OLDER ROAD USERS INVOLVED IN ROAD CRASHES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

OVERVIEW There are on average (2012–2016) 23 road fatalities and 76 serious injuries of persons aged 70 years or above each year. Persons aged 70 have in recent years increased their representation in fatalities, they make up 12% of the population yet account for 23% of fatalities but only 12% of serious injuries. Research has shown that although older drivers are involved in a small number of crashes, these crashes are of higher severity, probably because of the frailty of these older users. Older drivers have been shown to be more cautious and to exhibit less illegal and dangerous driving behaviour than other age groups, and there is evidence that older drivers self-regulate to avoid risky situations and times of day.

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in fatal and serious injury crashes at intersections involving right angle crashes, and as they get older they are also more likely to be responsible for the crash they are involved in. However their rate of involvement per licence numbers in serious casualty crashes is lower than their younger counterparts, but again does increase as the driver ages.

Table 1 is a breakdown of serious casualties of road users aged 70 and over by year. The number of road users killed aged 70 and over has increased by an average of 0.5% per year over the past 5 years while serious injuries have increased on average by 2.7% per year.

Table 1: Fatalities and serious injuries of road users aged 70 years of age and over, South Australia, 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fatal</th>
<th>Serious Injury</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5yr Avg</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1a & b highlight the differences in the distribution of fatalities and serious injuries amongst age groups. 70+ road users are under-represented in serious injuries, yet this is not the case for fatalities, here they are over-represented in terms of the population.
Older Driver Crash Rates

Older drivers are two times less likely to be involved in a serious casualty crash than younger drivers. For drivers/riders aged 16-24, for every 10,000 licences held, 12.4 of those drivers/riders per year were involved in a fatal or serious injury crash. The rate of involvement in a serious casualty crash per 10,000 licences held in the 25-69 year age group was 7.2, and this dropped to six for drivers aged 70 and over.
Research has shown that although older drivers are involved in a small number of crashes, these crashes are of higher severity, probably because of the frailty of these older users. Older drivers have been shown to be more cautious and to exhibit less illegal and dangerous driving behaviour than other age groups, and there is evidence that older drivers self-regulate to avoid risky situations and times of day. Figure 2 can be broken down further to reveal that even though those aged over 70 have a smaller crash involvement rate this rate can go up as a driver ages, as seen in Figure 3. It should be noted that licence holders aged 90+ represent less than 1 per cent of all licence holders, and they are involved in on average 4 serious casualty crashes per year.

As a driver ages they are more likely to be responsible for the crash they are involved in. In South Australia, on average, drivers aged 60-69 involved in fatal and serious injury crashes were responsible in 55% of cases, drivers aged 70-79 were responsible in 63% of cases and drivers aged 80 years and over were responsible in 86% of cases.
Types of Crashes Involving Older Drivers

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in fatal and serious injury crashes at intersections than other drivers – 47% of older driver crashes occur at intersections, compared to 33% of all serious and fatal crashes generally. As seen in Figure 4, most fatal and serious injury crashes involving older drivers are right angle crashes – 26% of them, compared to 14% of fatal and serious crashes generally. Intersections and junctions are complex traffic environments in which the driver has to attend to a variety of information while under time pressures. Common crash types for older drivers are right turn crashes and crashes due to disobeying a traffic signal or sign. A higher rate amongst older drivers could be due to a number of factors, including impaired vision and slower reaction time. Rear end and right turn crashes involving older drivers are also more frequent than fatal and serious injury crashes generally. Older drivers are however, less likely to be involved in a crash that results in hitting a fixed object or rolling over as compared to serious casualty crashes in general.

Figure 4: Types of fatal and serious crashes involving drivers aged 70+ years, South Australia, 2012-2016

Crash Location and Speed Limits

Over half (60%) of fatal and serious injury crashes involving drivers aged 70 and over occur in metropolitan areas. Table 2 shows the breakdown of crashes by speed limits and area. The figures seen are consistent with fatal and serious injury crashes generally.

