

Aging Driver Communications Framework

A Guide for Canadian Jurisdictions

Prepared for CCMTA

Task Force on the Aging Driver

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Table of Contents

OVERVIEW	3
INTRODUCTION.....	3
BACKGROUND.....	3
DEFINITION.....	4
KEY ATTITUDINAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	4
GUIDING PRINCIPLES.....	4
TARGET AUDIENCE.....	5
GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES	5
PAID ADVERTISING.....	6
PARTNERSHIPS, TECHNOLOGY AND NEWS MEDIA OUTREACH.....	6
SUGGESTED COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES.....	6
SUGGESTED COMMUNICATION COMPONENTS.....	7
<i>Partnership Strategies.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Interactive (Internet and New) Media Strategies.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Media Outreach Strategies.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Turn-key Information Kits.....</i>	<i>10</i>
SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES	11
BASIC PRINCIPLES.....	11
COMMUNICATION TACTICS.....	11
KEY MESSAGES/STRATEGIES.....	13
KEY STAKEHOLDERS.....	13
<i>National.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Local.....</i>	<i>14</i>

Aging Driver Communications Framework

Overview

Introduction

In Canada, and North America in general, there has been a dramatic increase in life expectancy over the last decades. As of 1991, the estimated life expectancy of people over 65 years of age has risen to an average of an additional 18 years: 15.8 years for men and 20 years for women. In Canada, the number of citizens aged 65 years and older has grown significantly since 1991. According to 1995 data, they currently represent 12% of the country's total population. According to projections made by Statistics Canada, this proportion is expected to reach 20% by 2006, and 23% by 2041. As for the 50 and over age group, they already represent 26% of the Canadian population.

The skills required for safe driving – vision, reflexes, flexibility, and hearing – usually begin to deteriorate around age 50 with an even greater loss after 75. Aging drivers can adjust their driving habits to cope safely with this decline, but to do this they must recognize their limitations and unsafe driving practices and be aware of actions they can take to make their driving safer.

At the same time, specific stakeholders such as police, medical professionals, pharmacists and caregivers, along with various branches of government must be prepared for and educated about this issue to ensure road safety remains a priority, and is not compromised.

Background

In the fall of 1998, the two CCMTA Standing Committees on Road Safety Research and Policies and Driver and Vehicles held a joint session to discuss their common concerns about driver improvement and control programs. There was consensus that aging drivers was an emerging issue and that should be addressed as a separate entity.

In December 1998, the standing committee recommended to the CCMTA Board of Directors that a project group on aging drivers, comprising joint membership from both committees, be created to review driver licensing policies, standards and procedures. One item in the project group's mandate was to hold an Aging Driver workshop.

The two-day event held October 15-16, 1999 in Ottawa involved approximately 80 attendees from every province and territory across Canada. The workshop provided the opportunity for consultation and information exchange among government officials and many different stakeholders, which included seniors, associations, health organizations, police departments, road safety professionals and driver licensing agencies. 62 key issues were identified and a total of 25 top priority issues were retained and grouped into seven general categories.

One of them was public education and awareness. The project group was specifically tasked with developing a communications guide to assist jurisdictions interested in educating their constituents and key stakeholders on the key elements relating to aging and driving.

Definition

The following definition of an aging driver was adopted and approved by the project group:

Every driver is an aging driver and the aging process varies from individual to individual. As drivers age, they experience changes in their physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities. In general, these changes start to become more pronounced after the age of 50.

Key Attitudinal Considerations

The research conducted in British Columbia on the attitudes and preferences of current and future older drivers found the following:

- Older drivers tend to feel that driving is a right, not a privilege.
- Driving is synonymous with not only independent living, but with their own identity.
- Older drivers tend to over-rate their ability and are reluctant to relinquish their driver's license and their driving "right" even in the face of functional limitations.
- The majority of elderly who have quit driving feel they did so at about the right time, albeit reluctantly.
- Self-graduated drivers who decide to quit are influenced by several factors ranked in the following order: 1) doctor's advice; 2) own recognition of serious visual loss; 3) increasing nervousness behind the wheel of an automobile; and 4) advice from family and friends.
- It is estimated that as many as 30% of the elderly will continue to drive until circumstances beyond their control force them to stop.

