# Medical Fitness to Drive: Safety Recommendations, Laws and Education by Dom Einhorn

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The safety of our roads is important. Traffic accidents are one of the leading causes of death in the United States, which is an issue that needs to be addressed. One important issue that is a concern is that of older drivers and their medical fitness of being able to drive. In the next 20 years, the number of drivers over the age of 65 is expected to double. These individuals are expected to travel more than their predecessors. While the majority of these individuals will remain good drivers, there is a minority that will need attention from family members, health professionals, and state governments in order to determine when it is necessary to retire from driving.

## Safety Recommendations for Senior Drivers

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has come up with several recommendations based on their research of the aging driver and safety concerns. The first recommendation is for licensing decisions to be based on medical fitness and functionality of the driver and not the age of the driver. This is because individuals each age differently. Some people that are in their 80s are still quite safe behind the wheel both physically and cognitively. There should be specific criteria and guidelines for determining the medical fitness of the driver as well as their functional abilities. Standard reporting laws should provide civil immunity to physicians and clinicians that report people that they consider may be medically unfit to drive. Additionally, there should be medical advisory boards established and funded. One example of policies that should be implemented in each state includes the bill enacted in Missouri. This bill offers a clear definition of who is allowed to report individuals and offers voluntary reporting as well. There is legal immunity protection for those making the report and their identity is held in confidence. The bill also provides a medical advisory board and clear procedures and forms.

## Medical Fitness to Drive Laws

Medical fitness to drive laws should be stated to be issued to any one at any age. However, it is more likely to be issued to someone as they get older. There are studies that have shown certain medical conditions that develop as we age can impair our ability to drive and elevate the risk of crashing. It is important to understand that what a medically fit driver is as well. Medically fit drivers will have sufficient vision, memory, attention, and cognitive skills, have the motor skills to manage the task of driving and meet all of the requirements for licensure within the state.

## Education

The most important aspect of medical fitness to drive is education. People need to be informed about what it means to be medically fit to drive. Public safety and education can help older individuals recognize when their driving abilities start to decline. This can help individuals realize when it is time to limit or stop driving altogether. The good news is that seniors are among the safest drivers on the road and many already limit their driving to compensate for health and functional changes in regards to age.

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