

A Referral Assessment Tool for Assessing Older and Functionally Impaired Drivers

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study, commissioned by VicRoads, was to develop and evaluate a referral tool for use by GPs and other health professionals to identify functionally impaired drivers who may have an increased risk of crashing. Two hundred drivers aged 79 years and older were assessed by a GP researcher in New Zealand. The referral tool comprised a number of tasks and observational measures of functional abilities, including items from several existing tests such as the OPS scale, the GRIMPS test and standardised screening tests for dementia. Details were then obtained from the Land Transport Safety Authority on participants' on-road test performance and crash and infringement records. Participants' confidentiality was maintained and no data that would reflect on their licensing status were provided to the NZ authorities. Preliminary findings suggest that a number of test components are strongly related to driving performance. Further analyses will be conducted to explore the relationship between specific combinations of test components and driving performance as well as the sensitivity and specificity of the test. One limitation of the study is the reliance on on-road licence test outcomes as the main measure of driving performance because of the rare occurrence of crashes and infringements. The study was also constrained by the use of a GP researcher who did not have knowledge of participants' medical histories as would their family doctor. Older drivers who voluntarily choose to stop driving were not included. This study will lead to the development of a unique pre-screening test for use by health care professionals for referral of potentially at-risk older drivers to licensing authorities.