# Supporting senior drivers

Discussing driving and transport options





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Note: A number of internet links for further information are provided in this booklet, so it can be useful to have access to the internet when reading this booklet (on smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer). The support agencies listed on page 31 will be able to help you if you do not have an internet connected device.

You can download this guide to your device at: www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/supporting-senior-drivers

Free hardcopies of this resource can be ordered by calling: 0800 822 422.

### Senior driver conversations



#### Who is this booklet for?

This booklet gives tips for having conversations with senior drivers about driving and transport options. It is for anyone, including seniors, who want to open a conversation with a senior friend or family/whānau member. Health care professionals (GP or nurse) or community support workers who are working in a professional capacity, may also find the information in this booklet useful.

It's important to keep in mind that most senior drivers of cars and motorbikes are very experienced and safe drivers, making them great role models for younger drivers.



#### What would I want to talk to a senior driver about?

There's a range of things you might talk to seniors about. You could discuss the renewal process, alternative ways of getting around without driving, how to get a check-up if they have health concerns, or how to access resources that help refresh their knowledge of the road rules and safe driving. Senior drivers can be more easily injured in a crash, so these conversations are important.

Fitness to drive is a concern for people of all ages, and some people are unable to drive, or have conditions placed on their licence as a result of health challenges. Bodily and sensory changes that can affect a senior person's fitness to drive can alter quite slowly. People we trust may notice changes over time, so it's good to be self-aware and open to what people around us are saying.

#### Is this relevant if everything is fine right now?

We will all eventually experience bodily and sensory changes as we get older. When we encounter changes, we can still be fit to drive but we may need to alter the way we drive, or we may have conditions placed on our licence (see our *Renewing your driver licence as a senior* booklet). We may reach a point when we are no longer fit to drive. This can be difficult to deal with if we haven't had time to adjust.

All of this means it's good to be thinking about our abilities and transport options sooner rather than later. Thinking about the options and benefits of getting around without a car or motorbike, when we are in good health, gives us a chance to adjust gradually in a positive way.

Discussing concerns around driving can be a very sensitive subject for many seniors. Keeping mobile, personal freedom and having the ability to get around is crucial for everyone, whether or not we drive. Anybody having this conversation with a senior should approach this in a calm, supportive, respectful, positive and helpful manner.

You might also want to have a look at our *Getting around as a senior* booklet, which provides more information on a wide range of transport options.



### What to look out for



There are a wide range of worrying or other changes that people can experience as a result of bodily or sensory changes. Worrying changes are of serious concern and require intervention as they present a safety risk to the driver and other people using the road. Other changes are also concerning but can be addressed over time.

#### **Worrying changes**

- Getting lost in places a driver knows well.
- Failing to stop at a stop sign or red light.
- Mixing up the brake and accelerator pedals.
- Stopping in traffic for no apparent reason.

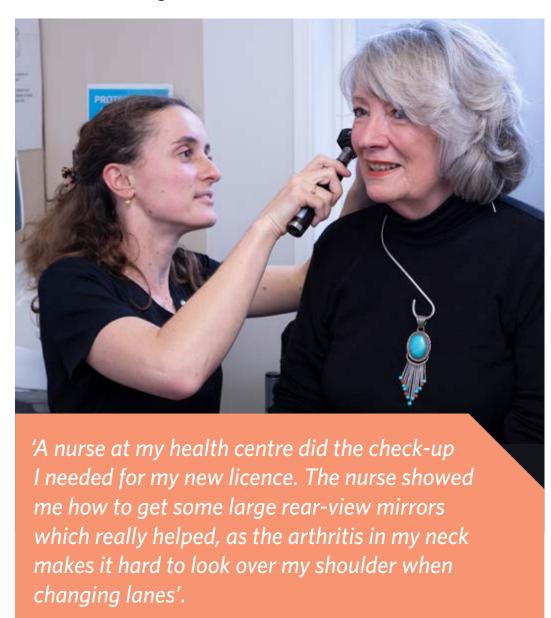
For advice on discussing these concerns see pages 15–19 *Raising* concerns about driving.