Guiding Principles

Through consultation with various stakeholders, the project group adopted and approved the following guiding principles:

- A driver's license is important for maintaining an individual's self-esteem. The concept of "keeping aging drivers mobile and safe" should guide the development of policy and programs dealing with aging drivers.
- As driving is a privilege, not a right, there should be a balance between the individual's mobility, and the individual's and public's right to expect a reasonable level of road safety.
- The life cycle or continuum of changes that drivers go through as they age should be recognized and built in from the start of the individual's road safety education.

- There should be recognition that age is not necessarily an indicator of driving skill or ability, but rather that competency or functional ability should be the measure.
- Policies and programs should be enforceable.
- There should be a process that will allow aging drivers to provide input relating to the issue of aging drivers.

Target Audience

Communications should be targeted (but not limited to) the following segments of the population:

Primary

- Drivers aged 50 and over
- Professional drivers 50 and over
- Family and friends of aging drivers
- Health industry professionals

Secondary

- General public
- Police agencies

General Communications Guidelines

Communication campaigns typically work by gradually influencing the audience members' perceptions and then shaping the content of their conversations with friends, family members, and others. In a recent report produced for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, the unique role of family and friends was described as follows:

Family or friends play a key role in influencing high-risk older drivers. They may informally pressure the individual to reduce or cease driving, or they may notify the driver's licensing office in their community. Given the complexity of personal relationships, it is not reasonable to rely on family and friends to play a major role in driving graduation and cessation behaviour. It is possible, however, that carefully tailored media driving campaigns could be used to increase involvement of family and friends.

(Older Drivers in British Columbia: Predicting Future Patterns and Assessing Strategies for Prevention of Accidents, June 2000)

An integrated communication strategy uses a range of communication vehicles to ensure the messages are frequently and consistently received and discussed by members of the target population.

Paid Advertising

Advertising is a powerful force, as attested by the billions of advertising dollars spent every year by corporations world-wide. Because of its unique ability to achieve message reach and frequency, advertising is frequently positioned as a core component of integrated communication campaigns. Jurisdictions with the resources can implement aggressive advertising campaigns as part of their communication initiatives. The subsequent messages quickly and efficiently reach the vast majority of target audience members on a frequent basis. As such, advertising is an extremely important tool in the communication mix.

Partnerships, Technology and News Media Outreach

While advertising delivers compelling and informative messages and imagery, keep in mind it is but one of many influences in the lives of our target audience. As consumer marketers recognize, capturing the target audience and motivating the individuals within it requires the impact of frequent mass and interpersonal communication.

Given the challenging nature of the aging driver issue and the social and psychological conditions that must be influenced, the lead agency should consider employing multiple mass media and direct communication channels over a substantial period of time to achieve an effect.

Along with paid advertising (if utilized), three key non-advertising components can be used to help communicate this issue:

- Partnerships with community, civic and professional groups, and government and non-government organizations;
- Interactive (Internet and new) media projects/activities; and,
- Public information (news media outreach).

Suggested Communication Principles

- **Messages and activities should be tied to the communication strategy.** Messages and activities that are not derived from the communication strategy are likely to be ineffective or worse, counterproductive.
- **There is a critical need for strong, central management of all aspects of integrated communications.** The lead agency should consider developing a system to ensure the consistency, integration and timing of all activities targeting older drivers.
- **The lead agency should consider developing a strong brand identity to link its many activities.** Ideally, the lead agency should consider developing (and test through consumer research) a campaign name and graphic identity that will be used to brand all elements of the campaign.
- **Collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental federal, provincial and local programs is vital to the success of communications.** The lead agency should consider implementing a systematic process for partnering and collaborating with other organizations to achieve the campaign goals.

- **Involving seniors in creating and disseminating messages is critical to ensure meaningful messaging.** The lead agency should consider creating a variety of mechanisms to solicit the input of the target group, and to involve them in the development and distribution of campaign messages.

Suggested Communication Components

The unique roles of each of the three non-advertising components, as well as recommended principles for working within them, are described in this section.

Partnership Strategies

Partnerships with public and private sector organizations are essential to meeting the goal of an Aging Driver Communication Campaign (ADCC). While advertising and news media can raise the importance of this issue on provincial and national levels, interpersonal strategies and the community structures that sustain them create enduring behaviour change and a supportive context for new behaviour. Interpersonal activities can be accomplished by partnering with organizations that can extend the campaign by reinforcing the messages in the national and local communities they serve.

Developing and maintaining effective partnerships — those viewed as valuable and productive by both the lead agency and its partners — requires effort and ideally adherence to a formal process.

