

The Road Ahead: Driving Behaviors, Confidence, and Planning Among Adults Age 65+



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHCARE
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Key Findings

- The majority of people age 65 and older (62%) reported driving a vehicle most days in the past six months.
- While 81% of drivers age 65 and older feel very confident in their current ability to drive safely, only 43% feel very confident about their ability to drive safely over the next five years.
- 54% of drivers age 65 and older do not have a plan in place if they were no longer able to drive, and 84% were not familiar with advance driving directives.

Driving supports mobility, independence, and social connections. As people age, however, driving can become more challenging. In February 2025, the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging asked a national sample of adults age 65 and older about their driving behaviors, confidence in driving safely, and planning for future driving changes and transportation needs.

Driving among adults age 65 and older

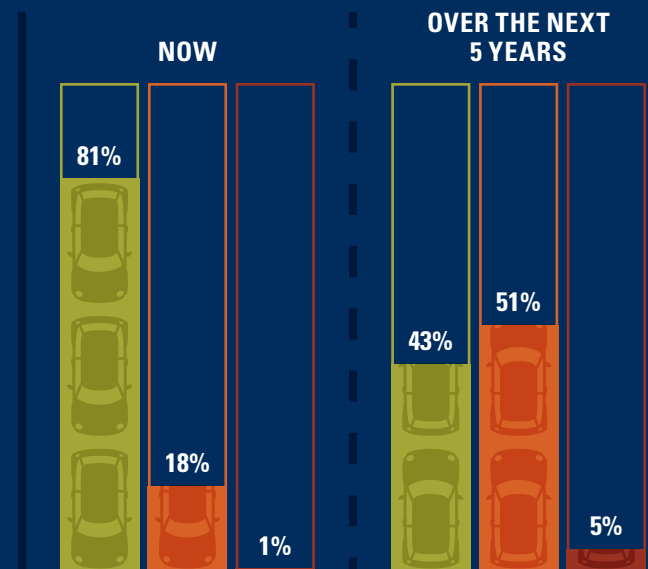
Frequency

Overall, 62% of adults age 65 and older reported driving a vehicle most days in the past six months, while 22% said they drive at least once a week and 6% said they drive less than once a week. In all, 10% reported not driving in the past six months.

Those more likely to report driving more often (at least once a week) included men, individuals with annual household incomes of \$60,000 or more, those with good to excellent physical health, those with

Drivers age 65+ are confident in current safe driving ability, but less confident for future

Very confident Somewhat confident Not very confident



good to excellent mental health, and those without a disability that limits their day-to-day activities.

Ability to drive safely

Confidence

Among drivers age 65 and older (defined as those who reported driving at all in the past six months), 81% said they were very confident in their current ability to drive safely, 18% were somewhat confident, and 1% were not very confident.

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Fewer drivers age 65 and older (43%) said they were very confident in their ability to drive safely over the next five years, while 51% were somewhat confident and 5% not very confident.

Those more likely to report being very confident in their current and future ability to drive safely included men, those with annual household incomes of \$60,000 or greater, those reporting good to excellent physical health, those reporting good to excellent mental health, and those without a disability that limits their day-to-day activities.

Health challenges and safety concerns

Some older drivers said that vision issues (14%), temporary health issues like surgery or injury (5%), or physical or mobility limitations (4%) impact their ability to drive.

Moreover, among adults age 65 and older who have not driven in the past six months, 34% believed it was no longer safe for them to drive, and 29% reported not driving because of a health issue.

Overall, 6% of drivers age 65 and older have ever talked with a health care provider about their driving, while the vast majority (94%) have not.

When do older drivers avoid driving?

Among drivers age 65 and older, many reported avoiding driving under certain conditions:

- In bad weather like rain, snow, or fog (53%)
- At night (48%)
- In heavy traffic (25%)
- In new or unfamiliar places (16%)
- On freeways or interstates (15%)

In all, 68% of older drivers said they avoid driving under one or more of these conditions.

Transportation alternatives to driving: recent use and future plans

In terms of recent use of transportation alternatives to driving, some adults age 65 and older (including drivers and non-drivers) reported getting around via rides from friends or family, rideshare services, or public transportation. In the past year, 44% of older adults said they received rides from family and friends, 21% reported using rideshare services like Uber, Lyft, or taxis, and 14% had used public transportation. However, 5% said rideshare services are not available where they live, and 9% said the same about public transportation.

Many drivers age 65+ feel unprepared for a time when they may be unable to drive

54% do not have a plan if they were no longer able to drive

84% are not familiar with advance driving directives

An advance driving directive is a written plan outlining one's driving preferences in case of future health issues or impairments.