#### Other changes

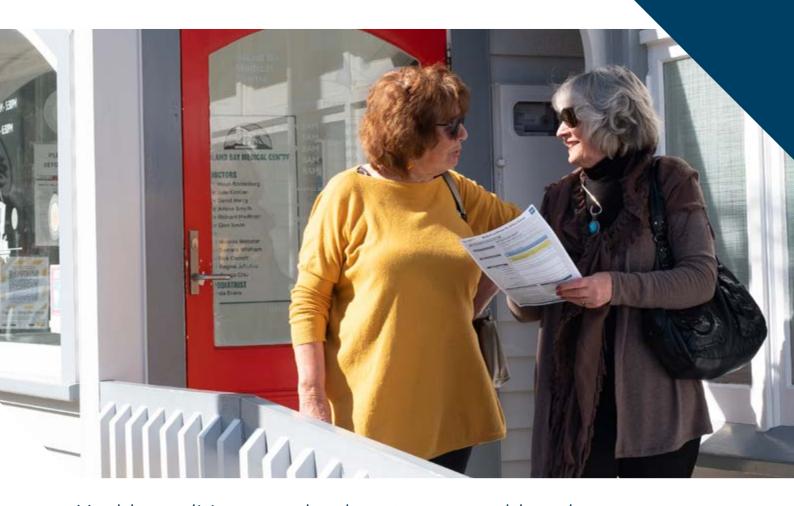
- Not feeling confident about driving.
- Finding it hard to turn around to see when reversing.
- Easily distracted.
- Frequently honked at.
- Scratches or dents on your friend or relative's car, letterbox, fence or garage, caused by driving.
- Easily irritated or upset when driving.
- Driving too fast or too slow for the conditions.
- Failing to spot hazards (such as a pedestrian running out onto the road).
- Relying on a passenger to give them instructions when they're driving.
- Having a near miss.
- Drifting out of lane.
- Getting a speeding ticket.
- Involvement in a crash.

If the 'other changes' happen once, there may not be a problem. But if any of them start happening regularly, it's possible you, your friend or relative has a health condition they need help with. For a number of these changes, a health care professional can help – such as an optometrist to make sure glasses or the correct prescription of glasses is being used, or an occupational therapist, who can provide aids and adjustments to the car.

For advice on discussing these concerns, see pages 15–19 *Raising* concerns about driving.



### Health conditions and medicines



Health conditions can develop at any age, although as we get older, it's more likely that we will have a health condition. It is also more likely that we will be taking medications or multiple medications. Often we can drive safely with health conditions and while taking medications, although sometimes health conditions and medications can impair our driving. It is important to know that driving when impaired is illegal.

Impaired driving is when your body or emotions have been affected, usually temporarily, in a way that makes you an unsafe driver.

It is illegal to drive if you feel impaired, whatever the cause might be. Impairment can be caused by medication, injury, illness, or intoxication from alcohol, legal substances or illegal drugs.

#### **Health conditions**

People may have health conditions at any age, so medical fitness to drive applies to everyone. Health care professionals assess people's fitness to drive across all age ranges. The natural ageing process makes it more likely that people can develop health conditions that affect safe driving. These include vision and hearing changes, diabetes, mobility issues, arthritis, dementia, stroke and heart disease. Senior drivers are more likely to take medications that can affect driving, as the number of medications taken increases with age.

A number of factors related to health conditions and driving become more significant with increasing age:

- Energy levels and physical strength.
- Speed of response.
- Vision and hearing function.
- Mobility, range of movement, feeling in limbs.
- Thinking processes, attention spans.
- Mental health and ability to manage stresses.

Health care professionals consider how these factors relate to safe driving when they are assessing a person's fitness to drive. More information on this is detailed in our *Renewing your driver licence as a senior* booklet.

Waka Kotahi provides a guide for health care professionals to use in their practice, which is available at:

#### www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/medical-aspects

If you have a health condition that affects your mobility, you may be entitled to a mobility parking permit and a hāpai access card. You can find more information, including how to apply at:

www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/mobility-parking/applications-and-renewal/



#### **Medicines**

Medicines play an important role in maintaining our wellbeing, and it is important we take them to stay as healthy as possible. Sometimes our medicines give us side effects and these side effects can impair our ability to drive safely.

