'An Information and Media Strategy for Older Road Users in the ACT'

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Abstract

The ACT Council on the Ageing commissioned the development of a seniors' information and media strategy, to provide a framework to deliver key road safety messages to a rapidly growing risk group and their support network, over the coming years.

The *Seniors Moving Safely* strategy report addresses the key ideas and messages to be disseminated; target audiences; effective message delivery; and availability and adaption of current ACT and interstate materials. It outlines both strategic and specific messages to be delivered and suggests effective means of communicating with older road users and their support networks.

A program of topics, information/media delivery options, timing and estimated costs is suggested for the first two years, with an evaluation prior to setting the next three year program.

The work sought to segment the target audience rather than treat it as monolithic; to create a program targeted to a single city or region rather than be multi-regional as most state or national programs must be; and to link the strategic and tactical levels of road safety program development.

The strategy seeks to create behavioural change not only in seniors, but in all road users, so the new practices and attitudes become part of ACT driving culture.

Keywords

Older Road Users, Information and Media Strategy

Introduction

Seniors Moving Safely is a framework for the delivery of key road safety messages to a rapidly growing risk group and their support network over the coming years. The framework takes the form of a strategy that identifies a structure for the messages, with the sequence of the messages maximizing their effectiveness, and the medium of their delivery striving to keep costs within bounds. The information and media strategy delivers key messages in a way that complements the ACT Department of Territory and Municipal Services road

safety media strategy (*contentgroup*, 2008) and the work of the ACT Council on the Ageing (COTA).

Rationale for the Strategy

The basis for investigating safety for older road users (those over 65) ultimately lies with the fact that the percentage of the Australian population aged over 65 is projected to more than double by 2032. At the 2006 census, 9.5% of the ACT's population was aged 65 or over; by 2032, the proportion is expected to be between 20 and 25%. (*ACT Population Projections 2002-2032 and beyond,* 2003; *ACT Population Projections: Snapshot to 2032*, 2003)

Drivers over 70 years of age do not show up as a particular problem in ACT crash statistics at present, with this age group being involved in fewer than 5% of all crash casualties in 2006 and 2007. (*Road Traffic Crashes in the ACT*, 2006 p.23 and 2007, p22)

Unfortunately, current public perceptions are very different. Many people have a negative story about older drivers – a relative, friend or an on-road encounter. It will thus be a significant challenge to get the community to accept that older drivers are not a major risk to other road users.

Yet there will be growing numbers of older road users as the 'baby boomers' age, with the concomitant need for a better understanding of driving behaviours, travel patterns and crash risk in order to develop effective strategies and programs to support continued mobility and safety (*ACT Road Safety Action Plan,* 2007, and 2008 p24). It is in anticipation of these issues that steps should be taken with a view to forestalling the emergence of serious problems.

Methodologically, *Seniors Moving Safely* sought to extend the rationale for an information and media strategy. It is unusual in Australia, that a strategic road safety information framework can be developed for a single city or region, whereas the ACT offered an opportunity to do this for a city of around 330,000 people.

This single-region focus provided an opportunity to link the high-level concept of addressing road safety for seniors with the detailed on-the-ground perspective of front-line workers. In linking the strategic and tactical levels, the study separated broad strategic road safety messages from single-aspect specific messages. It also identified sub-groups of the target audience for seniors' road safety, and in doing so, suggested a sequence of intervention strategies appropriate to each message and sub-group.

The authors believed at the outset that there would be value in extending road safety information methodology by working at this intermediate scale. The information and media strategy that has resulted, *Seniors Moving Safely*,

supports the worth of bridging any gaps between strategic and tactical approaches. However, evidence-based policy must address the question of the value to be gained from producing an information and media strategy at this intermediate level. The evaluation that is proposed at around the two-year mark of the proposed strategy will be vital in deciding whether to continue this work, or whether to return to more general campaigns to an undifferentiated audience of "older road users".

Key Ideas and Messages

This study does not attempt an exhaustive analysis of older road user issues in an information needs context. Rather it has used key reference material to identify important ideas and messages relevant to older road user safety in the ACT. Extensive studies by Bailey (2004) and COTA (2006) provide considerable information on older drivers' perceptions of their mobility and safety information needs and how they obtain such information. The COTA study's survey of nearly 1,500 ACT seniors is especially useful in this regard.

Mobility is very important in ensuring a healthy old age – both physically and mentally. (Buys and Carpenter, 2000) Information and programs to help older people maintain mobility provide not only safety benefits, but economic and social gains as well. Yet, health and road safety professionals frequently receive pleas for advice on the process of giving up driving and its often dramatic effects on personal mobility and self-image.

It is essential to emphasise that cessation of driving should be a gradual transition or process – not a sudden traumatic event. A key element is to get the issue of a mobility transition onto the agenda early – for both seniors and health professionals. An increasingly important issue will be how to reach the small proportion of older drivers who avoid assessment or do not self-regulate. These lapses are often due to lack of recognition of a problem due to illness (often early dementia) or fear of losing their license. (Anderson, 2006, p12).

