



Aging drivers and the elephant in the room

The importance of keeping an aging family member safe without compromising their independence and mobility is essential to maintaining a thriving, engaged life. The topic of driving and seniors generates many concerns and is an uncomfortable topic that becomes the elephant in the room to initiating conversations. As a result, the subject is often delayed until evidence of poor driving behaviors or signs of serious cognitive or physical decline begin to appear.

The task does not need to be as difficult as it appears because there are resources aging drivers and their families can explore to help make the aging driver's transition from driving to non-driving safe and affirming.

One of the first steps is to visit the "Safe Drivers, Smart Options – Keys to Lifelong Mobility" (SDSO) website at **Michigan.gov/agingdriver**. The website, which is supported by a coalition of traffic safety and geriatric care management specialists, provides a wealth of information and resources for older drivers and their families, including topics such as:

- How and when to start conversations with older drivers
- How medications and health problems impact driving as we age
- Driving self-assessment tools, videos, and links to driver-refresher courses

- Contacts for local organizations that work with older drivers and their families
- Resources for transportation options for those who no longer drive

Michigan understands that mobility is essential to keeping seniors active and engaged in their communities. The SDSO website was developed around three core principles:

1. To help aging drivers continue to drive as long as safely possible
2. To help aging drivers transition into a smooth driving retirement
3. To educate the community about the support and resources seniors need to maintain their independence and mobility

Older drivers and their families can explore the resources available in their community through contacts such as the Aging and Adult Services Agency and the Area Agencies on Aging. They also are encouraged to discuss the matter with their healthcare provider. Additional help is available through other federal, state, private- and non-profit agencies such as the National Traffic Safety Highway Administration, Area Agency on Aging 1-B, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and AARP.

Michigan, like states across the country, is experiencing a growing boom in the number of aging drivers. Statistics indicate that one of every five drivers in Michigan is a driver age 65 or older, and the number is only expected to increase over the next several years. While improvements to roads, street signs and vehicles are an important part of the equation to help keep aging drivers safe, the ultimate solution rests with aging drivers and the family and friends who support them. The SDSO website encourages everyone to be proactive and plan for a future that includes “driving retirement.” With that perspective, the elephant in the room will not seem as threatening.