



# DRIVING BETTER AND LONGER: EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLS AND PROGRAMS

A RESEARCH BRIEF BY THE UNSW AGEING FUTURES INSTITUTE

Driving is critical for maintaining independence as we age, but changes in functioning can impact safety. New research is providing accurate tools for assessing safety risk, and programs to maintain driver skills.

## BACKGROUND AND CURRENT ISSUE

Driving enables social participation, reduces loneliness and isolation, and maintains independence as we age. However, older drivers are overrepresented in fatal crashes per distance traveled, and have the highest health care costs when involved in a crash (1). Current approaches to managing safety in older drivers is through medical review and license restrictions, with many primary care providers feeling ill-equipped to make such decisions (2). There are also no evidence based programs to help drivers improve their skills. There is a need for accurate risk assessment tools for clinicians and a suite of effective interventions that can improve and support seniors' driving safety for as long as possible.

## SUMMARY OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Our current research program builds on over a decade of studies into the factors that best predict on-road driving safety in older adults. Based on these findings, we developed and validated the Multi-D risk assessment tool (3). This tool is designed for clinicians to quickly assess whether a driver is at risk of failing a driving assessment. Our latest research has found that older drivers who receive tailored feedback and driving lessons reduce critical driving errors and improve safety when compared to those who receive a road rules refresher course only (4). In a world-first 12-month trial, we will investigate the long-term impact on safety, and cost-efficiency of this program.

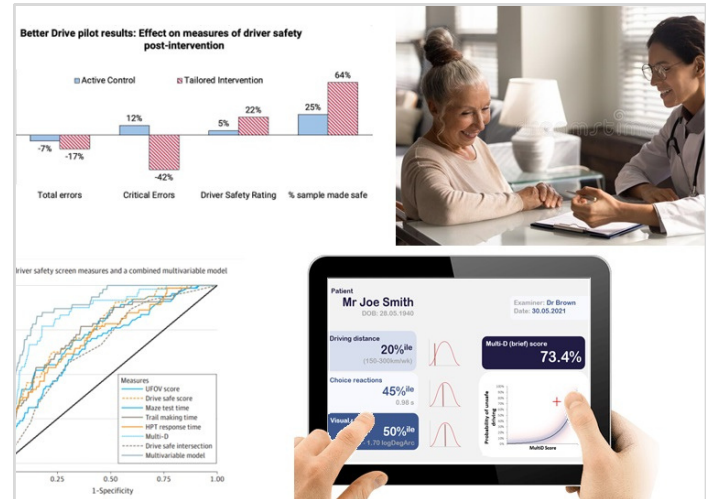
## RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Australia's ageing population means that older drivers are the fastest growing sector of the driving population with recent statistics showing fatality and crash rates in this age group are now increasing, while that of younger drivers is decreasing (1).

Given the importance of independence and life participation for healthy ageing, it is critical that clinicians and road safety authorities are better resourced with accurate and effective tools to help older adults maintain driving safety. We suggest that current policies move away from a system of regulation to one of accurate risk assessment and targeted remediation.

## REFERENCES

1. Thompson, J. P., et al. (2018). Trends in the crash involvement of older drivers in Australia. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 117, 262-269.
2. Wallis, K. A., et al. (2020). Assessing fitness to drive in older people: the need for an evidence-based toolkit in general practice. *MJA*, 212(9), 396-398.
3. Anstey, K. J., et al. (2020). Validation of brief screening tools to identify impaired driving among older adults in Australia. *JAMA network open*, 3(6), e208263-e208263.
4. Anstey, K. J., et al. (2018). Effect of tailored on-road driving lessons on driving safety in older adults: A randomised controlled trial. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 115, 1-10.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ARC Laureate and Scientia Professor Kaarin Anstey, is the Director of the UNSW Ageing Futures Institute, and Co-Deputy Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research. She has expertise in cognitive ageing, psychology and epidemiology. Kaarin conducts public health research into dementia risk reduction ranging from analysis of cohort studies, development of risk assessment tools, and conducting risk reduction trials. A second focus is on older driver risk assessment and safety.