



Published in final edited form as:

J Am Geriatr Soc. 2014 October ; 62(10): 1999–2001. doi:10.1111/jgs.13050.

AT WHAT AGE DO YOU THINK YOU WILL STOP DRIVING? VIEWS OF OLDER U.S. ADULTS

Rebecca B. Naumann, MSPH, Bethany A. West, MPH, and Erin K. Sauber-Schatz, PhD, MPH
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
Atlanta, Georgia

To the Editor: By 2030, it is estimated that one in five persons in the United States will be aged 65 or older.¹ Although the vast majority of older adults prefer to age in place (grow old in their current homes), aging in place can present challenges, particularly when older adults begin to experience declines in mobility. Nearly 80% of older adults live in car-dependent suburban or rural communities, with most of these communities lacking alternative mobility options.² Therefore, when older adults in these communities stop driving, they are left with few transportation options.³ To meet the transportation and mobility needs of aging populations, it will be necessary to have a clear understanding of when older adults expect to stop driving. The purpose of this study was to provide national prevalence estimates of the age at which older adults in the United States report they will stop driving.

Data were obtained from the Second Injury Control and Risk Survey, Phase 2, a cross-sectional, random-digit-dialed telephone survey that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted between March 2007 and May 2008. The study methodology has been detailed previously.⁴ This analysis was restricted to survey respondents aged 65 or older who reported being current drivers (N = 565). Information was collected on demographic characteristics, driving status, and views related to when they would stop driving. Nationally weighted estimates were calculated.

When drivers were asked at what age they thought they would stop driving, 58.4% responded with a specific age, 26.1% gave a response other than an age (e.g., vision impairment), 10.6% said they would never stop driving, and 4.9% did not know or refused to answer. Of those who gave an age response, 49.2% of those aged 65 to 69 and 41.9% of those aged 70 to 74 said they would stop more than 20 years from the time of the survey (Figure 1), and 51.3% of those aged 75 to 79 and 41.5% of those aged 80 and older said they would stop driving 11 to 20 years from the time of the survey. Of drivers who gave another type of response, 36.0% (95% confidence interval (CI) = 26.1%–46.0%) said they would stop when their vision became impaired, and 26.3% (95% CI = 17.5%–35.1%) said they would stop when they became unsafe or dangerous on the road.

Author Contributions: Naumann conceptualized the study and analyzed the data. Naumann, West, and Sauber-Schatz contributed to interpretation of data, manuscript preparation, and background literature review.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no financial or any other kind of personal conflicts of interest relevant to this research.

More than half of older adult drivers reported that they would stop driving sometime in their 90s, and one in 10 reported they would never stop driving. A previous study found that drivers aged 70 to 74 had an average driving life expectancy (time until driving cessation) of 11 years and an average life expectancy of 18 to 21 years.⁵ The authors estimated that, after driving cessation, older adult men would be dependent on alternative sources of transportation for approximately 7 years and women for approximately 10 years before death. The findings of the current study suggest that many older adults might overestimate their driving life expectancy. Another study found that most older adults do not think about when they might have to stop driving, nor do they plan for it.⁶ Encouraging older adults to think about the possibility that they or a loved one might have to stop driving earlier than they had anticipated and encouraging discussions about how they would approach this transition will be important in helping older adults successfully plan for driving cessation. Counseling by healthcare professionals might be an approach to early intervention and planning. Research shows that 43% of single older drivers who live alone and 32% of married older drivers preferred that a physician or healthcare professional be the individual to discuss driving concerns with them.⁷ Moreover, focus groups with older drivers found they viewed advanced planning with physicians about alternative transportation (e.g., advance driving directives) as positive.⁸ Because healthcare providers are generally not trained on driver fitness or future transportation planning, the American Medical Association has developed an older driver curriculum for healthcare providers,⁹ which has been shown to increase providers' knowledge of and confidence in strategies to counsel at-risk drivers and assist with mobility planning.¹⁰ Although this curriculum can help physicians facilitate these important conversations, innovative community-based programs are needed to then assist older adults in maintaining their community mobility in safe, accessible, and affordable ways.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sponsor's Role: None.