These effects can come on shortly after taking a medicine or the effects may appear some hours later, possibly when you are driving. Pull over and seek assistance if you become impaired while driving.

Impairment can be caused by medicines that are bought over the counter as well as those prescribed by a doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Sometimes medicines react with each other and the effect of one medicine changes, or increases the effect of another medicine. Taking alcohol or illegal drugs can greatly increase the potential for impairment, and these effects can persist for many hours, even into the following day.

It's good to get into the habit of always asking about the effects of medication on driving, especially when new or different medications are being discussed with you. How the medication might affect you? Are potential effects highly likely, unlikely, immediate or delayed? Tell the person giving you the medication if you consume alcohol, illegal drugs or other substances, as they can advise you on potential interactions and impairments.

If you are being prescribed any of these medications you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about the potential effects on your driving, as these types of medications commonly cause impairment:

- Strong painkillers
- Anti-depressants
- Heart medication
- Allergy medication
- Sleeping pills
- Anti-psychotics
- Epilepsy medication
- Addiction medication
- Nausea medication
- Anxiety medication.

Before you drive, check yourself for the following symptoms, and listen to anyone who says they are concerned about you. Also, check yourself for signs of impairment while you are driving and pull over if you become impaired. Some symptoms are:

- Feeling drowsy/sleepy
- Blurred vision
- Headache
- Feeling weak
- Slowed reactions
- Dizziness
- Nausea, feeling sick
- Unable to focus or pay attention
- Being easily confused
- Slurred speech
- Having trouble forming a sentence
- Feeling wired and overconfident.

Information to share with people taking medication:

- Don't start driving if you feel impaired.
- Pull over if impairment occurs while you are driving and ask for help from friends or family/whānau.
- Call 111 if you feel very unwell.
- Keep taking your medication if you are impaired, as stopping it could make things worse, and call your health centre as soon as possible.
- Talk to your prescriber about the possibility of alternative medications, doses or timings.
- Plan ahead if impairment is a possibility. You could consider different ways of getting around or ask for help from friends, family or whānau.
- Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs and ask your prescriber about the potential interactions with alcohol and illegal drugs, or other substances you may take, and how this might increase the likelihood of impairment.
- Healthline can provide free medical advice any time of the day or night
   0800 611 116.



- If you are working (paid or voluntary) and your job involves driving, you can ask your health care professional for a letter explaining how the medication affects your work. This letter does not need to state the medical condition or the name of the medicine (although some employers may request this more specific information as a contractual requirement). Also remember that any restrictions on work driving apply equally to commuter driving or driving for personal or recreational purposes.
- If you have immediate concerns about an unsafe situation where someone else is impaired and about to drive tell the driver that it is illegal to drive impaired (whatever the cause) and that they should not drive. If the driver starts driving, and you are concerned that they could be a risk to themselves and people around them, then you can call \*555 or 111 in an emergency.

More information on medication and impairment is available at: www.nzta.govt.nz/medication

## Raising concerns about driving



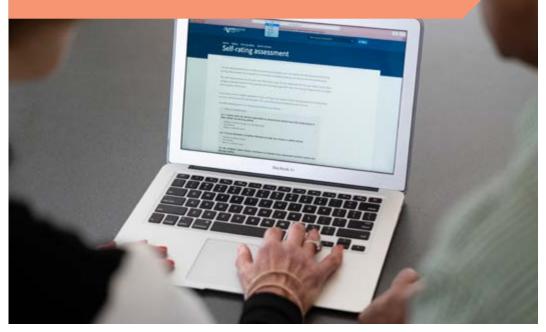
Discussing concerns around driving can be a very sensitive subject for many seniors. Keeping mobile, personal freedom and having the ability to get around is crucial for everyone, whether or not we drive. Anybody having this conversation with a senior should approach this in a calm, supportive, respectful, positive and helpful manner.

It's important to remember that it's OK to talk about any specific safety concerns you may have about someone's driving, as everyone wants to avoid crashes, deaths and serious injuries on our roads. It takes courage to talk about these concerns. You are doing the right thing by raising concerns.

