

Preface

The science of public health and the practice of medicine are often deemed two separate entities. After all, the practice of medicine centers on the treatment of disease in the individual, while the science of public health is devoted to prevention of disease in the population. However, physicians can actualize public health priorities through the delivery of medical care to their individual patients.

One of these priorities is the prevention of injury. More than 400 Americans die each day as a result of injuries sustained from motor vehicle crashes, firearms, poisonings, suffocation, falls, fires, and drowning. The risk of injury is so great that most people sustain a significant injury at some time during their lives.

The *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers* was created by the American Medical Association (AMA), with support from the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA), to help physicians address preventable injuries—in particular, those incurred in motor vehicle crashes. Currently, motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of injury-related deaths among 65- to 74-year-olds and are the second leading cause (after falls) among 75- to 84-year-olds. While traffic safety programs have reduced the fatality rate for drivers under age 65, the fatality rate for older drivers has consistently remained high. Clearly, additional efforts are needed.

Physicians are in a leading position to address and correct this health disparity. By providing effective health care, physicians can help their patients maintain a high level of fitness, enabling them to preserve safe driving skills later in life and protecting them against serious injuries in the event of a crash. By adopting preventive practices—including the assessment and counseling strategies outlined in this guide—physicians can better identify drivers at risk for crashes, help enhance their driving safety, and ease the transition to driving retirement if and when it becomes necessary.

Through the practice of medicine, physicians have the opportunity to promote the safety of their patients and of the public. The AMA and NHTSA urge you to use the tools in this *Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers* to forge a link between public health and medicine.

The project was supported by cooperative agreement number DTNH22-08-H-00185 from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the Department of Transportation. While this guide was reviewed by NHTSA, the contents of this guide are those of the authors and do not represent the opinions, policies or official positions of NHTSA.