REFERENCES

1. U.S. Census Bureau. National Population Projections (Based on Census 2010). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 [on-line]. Available at <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2012/summarytables.html> Accessed December 19, 2013.
2. Rosenbloom S The Mobility Needs of Older Americans: Implications for Transportation Reauthorization. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2003.
3. Bailey L Aging Americans: Stranded without Options. Washington, DC: Surface Transportation Policy Project, 2004.
4. Chen J, Kresnow MJ, Simon TR et al. Injury-prevention counseling and behavior among US children: Results from the second Injury Control and Risk Survey. *Pediatrics* 2007;119:e958–e965. [PubMed: 17403833]
5. Foley DJ, Heimovitz HK, Guralnik JM et al. Driving life expectancy of persons aged 70 years and older in the United States. *Am J Public Health* 2002;92:1284–1289. [PubMed: 12144985]
6. Kostyniuk LP, Shope JT. Driving and alternatives: Older drivers in Michigan. *J Saf Res* 2003;34:407–414.

7. Coughlin JF, Mohyde M, D'Ambrosio LA et al. Who Drives Older Driver Decisions? Cambridge, MA: MIT AgeLab, 2004.
8. Betz ME, Jones J, Petroff E et al. "I wish we could normalize driving health": A qualitative study of clinician discussions with older drivers. *J Gen Intern Med* 2013;28:1573–1580. [PubMed: 23715688]
9. Carr DB, Schwartzberg JG, Manning L, Sempek J. *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: NHTSA, 2010.
10. Meuser TM, Carr DB, Irmiter C et al. The American Medical Association older driver curriculum for health professionals: Changes in trainee confidence, attitudes, and practice behavior. *Gerontol Geriatr Educ* 2010;31:290–309. [PubMed: 21108097]

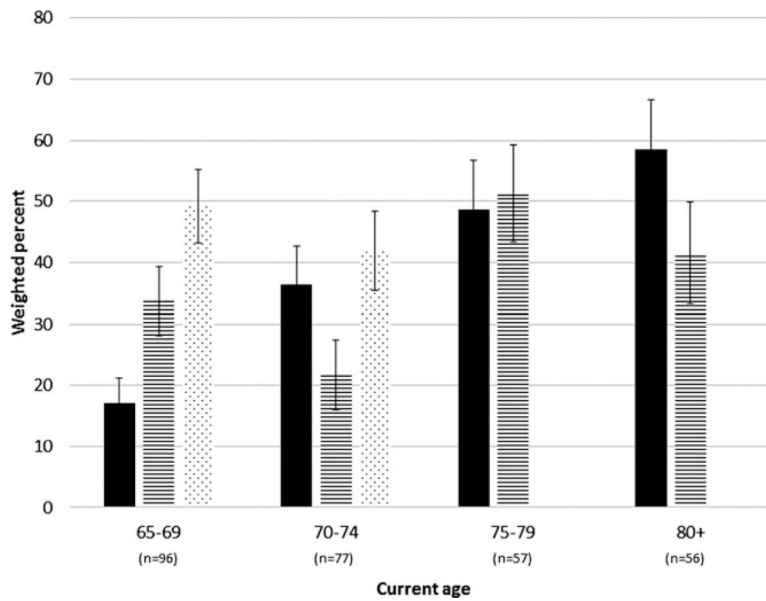


Figure 1. Age that drivers report they will stop driving according to current age group, Second Injury Control and Risk Survey, Phase 2, 2007 to 2008. n = crude number in each age group; bars denote 1 standard error above and below the weighted percentage. Solid black bar: Will stop driving in 0 to 10 years. Horizontal stripe bar: Will stop driving in 11 to 20 years. Dotted bar: Will stop driving in >20 years.