#### Some suggestions for discussing concerns

- Choose a calm and relaxed time to talk about driving. Ideally have the discussion one on one in a private setting, potentially planning a specific time for the talk. Start by asking your friend or relative for permission to talk about driving: 'I'd like us to have a chat about driving. Would that be OK?'.
- Stay positive and respectful. Focus specifically on the things that are worrying you, not their driving in general.
- Making use of open questions can also be helpful. These are questions that begin with 'How' and 'What' Avoid questions that begin with 'Why'. 'Why' questions can be threatening to people who feel vulnerable. You could say things like 'How do you feel your driving is going nowadays?' or 'What do you think could help with this?'.
- Focus the conversation on safety, and that you want to protect your friend or relative's safety and the safety of everyone else on the roads. You could say 'I want you to be safe and healthy. I'm worried about what could happen. What could we do about this?' or 'I know you don't want anyone to get hurt, so maybe we could think about who can help here'.
- It's very likely that you'll need to have a few conversations before your friend or relative decides to act. Don't expect to resolve concerns after just one discussion.
- Be empathetic and imagine how they might feel. People can feel threatened and scared, so make sure you are being supportive and helpful.
- Avoid arguments. It's unlikely that any positive change will occur as a result of an argument. People often need time to think over what has been said. Change topic if things get heated and return to the conversation on another day when things are calmer.
- Talk about health. Are they having any problems that might affect their driving? Could medication be causing problems? Has anything changed recently? You could suggest they visit their health care professional at the health centre and offer to go with them if that would help.

'When a mate I hadn't seen for a long time took me out for a drive I was pretty taken aback by a couple of near misses he had. I had a chat with him after and he said that was interesting as his partner had been saying the same sort of thing. He booked an appointment with his GP, who checked out his diabetes, and now he is much sharper.'



- Talk about staying fit and healthy. If they keep their mind and body active with exercise and other interests, such as walking, creative activities and pastimes that require problem solving, this may also help them to drive safely.
- Suggest they do the Waka Kotahi confidential online self-assessment form either with you, or by themselves. If they do it by themselves, ask how it went and what was useful about it.

www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/what-waka-kotahi-is-doing/education-initiatives/senior-drivers/hows-your-driving/self-rating-assessment

• In our *Driving safely as a senior* booklet, there is a section called *Being self-aware*. You could show or give your friend/relative a copy of this booklet and use this as a basis for opening a conversation. You can download *Driving safely as a senior* at:

#### www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/driving-safely-as-a-senior

- Encourage your friend or relative to attend a driver training course, such as the free 'Staying Safe' refresher theory course for seniors. See page 23 for more information about training and assessment options.
- Take the time to find out what your friend or relative might want or need. Help them consider and plan using alternative transport options.
   Benefits for using other transport options include saving money and being able to do other things while someone else is driving (eg reading, crossword puzzles or checking emails on a tablet).
- Thinking about the options and benefits of getting around without a car, while still driving, gives people a chance to adjust gradually to the change in a positive way. More information is available in our Getting around as a senior booklet. You can download this at:

#### www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/getting-around-as-a-senior

 For questions around the relicensing process, have a look at our Renewing your driver licence as a senior booklet, which can be downloaded from:

### www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/renewing-your-driver-licence-as-a-senior

 For answers to common questions about road rules and the road code, have a look at our Road rules refresher for seniors booklet, which can be downloaded from:

#### www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/road-rules-refresher-for-seniors

• See page 22 if you have immediate concerns about an unsafe situation.

#### Returning a driver licence

Some people decide they no longer want to drive and they want to return their licence to Waka Kotahi. A driver licence can be returned, although it's a good idea for the driver to discuss their decision with people they trust or contact one of the agencies named in the *Support and further information* section on page 31.

If a driver licence is returned, and that person then changes their mind, it's important to know that it's only legal to drive with a current licence in the driver's possession that is personal to them. Also, if a driver licence has expired it is only legal to drive once the licence has been renewed.

If someone is returning their licence, they should have a read through our *Getting around for seniors* booklet, so they can consider what transport options will work best for them.

