



Vehicle safety for older drivers and passengers

– September 2024

FACTS:

- Every year, approximately 175 Australians aged 65 and older die in vehicle crashes, either as drivers or passengers, and more than 4,000 are hospitalised, with chest injuries being the most common.
- Around a 25% of older Australian drivers use some type of comfort or orthopaedic accessory on their vehicle seat.
- Seatbelts are one of the most effective interventions in automotive safety, although in older vehicle occupants, they are the most common source of chest injury.
- Older people are commonly observed with incorrect seatbelt positioning. Coupled with the use of add-on accessories such as cushions, this potentially puts them at further risk of injury.

PROJECT CYCLE:

2020–2024

PARTNERS:

The George Institute for Global Health

Neuroscience Research Australia

Occupational Therapy Australia

SUPPORTERS:

Ramaciotti Health Investment Grant

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

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BACKGROUND:

- Many older people face challenges in achieving proper seatbelt fit and comfort in vehicles, yet there are few programs or resources available to address these issues.
- The use of comfort accessories like cushions and pads is relatively common among older people, although research has shown that some of these accessories can have a detrimental effect on safety in the event of a crash.

AIM:

- To provide evidence-based guidance for occupational therapists, medical practitioners, physiotherapists, and road safety professionals who may be advising older people about travelling in vehicles.
- To provide older people with access to guidance about comfort and safety in vehicles.

METHODS:

- The guidelines were created by a group of experts from different fields, who reviewed existing evidence and reached an agreement using a structured process.
- Key recommendations on the challenges older people face in vehicles and practical advice for addressing them were developed and fine-tuned through a structured expert review process.
- The guidelines were reviewed by industry and Occupational Therapy Australia.

IMPACT

- The guideline document offers targeted advice for practitioners, including specific challenges and guidance across three broad areas:
 - Ensuring comfort and safety
 - Managing cognitive and physical challenges
 - Alleviating pain and discomfort
- A straightforward, informative flyer was also created to help older people understand how to travel safely and comfortably.

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