Seniors Moving Safely identifies key audiences to receive critical transport safety messages. As well as older road users, these audiences include their families and friends, health professionals, the ACT public and media, and transport providers and policy makers.

There are two types of messages to be delivered. In developing key ideas to focus on, it is important to remember that people need to believe there is a problem and they are involved (requiring strategic messages), before they are willing to take action (using specific messages).

Critical transport safety messages are both strategic and specific in scope. Strategic messages include a focus on road safety, the community benefit of maintaining the mobility of seniors, transport options for seniors, lifestyle options

to facilitate mobility, the need to be supportive yet realistic with older community members, the need for health professionals to better recognise the role they play in advising seniors, and the need for transport professionals to more clearly consider the needs of seniors in their work. A key theme is that cessation of driving should ideally be a gradual transition.

Specific messages focus on the comparative performance of seniors relative to the rest of the population, the need for tolerance of seniors from time to time, safe car choice and improving driving and pedestrian skills.

Behavioural Change and Message Delivery Mechanisms

Education theory and past experience in health programs indicate that it is important to consider older drivers as self-directed learners and to base information provision on the views older drivers hold on their information needs.

Older drivers are a heterogeneous group, their views differing by age, gender, location and individuality. Accordingly, there are significant differences in such areas as self-regulatory behaviours, awareness of their sensory decline, and views on the timing of giving up driving. Research and past experience thus suggest that information materials for older drivers should involve a range of learning approaches and delivery mechanisms, in which self-determined information needs are a key part. Such diversity can also have a bonus in assisting drivers to challenge existing knowledge and values about their driving and lead to better self-regulatory behaviour (Bailey, 2004, p27-28).

Research by COTA shows that older road users want to be spoken to in a positive and encouraging, but not condescending, manner. The attitude and tone of the message is extremely important in terms of successfully delivering the message. It is proposed that the information needs to be "attractive, brief, have good impact and be offered 'little and often' " (COTA, 2006 p.171).

Seniors' importance ratings of information sources suggested a strong preference for informal learning opportunities, such as those afforded through mainstream media channels of print and television. Most of the drivers accessed information about driving through between three to eight different sources, which suggested that the dissemination of information to older drivers should occur through a variety of sources rather than via a 'one size fits all' approach (Bailey, 2004, p7).

This view is also reflected in the COTA study, which found the best ways of informally reaching seniors on road safety issues are information accompanying car registration and license renewals, the NRMA magazine, *The Canberra Times*, ABC TV and local radio (COTA, 2006, p151-157).

In terms of formal feedback, advice from health professionals was by far the highest rated, with over 80% of seniors expecting their GP to tell them when to stop driving, although optometrists, pharmacists and community nurses are also important players (Bailey, 2004, p58; COTA, 2006, p 161, 196-197).

The bottom line is that informal, ideally personalised, information, delivered by credible peers and medical professionals, is the best option to engage seniors and hopefully influence their behaviour. When communicating with health and transport professionals, the message and medium need to be tailored specifically for these groups.

Some key principles for delivering safety information to seniors are:
- Delivery through holistic 'healthy ageing' programs are probably more effective than specific driver education or safety publicity.
- Keep information simple and up to date.
- Material should ideally focus on a single outcome or message.
- To maximise effect, aims and benefits should be personally relevant, and ideally, take advantage of existing motivations to empower individual action.
- Introduce new ideas - people seldom change their behaviour in response to information they already have.
- Best-practice delivery mechanisms need to be tailored for specific local or group needs, so should be developed and introduced through seniors' networks and community health services, ideally at a local level.
- Road safety inputs should be carefully targeted in two areas:
  - Through lifestyle or community programs for more general behavioural or health outcomes.
  - Some specific programs for defined mobility or safety outcomes

(Anderson, 2006 p15-16; OECD 2001 p116-118).

ACT and Interstate Materials

The study examines ACT and interstate road safety publicity material with a view to ensuring that we do not 'reinvent the wheel'. In some important areas, materials exist that require only slight modification to make them suitable for use in the ACT. Examples are relatively generic topics, such as selecting a car to buy, driving and medication, or material aimed at an audience for whom localisation may not matter, such as professionals. However for some important information, localisation and even individual tailoring will be essential, such as information to assist with the decision about giving up driving.

A Five Year Program

The recommended older road users' road safety campaigns are based on the findings of earlier parts of the report. In essence, the five year program is proposed as a two-year initial program, followed by a review, then the remaining three years. A launch in conjunction with Seniors Week in March 2010 would be followed by a strategic or a specific campaign every four months.

A summary of the proposed specific activities for the first two years is as follows.