A licence can be returned by posting it to:

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency Private Bag 11777 Palmerston North 4442



### What to do if you still have concerns



If your friend or relative insists their driving is fine, but you want to raise serious or immediate concerns, consider the following:

- Continue to have a calm, supportive, respectful, positive and helpful attitude. Remember that conversations around driving are rarely a one-off thing. You will need to develop the discussion over time, and your friend or relative will need time to reflect on what you have discussed.
- These conversations can be emotionally upsetting. Listen to what they say about how they feel, acknowledge their feelings and allow them to express themselves.

- Ask yourself, 'Are you the best person to talk about this issue with them?'
  You could talk to family/whānau members, friends or a health care
  professional, and agree the person (or people) they trust the most and
  will engage the best.
- Consider asking your friend or relative what they think might happen in the future if the things you are concerned about continue.
- Ask your friend or relative to contact their health care professional to make an appointment for a check-up. You could help them make this appointment and/or go with them for supporting during the appointment.
- Also, if you need to, you can independently contact a health care professional at the local health centre directly to discuss your concerns.



- If a health care professional thinks it's appropriate, they can contact the Waka Kotahi medical team. Health care professionals have a legal obligation to inform Waka Kotahi about any individual they feel poses a danger to public safety by continuing to drive when they have been advised not to.
- If a health care professional is unsure about a person's safety to drive, they may refer that person to an occupational therapist for an assessment.
- If your friend or relative has to give up driving, encourage them to see this as a positive change, not an end to their freedom. Help them to think about other options for getting around safely.
- If your friend or relative is very obviously impaired (whatever the cause) and determined to drive, then you should tell them that it is illegal to drive when impaired.
- If you have immediate concerns about an unsafe situation: if your friend or relative starts driving, and you are concerned that they could be a risk to themselves and people around them, you can call \*555 or 111 in an emergency.



## Driver training and assessment



Waka Kotahi and Age Concern provide free 'Staying Safe' refresher courses for senior drivers around Aotearoa New Zealand. This free refresher course offers the chance to meet up with other senior drivers to discuss driving, road rules and transport related matters in a relaxed, friendly environment. You can find out where your nearest course is at: www.nzta.govt.nz/staying-safe

'I've been driving since I was 15, so I am fine behind the wheel. But the Staying Safe course was an eye opener for me – so you can teach an old dog new tricks after all.'

The Automobile Association (AA) also provide a free one on one incar coaching session to AA members (for people aged 74 and over – membership fees apply). This coaching session offers a friendly and relaxed check of your driving style. The session covers vehicle checks, cockpit drills, signalling, car control and hazard identification skills. Additionally, this coaching session is helpful if a driver is preparing for a road safety assessment from an occupational therapist. You can find out more at: www.aa.co.nz/senior-driver

Many driving schools also run assessment and training courses that are designed for seniors (fees apply). Check with your local driving school by doing an internet search or look in your local business telephone directory.

If someone you know has a medical condition that might affect their driving, it's important they talk with their health care professional.

Your friend or relative's health care professional might refer them to an occupational therapist to assess their ability to drive safely.

Occupational therapy (OT) assessments can evaluate the effects of any health problems or disabilities on a person's ability to drive safely. The occupational therapist can provide advice on suitable vehicles or equipment that can improve a driver's safety. For more information, see *Factsheet 51: OT assessments: occupational therapists and driver licensing* or call us on 0800 822 422. You can find all our factsheets at:

www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/factsheets/category



## Considering alternatives to driving



Sometimes a medical assessment can show that someone is not fit to drive. We appreciate this change can be very upsetting. Keeping mobile, personal freedom and having the ability to get around is important for everyone. The agencies listed on page 31 can provide support and practical suggestions to help if needed.

If a medical assessment shows that someone is fit to drive, they may opt to get around without a car or motorbike anyway, as there are many benefits of using different ways of getting around, including:

- Saving money.
- Using the time to do other activities such as reading and writing, while someone else takes the strain of driving.
- Being safe and comfortable, when taking public transport.
- Having social interactions, particularly if you travel with people you know.
- Supporting a person's health (eg walking to the bus stop).
- Supporting the community and the planet (less pollution).

Some common ways of getting around without a car include walking, bus, rail and taxi/shared rides. The availability of these services varies from area to area.