Partner with already existing networks related to road safety, seniors, aging, etc., for maximum dissemination of campaign messages.

Strong partnerships with broad-reaching organizations will save time and resources. Efforts should be made to identify and include groups that have the ability to reach far beyond themselves to peer organizations and members.

Involve partners at the earliest stages of program planning.

Such involvement will not only help ensure their "buy in," but is also needed to ensure that partner organizations take on roles that they perceive as important, and are prepared to carry out.

Recognize and build on the current and planned roles and activities of partner organizations, and avoid duplication of efforts.

This will require up-front coordination with potential partners to identify and synchronize roles and activities that already exist or need to be developed.

Involve organizations across many sectors of society.

The complexity of the aging driver issue requires the use of different strategies for different audiences. Involving organizations and individuals from many sectors (including education, government, seniors services) can increase the breadth and effectiveness of communications at all levels of society.

Provide partnership organizations with materials and other information resources needed to support the campaign.

The agency responsible should consider identifying and developing resources that local partners can use to forge linkages between campaign messages and partnership resources in the community. For example, the agency responsible should ideally be able to estimate demand for and provide sufficient

quantities of campaign materials to local partners (e.g., posters and brochures). This will require adequate distribution, monitoring, and fulfillment systems. In addition, mechanisms should be available to support ongoing communication with partners about campaign and partnership activities (e.g., through the Internet).

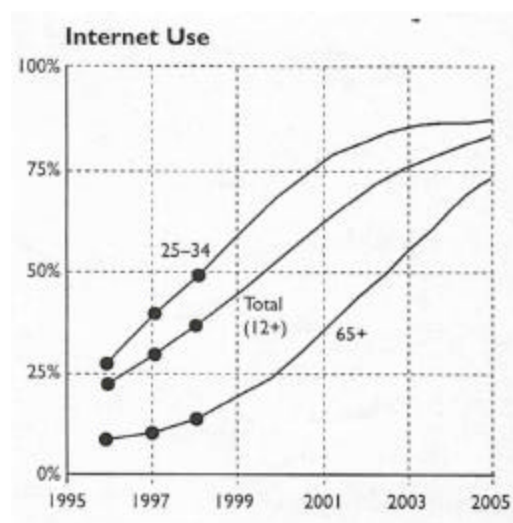
Recognize and reward partners for their contributions toward meeting the campaign goal.

Recognizing successful partner contributions at all levels is vital to maintaining and nourishing the relationship. Also, other communities and organizations should be encouraged to duplicate successful activities. In some cases, partners can leverage such recognition into financial or community support for road safety education and awareness programs for aging drivers.

Track and evaluate partnership activities.

Assessing partnership activities is an important evaluative component of the campaign. Tracking and evaluating partner activities will entail cooperation of partners in reporting on their activities; some assistance from the agency responsible may be required to assist partners in tracking their efforts.

Interactive (Internet and New) Media Strategies



The Internet is an extremely effective way to reach target audiences efficiently and effectively, and information retrieval by users (advertising, in particular) can be measured in ways that no other mass media channel can achieve. The medium can also provide powerful new ways to coordinate stakeholders and develop collaborations.

During the past five years, the use of the Internet and other new interactive media has grown tremendously. For many Canadians, the Internet has now become an important source of information and entertainment*. A report by Media Metrix in 1999 showed that the baby boom generation comprised 20 percent of total online users, outpacing 18- to 24-year-olds who trailed at 17.5 percent. The analysis also showed that 45- to 64-year-olds surf the Internet more frequently, stay there longer, and check out more Web pages than even their university-age counterparts.

While most adults age 50 or above are more likely to be intermediate Internet users testing the waters of the Internet, their heavy online habits have set them on a fast track to become fully accustomed to the medium. Compared to 18- to 24-year olds, they spend on average 6.3 more days per month on the Internet, stay logged on 235.7 minutes longer and view 178.7 more unique pages per month

* Internet use chart quoted from: 2020, New Rules for the New Age, Garth Turner, 2001

% of Population Using the Internet		Age Segmentation-Growth in Internet Users	
Canada	38%	<i>Age</i>	<i>Growth</i>
Australia	25%	45-64	18.4%
Singapore	25%	35-44	6.8%
USA	25%	25-34	6.2%
New Zealand	24%	18-24	17.9%
UK	15%	<i>Average Duration (Minutes)</i>	
Germany	14%	45-64	583.5
Hong Kong	14%	35-44	617.2
Taiwan	12%	25-34	704.9
France	11%	18-24	347.8
ACNielsen, NetWatch, 1999		Media Metrix Web Report, 1999	

Generate web information that older people will interact with, recognize how older people relate to the Internet, and plan accordingly.