- Seniors Week 2010 will be used to launch our 'conversation' about seniors' mobility, using three themes – older drivers are safe; the mobility transition; and options for future mobility. Estimated cost $8,000
- July 2010 will focus on family and friends being supportive and realistic Estimated cost $3,000
- November 2010 will cover how to keep driving safely for as long as possible; and buying a safe and appropriate car. Estimated cost $3,000
- March 2011, prior to Easter, will promote tolerance on the road and safe interstate driving. Estimated cost $3,000
- July 2011 would be a more substantial event, to reinforce the 'mobility transition' message; doing without a car; and re-launching the *Livedrive* website. Estimated cost $7,000
- November 2011 can challenge seniors to assess their ability to still drive safely with a 'Have You Still Got It?' tagline. Estimated cost $6,000

There is also a need for ongoing 'information trickle' activities, which could occur in three ways
- A CSO TV ad on key themes   Estimated cost $20,000
- Distribution of fact sheets in seniors' annual rego renewals   Estimated cost $5,000
- Ads and articles in *'The Chronicle'* and seniors' press Estimated cost $5,000

In summary, the estimated cost for these nine specific and 'information trickle' activities is $60,000. This would include development and implementation of media products (such as ads or news releases); media events; project officer costs; and specialist media and road safety advice.

There is also a clear and essential need for overall program coordination, client liaison and ongoing support. This would be most effectively done by a part-time Project Coordinator, assisted at times by specialist expertise. This would cost up to $10,000 for two years. This person would also undertake much of the specific project work.

Finally, the proposed review of years one and two and development of a future program could cost around $20,000

Total suggested two-year cost $90,000

The balance of strategic versus specific campaigns changes over the five years, with the initial emphasis on strategic messages gradually giving way to more specific messages. Throughout, human interest case studies are proposed to communicate the real-life impact of mobility safety decisions.

Possible funding sources include the NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust, government agencies, community groups and the transport industry.

Evaluation

Effectiveness is critical to success. Are we doing the right thing? An outer ring shot at the right target is preferable to a bullseye at a wrong target. Measuring effectiveness of individual road safety initiatives is notoriously difficult, but ultimately success in road safety is determined by outcomes.

The clearest outcome is the safety of those using roads, so rates of road deaths, serious injuries and crashes are vital. These can be assessed reasonably easily, as data on road deaths and traffic crashes are already collected. One problem is that ACT numbers are relatively small, so determining a clear trend usually takes a number of years. A second problem concerns the difficulty of ascribing causes – is a reduced injury rate among or involving older road users caused mainly by our media campaign or by other 'confounding factors'? Despite the difficulties, the numbers, rates and causes of fatalities, injuries and traffic crashes of older road users should continue to be monitored as the first means of evaluation.

A useful second measure concerns the attitudes of older road users and our other target audiences. Typically, behavioural changes are accompanied by attitudinal changes in the same direction as the behavioural change. Fortunately, COTA undertook a 2006 survey of older road users, which provides a satisfactory benchmark from which to measure change. (COTA 2006) This needs analysis was specific to the ACT.

At the proposed two year review, we recommend a small survey of between 80 and 120 respondents to assess changes against these benchmarks. This survey should be stratified so that our target audiences is sampled and identified. The survey would elicit views on the level of understanding of each of the audiences we are attempting to reach and influence. It would also help to clarify what issues are important to them and help to apportion priority, and obtain a clearer picture of the degree of success we are having in shifting attitudes and behaviour.

A third measure of the program's effectiveness would be to evaluate the various campaigns and activities as they are being undertaken, with the program coordinator reporting on:
- Perceived recognition and impact on the target groups.
- Perceived success of the campaign by key organisations involved.
- An assessment of 'what worked, what didn't work and what could be improved'.
- Ideally, all media activity that can be reasonably obtained and monitored would also be recorded and submitted as part of the evaluation.

A fourth form of evaluation would be to assess the progress of campaigns and activities and whether or not they are being completed within the specified time and on budget. Although this is not a measure of impact of activity, it is a measure of the efficiency of the program, which is a key contributing variable to effectiveness.

Finally we recommend taking 'informal' soundings of the various stakeholders of the program. They will have a reasonable understanding of the feedback they are receiving and may be able to communicate some instances of positive behaviour that could be at least in part be attributed to the new approach to information and media. Such feedback can provide insight into causes and processes associated with both our target audiences and the broader community.

Conclusion

The *Seniors Moving Safely* information and media strategy seeks to create behavioural change not only in older road users themselves, but in all road users, so the practices and attitudes the strategy will put in place become part of ACT road use culture. The ultimate goal is to make the most appropriate levels of mobility available to older road users in ways that are as safe as possible. The anticipated increase in the proportion of older road users means that it makes good sense to address any emerging problems early, to allow time to ensure that we develop effective measures that meet the sensitivities of our target audiences.

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The report is available at www.roadsafetytrust.org.au/reports

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