensive mailing list, focusing on an older adult clientele. This list would offer the ability to quickly and efficiently notify the older driver population of information, such as changes in the law and training programs available to older drivers.

In conclusion, training programs to improve driving skills are needed to reduce the vulnerability of older drivers to traffic accidents and preserve their independent mobility. Efforts by licensing agencies should be undertaken to (1) identify those older drivers whose deficiencies can be remedied through training, (2) encourage greater numbers of older drivers to participate in training programs, and (3) certify or develop courses for voluntary enrollment, insurance discount, or licensing action. A survey to identify the training programs to improve driving skills in each state should be undertaken to determine what is available for older drivers and identify aspects which lead to the success of the programs.