Only some areas of the country have a train service, but many areas have a bus service. Contact your local council to see what's available in your community. All areas of the country are served by taxi or shared ride/community transport services though, so it's worth finding out which taxi or shared ride/community transport services operate in your area.

There are a number of driving providers that specifically support senior drivers. Local Age Concern branches, or your local council can usually help you with local information about these providers and the potential savings in relation to regular travel needs (see page x).

All seniors, from the age of 65, are entitled to a SuperGold Card which offers a range of discounts on daily living expenses. This includes free offpeak travel on public transport. For more information visit:

#### www.supergold.govt.nz

Additionally, a range of financial benefits are available from Work and Income. For more information visit:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/seniors

People with long-term health conditions might also be entitled to access the Total Mobility Scheme, which provides substantial discounts on taxi/shared ride costs. For more information visit:

ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/services/how-can-we-help/total-mobility-taxi-vouchers

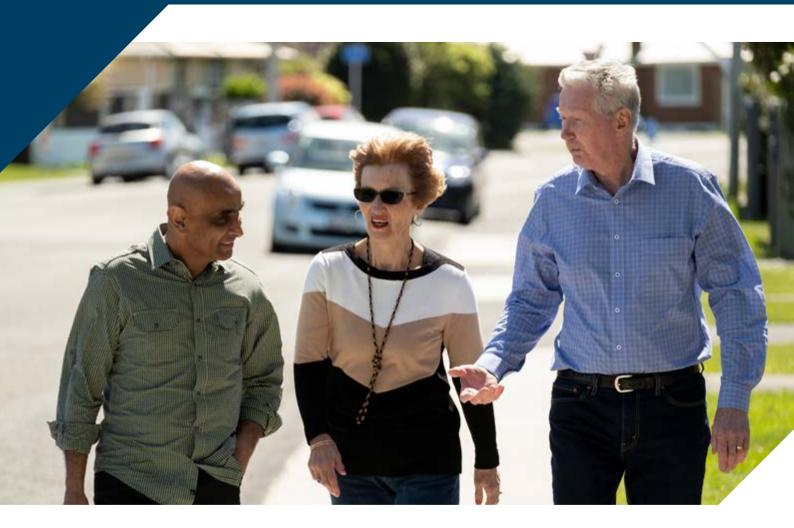
Our *Getting around as a senior* booklet provides more information on a wide range of transport options. See:

www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/getting-around-as-a-senior

The Office for Seniors also provides a very useful brochure *No car, no problem* which is available at: www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/health-wellbeing/out-about/transport-driving



## Providing practical support



There are many ways in which you can provide practical support to senior drivers.

#### Be hands on

- Do a basic safety check on the car together tyres, windscreen, wiper and mirrors, indicators, rust, lights. See: www.nzta.govt.nz/vehicles/choosing-the-right-vehicle/ check-your-car-safety-basics
- If a baby or child is going to be travelling in the car, find out how to install the child restraint and have a look at Waka Kotahi child restraint videos.
- Offer a lift if a friend or relative doesn't feel confident driving in a particular situation, such as driving when the roads are busy, driving through complex intersections, driving at night, driving a long distance or driving somewhere new.

- Share driving duties if driving long distance.
- Do shopping trips together.
- If buying a car, go together to provide a second opinion.
- Act as a support person when someone is attending a health care appointment.