When the poll asked drivers age 65 and older how much thought they have given to what they will do for transportation if they are no longer able to drive safely, 53% said they thought about it very little or not at all, 39% said some, and 8% had thought about it a lot.

Among drivers age 65 and older, 46% said they have a plan in place if they are no longer able to drive (e.g., have family or friends drive them, or use ridesharing services), while 54% do not have a plan. Women and people age 75 and older were more likely to have a plan in place than men and people age 65–74, respectively.

Advance driving directives

Overall, 16% of all adults age 65 and older said they were very or somewhat familiar with the concept of an advance driving directive (ADD) — a written plan outlining one’s driving preferences in case of future health issues or impairments and identifying a person(s) to help one decide when to stop driving — while 84% were not familiar. After being provided the definition of an ADD, 70% of adults age 65 and older said it is very or somewhat important to have an ADD, compared with 30% who said it is not important.

Implications

Our poll found that most adults age 65 and older drive regularly and feel confident in their current driving abilities. However, they felt considerably less confident about their ability to drive safely in the future. Yet, few older drivers had thought a lot about what they will do for transportation if they can no longer drive, and less than half had a plan for when they stop driving.

At the same time, our poll shows that more than half of older drivers avoid driving in certain situations, such as in bad weather or at night, which could indicate that some older drivers recognize their driving abilities are changing and have adjusted their driving behaviors accordingly.

To continue driving safely, **older adults** should consider regular vision, cognitive, and physical health screenings to identify changes in functioning and

The majority of older drivers said they avoid driving during certain conditions, such as at night or in bad weather.

determine whether additional resources or targeted training can support continued safe driving. For example, updated corrective lenses, occupational therapy, or driver safety programs can help address functional changes and promote confidence behind the wheel.

Advanced in-vehicle technologies show promise in helping older adults maintain safe driving. For example, safety features such as backup cameras and blind spot warnings can provide greater awareness of the driving environment by offering additional visual and auditory cues to support decision-making while driving. Certain safety features can sometimes be added to older vehicles too.

Research shows that most people will eventually need to reduce or stop driving. Losing the ability to drive can be a significant and potentially life-changing event, affecting one’s daily tasks, social activities, and sense of independence. It is important for the people in older adults’ lives to be aware of this reality and support them as they navigate changes in driving ability.

Planning ahead for when an older adult may need to limit or stop their driving is vital. Trusted people in older adults’ lives like **family members, friends, and caregivers** can play a key role in encouraging conversations about planning for future mobility and transportation needs, especially since some older adults may think these needs are too far off to plan for. These discussions may focus on practical aspects, such as indicators of changes in driving ability, gradual transitions, and other transportation

options. Framing the topic as planning for independence and safety, rather than restriction, can help make these discussions constructive and supportive.

Health systems and providers are particularly well positioned to help older adults and their families think about their future transportation needs by integrating “mobility planning” into routine care. Embedding these discussions, which may include assessments, resources, or planning tools, into regular care can promote shared decision-making and help older adults maintain both independence and safety as they age. Examples of tools that could be used in routine care and conversations include advance driving directives and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “[MyMobility Plan](#).” There remains a need for new tools that address the unique needs and available resources of all community members, including individuals of all income levels, all disability and health statuses, and those living in rural areas.

Another important aspect of planning is ensuring that people have acceptable ways to get around after they stop driving. Some may find current transportation alternatives to driving, like taxis,

rideshare services, or public transit, unreliable or even unavailable in some cases. Even the most commonly used alternative, getting rides from family and friends, often does not fully address older adults’ transportation needs and can place an undue burden on others. **Policymakers, local governments, and community leaders** can help by ensuring that a range of transportation services is widely available, along with an integrated system for finding and coordinating rides that is accessible to both older adults and caregivers. Expanding reliable, affordable, and accessible community transportation options would not only help older adults stay connected and independent, but also lessen dependence on transportation provided by family, friends, and caregivers.

To support older adults’ independence and well-being, communities need coordinated and innovative strategies that connect transportation planning, public health, and aging services. With thoughtful planning, proactive conversations and preparation, and strong community supports, older adults can continue to travel safely as they age and be better prepared for any future changes in their driving.

Data Source and Methods

This National Poll on Healthy Aging report presents findings from a national household survey conducted exclusively by NORC at the University of Chicago for the University of Michigan’s Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. This survey module was administered online and by phone from February 4th–28th, 2025, to a randomly selected, stratified group of U.S. adults age 50–97 (n=2,883), with an oversample of non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander populations. The survey completion rate was 32% among panel members invited to participate. The margin of error is +/- 1 to 3 percentage points for questions asked of the full sample and higher among subgroups. Percentages in this report may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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