

## Are young adults' licensing rates still declining?

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### Abstract

Declines in young adult driver licensing have been reported in several countries. This study provides an important update of such trends in Victoria and includes new data by gender and location. Across 2001-2016, there was an 18% decrease in young adults aged 18-24 holding a driver licence with over a third not holding a licence in 2016. Females were less likely than males to be licensed at all ages. Those living in the Greater Melbourne area or regional centres were less likely to be licensed than those dwelling in the remainder of Victoria. The findings have implications for road safety.

### Background

Declines in young adult driver licensing have been noted in the United States, Canada, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom, Japan, France and Germany (e.g. Delbosc & Currie, 2013; Sivak & Schoettle, 2012; van Dender & Clever, 2013). In Australia, Bailey et al. (2015) found that driver licensing rates among Victorians aged 18-30 years have declined since 2001. This study provides an update to gauge whether the overall licensing rates among young Victorians are continuing to decline and whether the trends are the result of different patterns of licensing according to gender and urban versus rural residence.

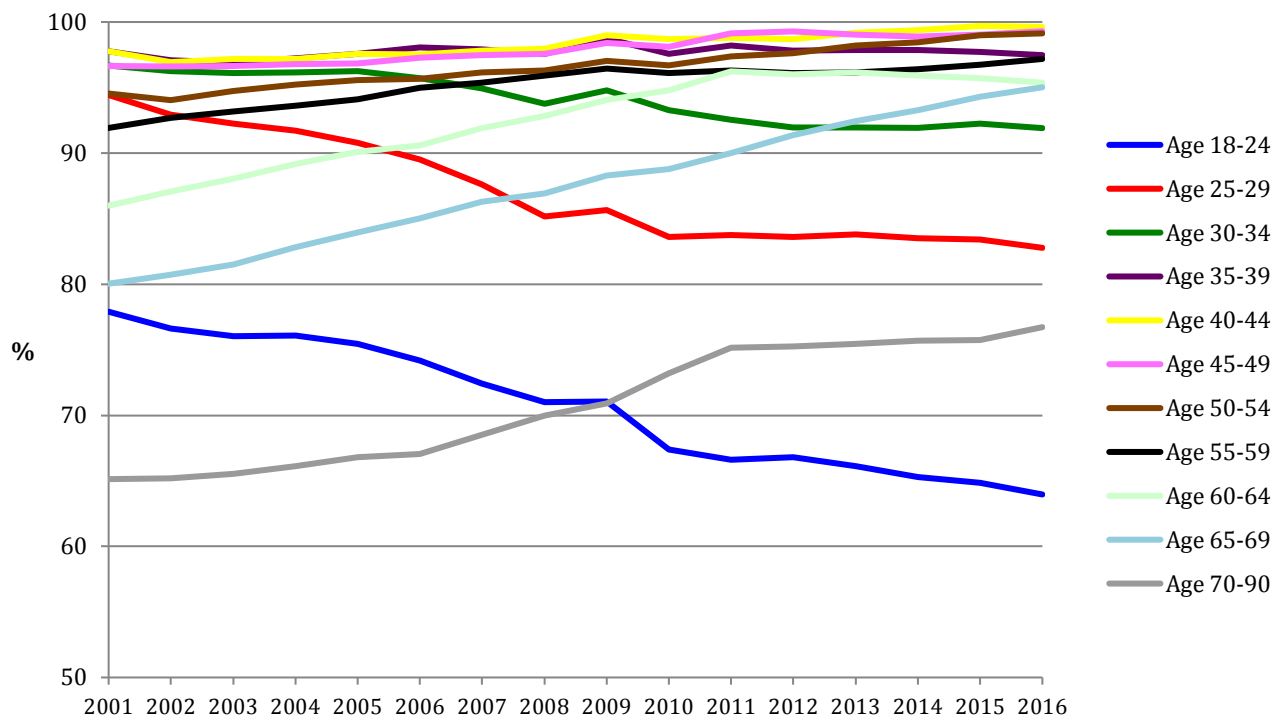
### Method

The total numbers of licence holders for individual ages 18-90 by gender from 2011-2016 were obtained from VicRoads in addition to those for individual ages 18-24 by postcode of residence. The number of driver licences at each age were tabulated against Australian Bureau of Statistics population data by postcode and gender. The percentages of licensed drivers per population were then calculated for each category and examined to ascertain any trends over time in driver licensing rates. Chi-square analyses were performed to determine statistically significant differences.

### Results

Figure 1 shows that from 2001-2016, there was a decreasing trend for young Victorian adults to hold a driver licence. Licensing rates for young adults aged 18-24 have decreased by 18% since 2001, with over a third (37%) of them not holding a driver licence in 2016. In 2016, 18 year olds had the lowest licensing rate on record (39.6%). Licensing rates among adults aged 25-29 have also declined since 2001, but not as substantially (by 12%). Looking at more recent years, since 2014, there has been a slight downward trend in licensing rates for those aged 18-24 while for older age groups (i.e. age 30-65) licensing rates have remained relatively stable.

With respect to gender, across 2014-2016, females were less likely than males to be licensed, for ages 18-24 (63% vs 66%,  $\chi^2=1777.8$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and also in all other age groups.



**Figure 1: Driver licensing rates (percentage of Victorian population) by age groups, 2001-2016**

For those aged 18-24, from 2011-2016 licensing rates in the Greater Melbourne area declined slightly (4%) while licensing rates increased by 4.7% for the rest of rural Victoria. When the Victorian rural area was further divided into two categories, we found licensing rates for the regional centres (Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo) remained relatively stable while there was increased licensing over time for the rural areas excluding regional centres (6.3%). However, looking at the age trends from 2011 to 2016 in more detail, in regional centres, those aged 21-24 became increasingly more likely to be licensed and those aged 18-20 became less likely. Overall, those living in the Greater Melbourne area or regional centres were less likely to be licensed than those living in other rural areas.

## Conclusions

A pattern of delaying or forgoing licensure among young adults is persisting. This trend is more evident among females and those living in urbanised environments. It is important to continue to monitor trends in licensing rates among young adults in the future as licensing levels have significant implications for transport planning and road safety. The continuing trend for fewer young adults being licensed may mean reduced overall exposure to the road, which potentially could result in fewer crashes involving young drivers and their passengers.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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