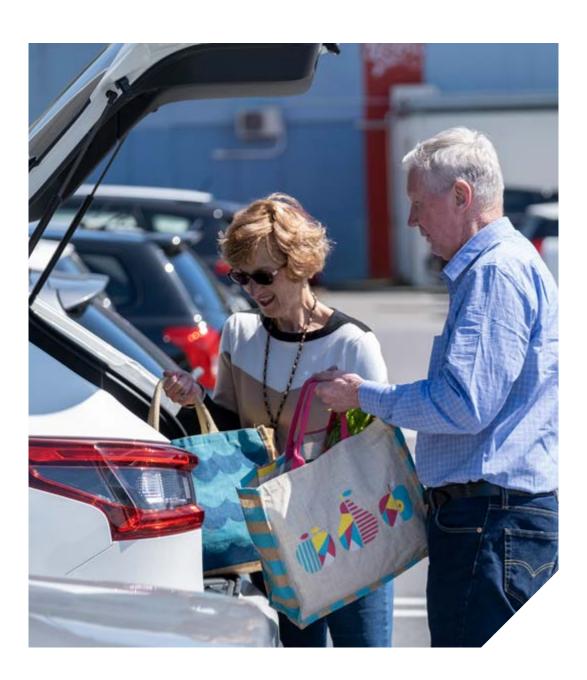
#### Discover more

- Read through and jointly discuss Waka Kotahi booklets on senior driving.
- Complete and discuss Waka Kotahi online self-assessment quiz together.
- Take your time to get to know your friend or relative's views, opinions and levels of awareness regarding driver safety and transport options.
- Find out if online shopping and home delivery is a possible and preferred option.
- If buying a car, check the 'Rightcar' website for the car's safety rating, and for advice on safety features as well as ratings for fuel economy, carbon emissions and air pollution: www.rightcar.govt.nz
- If changing living arrangements, have a chat about what services are available where they live and how accessible these might be – public transport, shops, health centres, places of worship and recreational facilities.



#### Help connect

- Find out when and where your nearest free 'Staying Safe' refresher course is being provided, and attend as a support person if desired.
- Contact AA (membership fees apply) to arrange a free in-car coaching session and attend as a support member if desired (for people aged 74 and over).
- Provide assistance if help/support is needed to make an appointment at a local health centre or with an occupational therapist.



### Support and further information

#### **Age Concern**

www.ageconcern.org.nz

Phone: 0800 65 2 105

Email: national.office@ageconcern.org.nz

Free 'Staying Safe' refresher theory courses:

www.nzta.govt.nz/staying-safe

www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/
supporting-senior-drivers

All the internet links contained within the booklet are live so you can click on them for further information on each subject.

#### **Office for Seniors**

www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz

Email: osc@msd.govt.nz

#### **Local councils**

www.localcouncils.govt.nz Click on 'Council Profiles'

#### Neighbourhood support

www.neighbourhoodsupport.co.nz

Phone: 0800 463 444

#### NZ Automobile Association (AA)

www.aa.co.nz/contact-us

Phone: 0800 500 444

(Fees apply to access AA services)

#### **Vehicle Testing NZ (VTNZ)**

www.vtnz.co.nz/contact-us

Phone 0800 88 88 69

(Fees apply to access VTNZ services)

#### **Primary health care**

To access health care professionals (GP or nurse)

www.healthpoint.co.nz/gps-accident-urgent-medical-care

www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-careservices/visiting-doctor-or-nurse

#### Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency

www.nzta.govt.nz/senior-drivers

Phone: 0800 822 422

Email: info@nzta.govt.nz

The following Waka Kotahi publications are free, and include information that you might find useful:

- The road ahead for seniors a pamphlet which gives a brief overview of our core Senior driver information booklets:
- Driving safely as a senior
- Supporting senior drivers
- Getting around as a senior
- Renewing your driver licence as a senior
- Road rules refresher for seniors
- Check your car
- Guide to the on-road safety test
- Safer winter driving

#### To get copies of any of these publications

Email: info@nzta.govt.nz

Visit: www-ak.bspg.co.nz/WebForm/NZTAWN\_PB?form=Public%20

**Publications** 

Phone: 0800 822 422

#### You can find all our factsheets at

#### www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/factsheets/category

- Factsheet 1: Cycles, road rules and equipment
- Factsheet 7: Child restraints
- Factsheet 16: Diabetes and driving
- Factsheet 17: Epilepsy and driving
- Factsheet 23: Dementia and driving
- Factsheet 24: Fatigue: staying alert while you're driving
- Factsheet 25: Vision and driving
- Factsheet 31: Disabilities and driving
- Factsheet 51: OT assessments: occupational therapists (OT) and driver licensing
- Factsheet 57: Older drivers: licence renewal

#### Road codes

#### www.nzta.govt.nz/roadcode

#### **Our postal address**

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency

Private Bag 11777

Palmerston North 4442



If you have further queries, call our contact centre on 0800 699 000 or write to us:

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency Private Bag 6995 Wellington 6141

This publication is also available on our website at **www.nzta.govt.nz** 

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