

SUBMISSION TO THE HONOURABLE SUZANNE ANTON, JUSTICE MINISTER FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

SUBMITTED BY THE BRITISH COLUMBIA CHAPTERS OF CARP (A NEW VISION OF AGING FOR CANADA)

INTRODUCTION

The present rules about senior driver re-examination are unfair and discriminatory. They are based on an outmoded concept of seniors as old and feeble, content to lounge in their rocking chairs until infirmity puts them in a wheelchair or sends them to an early grave.

This old image no longer applies. Most of today's seniors travel extensively, participate actively in sports and other recreational programs, and contribute to their local communities in many ways. They are the largest group of volunteers, contributing millions of hours of unpaid work to sports organizations, charities, community and health organizations.

THE CURRENT DRIVING RULES

The compulsory medical examination: The results of the medical exam at age 80 and later are inconsistent:

- The charge for the exam ranges from \$75.00 to \$400.00. This charge alone can be a hardship for low income seniors.
- People who have no doctor must go to a clinic which knows nothing about their medical history. Doctors tend to be more sceptical about people they don't know. We've heard stories of people who were traumatized by the experience and felt the doctor was not being objective.
- Doctors are not trained or equipped to do proper vision tests. Some are in dingy halls with well-worn eye charts posted at a much greater distance than the optometrist's charts.
- Doctors are not qualified to determine if an individual is a poor driving risk.

- Studies have shown that medical examinations are an ineffective way to evaluate driving competence.
- We've heard stories about people who know their doctors well having their forms signed without any examination taking place.

The Drive-ABLE test is unreliable and punitive.

- Almost half of all Drive-ABLE test results are inconclusive, according to recent scientific studies.
- *In spite of Dr. Alan Dobbs' claim to the contrary*, there is no scientifically proven validity to the tests. His self-conceived validity studies are akin to pharmaceutical companies declaring their drugs are safe without any regulatory oversight. In too many cases these assumptions have been proven to be wrong.
- In spite of the claim it is merely a touch screen test, not a computer test, many people who do not use computers (and some who do) are intimidated by the touch screen and are too nervous to achieve accurate results.
- The expense of the test is another financial burden for people living on limited income.
- People who have not passed the test have told us they cannot find out why they failed or how they can correct it.

CARP'S Experience

The North Fraser Chapter of CARP held two public meetings on seniors driving rules and some other BC chapters also held meetings. Some of the stories we heard were heart-wrenching. When seniors lose their driving licenses they lose their independence and feel isolated. They find it difficult to go to medical appointments and virtually impossible to attend the social events that keep them

alive and alert. People told us they had been driving for many years without an

accident or a traffic violation, yet suddenly they were faced with re-examination. Your government wants people to live in their own homes as long as possible to reduce medical costs. The Better at Home program is designed to help promote living at home. The experience of many of our members and guests at meetings suggest losing their licenses is going to prevent them from living at home, defeating the purpose of Better at Home and imposing substantial costs on the health care system.

The Tri-Cities Seniors Planning Network researched transportation issues in the Tri-Cities. They found large gaps in the availability and convenience of public transit. Not only is it bad, recent transit changes have made it worse. A recent transportation forum they held confirmed their findings. They found that Handy Dart is equally unreliable.

In short, BC should make every effort to have seniors retain their drivers licenses for as long as they can safely drive.

The Seniors Driving Experience

ICBC gives drivers over 65 a discount on their car insurance **because claims costs are lower for over 65's.**

The United States Insurance Institute for Highway Safety released a report in February 2014 which showed that the rate of decline in traffic accidents is greater for seniors than for middle-aged drivers.

- During the 1997 – 2012 period, fatal crash rates per licensed driver fell 42 percent for older drivers and only 30 percent for middle aged ones (35-54).
- The study, relying on state data, found that the rate of non-fatal injury crashes fell by a third for drivers 35-54, 36 percent for drivers 70 – 74, 38 percent for drivers 75-79 and **45 percent** for drivers 80 and older.
- The argument that older drivers have fewer accidents only because they drive less also doesn't hold. Their study showed that accident rates **per vehicle mile travelled** also declined faster for drivers 70 and older than for 35 to 54 year olds.

The Institute cited two reasons for the improved driving record for older drivers. Older people are more fit than in previous years and vehicles are safer.

Ageism

British Columbia eliminated compulsory retirement at age 65 for most people because they recognized it was discriminatory. We believe BC's present rules for senior drivers are equally discriminatory and founded in ageism, which should no longer be practised in any civilized society. In addition to it being counter-productive to the province's desire to have people age at home, it is time to treat seniors with dignity and respect. They deserve it after making contributions to society for many years and continuing to contribute.

Ontario recently considered using Drive-ABLE tests to determine seniors' driving competence. Following a request from CARP to re-consider their decision, they decided on a more humane approach to test the ability to drive safely. Alberta, the home of Drive-ABLE, is also reviewing its use in determining driving capability.

CARP Recommendations

Numerous studies in various parts of the world have shown that seniors' driving records are as good as, or in many cases better than younger age groups. The more enlightened countries such as Australia do not discriminate against senior drivers..

Drivers of all ages can cause problems on the road. When younger drivers cause problems, no one suggests that everyone in their age group should be punished for their transgressions. When seniors drive erratically, over-reaction to an isolated incident calls for punitive measures against all senior drivers.

Senior drivers as a group should be treated the same as other age groups of drivers. All bad drivers should be treated harshly. But all good drivers should be treated kindly, regardless of their age.

It's time for British Columbia to abolish special rules for senior drivers and treat all age groups equally. Ageism is an outmoded concept that has no place in BC. We urge you to treat seniors with dignity and respect by eliminating special rules for senior drivers.

CARP is a national, non-profit, non-partisan organization with a membership of over 300,000 from across Canada committed to a “New Vision of Aging for Canada” promoting social change that will bring financial security, equitable access to health care and freedom from discrimination.

Submitted by Bruce Bird, Chair of North Fraser Chapter CARP on behalf of BC CARP chapters and members.

Bruce Bird, BA, FIIC (Fellow of the Insurance Institute of Canada), worked in the insurance and re-insurance industry for 21 years and was involved in automobile underwriting and claims for much of that time.