As with any medium, an understanding of how it is used by the audience, particularly in conjunction with other activities, will help focus campaign efforts effectively.

Online users are frequently in an "action mode" when they use the Internet.

The Internet is not simply informational — it is "transactional." The value of the Internet is not the ability to just deliver information (although it can deliver a substantial amount), but to allow a user to learn as much as he or she chooses to about a subject — be it a computer or car — and then to take action. For example, Internet users can now shop for airfares, compare rates, and purchase tickets online. Therefore, the Internet resources developed for an ADCC should focus on teaching the user and then encouraging him/her to take action (e.g., self regulate, enroll in a refresher course, etc.).

Use the Internet to save money.

Using the Internet will help the lead agency realize efficiencies in materials distribution. For instance, the lead agency's web site could be an effective online clearinghouse and central distribution point where partner organizations can download materials. However, some hard copy materials will still need to be made available, as some audience members may not have access to online technology.

Media Outreach Strategies

Ideally, an ADCC should incorporate a proactive approach with mainstream media when educating and informing the public. A media message is especially compelling to the target audience if it is presented through trusted news professionals, rather than through paid advertising. News media stories and public affairs programming gain credibility that cannot be achieved through paid messages. While news media outreach does not guarantee a successful communication campaign, such coverage can play a substantial role in effectively communicating campaign messages. Therefore, the news and other

information media are critical to the success of an ADCC. There are few substitutes for an article in a major daily newspaper, a feature story on the network or local television evening news, or a radio talk show that examines the issue in depth. Media stories can help bring an issue to life, particularly when delivered to an audience by peers or other people they identify with.

The lead agency should consider making a substantial news media outreach effort to ensure that these efforts support those of paid advertising and other communication components. The outreach should be targeted specifically to seniors, and its messages should be based on the Communication Strategy. This will require the lead agency to be proactive and responsive to the needs of established press outlets.

Consistently communicate interesting and useful story information to media that reach specific target audience segments.

Seniors favour certain magazines, listen to particular radio stations, and watch certain programs. This differentiation and segmentation of media by different target audiences must be a key consideration in all news media outreach and relevant materials need to be tailored to meet those specific needs.

Build and maintain ongoing relationships with both national and regional media.

Good relationships are important to ensure continuing media coverage. They can be developed by continually providing the media with useful and timely information/trends and program evaluation information, as well as with appropriate feature story suggestions tailored to their audiences' interests.

Creatively pursue both hard news and feature story placements.

It is important to pursue opportunities to dispel myths and clarify the facts surrounding the issue of aging drivers through "hard" news and feature stories. This will reinforce key messages and establish the relevancy of the aging driver issue.

Manage issues and prepare for the unexpected.

Given the complexity and often-controversial nature of the aging driver issue, unexpected issues will inevitably arise. The key is to be aware of these issues, prepare appropriate responses, maintain communication with the media, and utilize ties with key stakeholders (such as representatives of partner organizations) that can provide communication support through spokespeople and related roles. The guiding principle for any such response will be to consistently provide factual information with the goal of reducing the collision rates of senior drivers.

Turn-key Information Kits

To extend the messages and activities of the campaign into communities across the province, the lead agency should consider disseminating practical tools and information in turnkey information kits (e.g., The Older and Wiser Driver, 55-Alive material). Recipients of the kits can carry out training and awareness activities through community seminars (e.g., self-assessment, self-regulation, refresher materials), fact sheets, camera-ready newsletter articles, videos and media outreach materials.

Specific Communications Strategies

Basic Principles

To maximize effectiveness, an ADCC should be guided by certain basic principles. The agency responsible should demonstrate the relevance of the issue, focus its messages, utilize technology, and explore how its messages could flexibly serve multiple audiences.

Relevance

Communications efforts should clearly establish why aging drivers (especially given current demographic trends) is an important issue and why it should be made a road safety priority.

Focus

Communications on the issue of aging drivers should be focused, clear and consistent with national and provincial standards and trends.

Technology

Technological innovation should be incorporated into communications as much as possible and appropriate

Flexibility

Messaging and medium should be readily adaptable to serve the needs of diverse audiences.