Table 2: Crash location\(^1\) & speed limits involving drivers aged 70+ years, South Australia, 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speed Limit</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 km/h and under</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 km/h</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-90 km/h</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 km/h and over</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Rural and metro boundaries changed on 1 January 2013 to align with new ABS Greater Adelaide City Statistical Area boundaries, new boundaries have been used in calculations and will not be comparable with previous editions of this report.
Older drivers are also more likely than other drivers to be involved in crashes in the locality they reside in (as classified by postcode). 38% of older drivers are involved in fatal and serious crashes in their resident locality, compared to 24% of drivers under the age of 70.

Serious casualty crashes involving older drivers are most likely to occur between the hours of 9am and 5pm – 73% occur during these times. By contrast, 49% of all fatal and serious crashes happen between these times. The higher proportion for older drivers is to be expected, given that older drivers generally prefer to drive during off peak daylight hours than at night time.

Older road users
The next section discusses older road users in crashes, this encompasses all road users including drivers/riders, passengers, cyclists and pedestrians.

Figure 6 shows the serious casualty number of road users aged 16-24 and road users aged 70+. It can be clearly seen that the drop in serious casualties over the last 20 years is much stronger in the 16-24 year old group than the over 70’s, demonstrating that serious casualties of older road users are declining at a slower rate than the rate for other road users. Since 1996 the 70+ age group has had an average yearly decline of 1.9% per year compared to the 16-24 year old road users achieving a 6.2% decline per year. The more recent 5 year trend shows an increase in the number of serious casualties, this is likely to be in part due to increases in the numbers of people aged 70 and over, consistent with South Australia’s ageing population.

Figure 6: Fatal and serious injuries, persons 70+ years and 16-24 years, South Australia, 1997-2016
Older Road User Types

Figure 7 shows that the majority of fatalities and serious injuries among older road users are drivers, passengers and pedestrians. 92% of older road users (including gophers) fall into these categories, compared to 75% for all road users generally.

Figure 7: Road users 70+ years, fatalities and serious injuries, South Australia, 2012-2016

![Bar chart showing the percent of fatal and serious injuries by road user type for older road users.]

Sex

Males generally far exceed females in road user fatalities and serious injuries. Between 2012 and 2016, 65% of serious road casualties were male and 35% female. However, in the older road user population, the gap between male and females is not as large. Over the age of 70, 53% of serious casualties were male and 47% were women. This can be partly explained by the longer life expectancy of females and a reduction in risk taking behaviour in the older male age groups. Older drivers are far less likely than young drivers to be involved in crashes characterised by loss of control, speeding, risky overtaking or drink driving.

Older Pedestrians

Figure 8 shows the number of pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries per 100,000 population by age group. Elderly pedestrians in particular have a higher risk of collision with road vehicles due to the perceptual, cognitive and physical deterioration associated with ageing. If an older person is hit by a car, the outcome is likely to be more severe, resulting in a fatality rather than an injury. The higher involvement of older people in pedestrian fatalities is indicative of the relative frailty of older people. Many elderly people also have a greater reliance on walking and are therefore more likely to be exposed to traffic as pedestrians than younger age groups.$^2$

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Figure 8: Average pedestrian serious casualties per 100,000 population, South Australia, 2012-2016
Definitions of police reported casualty types:

**Casualty Crash** – crash where at least one fatality, serious injury or minor injury occurs.

**Casualty** – A fatality, serious injury or minor injury.

**Fatal Crash** – A crash for which there is at least one fatality.

**Fatality** – A person who dies within 30 days of a crash as a result of injuries sustained in that crash.

**Serious Injury Crash** – A non-fatal crash in which at least one person is seriously injured.

**Serious Injury** – A person who sustains injuries and is admitted to hospital for a duration of at least 24 hours as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor Injury Crash** – A crash in which at least one person sustains injury but no person is admitted to hospital or dies within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor Injury** – A person who sustains injuries requiring medical treatment, either by a doctor or in a hospital, as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Property Damage Only Crash** – A crash resulting in property damage in excess of the prescribed amount in which no person is injured or dies within 30 days of the crash.

Data sources

The data presented in this report was obtained from the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure Road Crash Database. The information was compiled from police reported road casualty crashes only.

Enquiries

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