Communication Tactics

- 1. Integrated communications team(s)** Roundtable discussions with representatives from organizations with a vested interest in the aging driver issue should be convened to ensure a broad range of perspectives are taken into consideration prior to the development and delivery of specific communications initiatives. At the same time, this group could provide valuable feedback during the evaluation phase of any given project.
- 2. Define strategy** The lead agency should develop a clearly defined integrated communications plan that articulates, key messages, partners, timelines, measuring and monitoring, etc.
- 3. Provincial campaign launch** An official campaign launch provides a tremendous opportunity to place the issue of the aging driver on the public agenda. The launch should highlight all the major elements of the campaign- from advertising and news media outreach to partnerships and online activities.

- 4. Consistent messaging/materials**

Efforts should be made to standardize certain communications product development and service processes with the goal of providing better products and services and eliminating duplication and overlap. This recommendation is targeted to any agency (e.g., Jurisdiction's Department of Highways, Health, etc.) responsible for the development of safety-related publications/messaging or which is responsible for responding to road safety related public inquiries.
- 5. Strategic material distribution**

Resource materials regarding required medical examinations, reassessment, refresher courses, self-evaluation, etc. should be distributed with license and/or insurance renewal notices to the target population. This information should also be made available at locations frequented by the target group (pharmacies, service stations, workplaces, etc.).
- 6. News media outreach**

The news media can help to credibly communicate the issues relevant to aging drivers through stories they consider compelling, timely, and of interest to their audiences. Many members of the media are also enthusiastic about making a clearly positive impact on the quality of life in Canada by reporting or depicting "good news" stories, or "news you can use," modelling constructive behaviour that may be useful to audiences. The lead agency should consistently provide the media with newsworthy, interesting facts and compelling feature story suggestions. Consistent outreach to media should take place through means that are most useful and appropriate (including background briefings, spokesperson availabilities, news conferences, press kits, online information, etc.).
- 7. Integration of emerging technologies**

When developing publications, the agency responsible should ensure their publications could be electronically distributed.
- 8. Creation of an Aging Driver Speakers Bureau and/or network**

Currently, there are a number of organizations that provide driver education refresher courses for older drivers. One such program, the 55 Alive/Mature Driving Program, developed by the Canada Safety Council, has experienced tremendous growth in enrolment over the past several years. Opportunities to use this delivery structure to communicate the issue to a broader audience could be explored. A provincial network of individuals could be organized and trained under the auspices of 55 Alive to deliver presentations to various groups and organizations.
- 9. Annual review of aging driver communications**

Metrics for performance and continual assessment of effectiveness should be a fundamental element of all aging driver communications efforts, followed by any necessary adjustments. The agency responsible should review its strategy on an annual basis. Performance indicators, which have been developed, should be used to conduct this evaluation.

- 10. Public feedback** The agency responsible may wish to seek regular customer input and evaluation of programs, as well as advice from existing advisory committees.

Advisory groups such as focus groups and round tables can be used to obtain independent perspectives on how well the agency communicates the aging driver issue. This approach offers:

- Flexibility
- Immediate initiation of process
- Instantaneous feedback
- Periodic telephone surveys can also be used to measure the level of public awareness.

Key Messages/Strategies

- Communications should clearly articulate the importance of personal mobility and why it is important to keep people operating vehicles as late in life as possible, as long as they can do so safely – “aging is not a character flaw.”
- Messaging should explicitly and implicitly refute the common misconception that mandatory re-testing for drivers that reach a specific age is the most effective way to address this issue.
- Older drivers should be made aware of the driver risk factors facing their age group.
- Campaigns should target family and friends in the decision of graduation and cessation of driving, and initiating medical exams and re-testing.
- Communications should focus on what aging drivers can do to maintain operational safety.
- Communications should help prepare individuals for older age and the prospect of using alternative forms of transportation.

Key Stakeholders

National

- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Federation of Seniors
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Pharmaceutical Association
- Transportation Association of Canada
- Insurance Bureau of Canada

- Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police

- Canadian Association of Japanese Automobile Dealers

Local

- Motor Vehicle Licensing Authority

- Medical Associations

- Retirement Organizations

- Law Enforcement

- Seniors Organizations

- Public/Para Transit Representatives

- Kiwanis/Rotary Clubs

- Pharmaceutical Companies/Organizations

- Department/Ministry of Health

- Department/Ministry Justice