

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



**Department of Human Services
Division of Elderly Affairs**

RHODE ISLAND SENIOR BEAT

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IS IT SAFE FOR YOUR OLDER RELATIVE TO KEEP DRIVING?

CRANSTON--- You may have already seen some of the warning signs like a few more scratches and dents, accidents, confusion about routes to stores they have been shopping at for years, or maybe they have gotten a few traffic tickets lately. There is never an easy time to “have the talk” with your older relative about giving up their driver’s license or their car. But the conversation may just save their lives and the lives of others.

For seniors, the decision to stop driving is difficult. The transition represents a certain loss of mobility and independence. And while getting older is not the sole reason for giving up driving, aging may contribute to decreased vision or hearing, slower reflexes and reaction times, and less flexibility. Seniors may also be taking medications for chronic conditions. Any one of these factors can affect their driving ability.

In some cases, seniors may alter their driving habits, such as no longer driving on the highway or at night, or driving shorter distances. While this may work some seniors, others may be faced with the tough decision of relinquishing their driver’s license and getting rid of their cars.

The conversation needs to be approached calmly and logically, and with the full knowledge that the senior’s safety is at risk if they continue to drive. It might be a good idea to point out the benefits of not driving. They will be saving money on gas, maintenance and insurance. Talk about the alternatives, such as public transportation or community buses.

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The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) RIde program provides transportation services to those 60 and older, and adults with disabilities under 60 who meet certain criteria. Transportation is generally available weekdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for doctors' appointments, therapy, medical tests, adult day care, kidney dialysis, cancer treatments, and senior center/community meal site lunches. There is a \$2 one-way fee per ride. Adult day service clients and persons on Medical Assistance are not charged fees. Reservations should be made at least seven business days in advance of any appointment. RIde transportation reservations can be made Monday through Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by calling 461-9760, or 1-800-479-6902.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Rhode Islanders of any age who have a disability may be eligible for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit Services. The program provides transportation service if disability(s) prevents the individual from using regular RIPTA bus service. Service is provided along existing RIPTA routes at a fare of \$4 per each one-way trip. For more information, call 461-9670, or go to www.ripta.com. The TTY number is 711 (Relay RI).

Some cities and towns offer senior transportation for non-medical destinations, such as the grocery store, or other locations. Call your local senior center.

When talking to an older relative about the issues of driving, be respectful, but firm. For many people, driving is not only the key to independence, but also a trigger for fond memories. Realize that when your older relative's driving privileges come to an end, they may exhibit some signs of depression or anxiety. Make a point of telling them that they still need to stay connected to family and friends. Express your concerns, but don't be intimidated.

Give specific reasons for your concern. Note any accidents, recent car damage, difficulties in turning their head, traffic violations, or physical changes. If you need it, get help and support from other family members such as siblings, or close friends. You may want to include recommendations from professionals such as doctors or driving instructors. Stress your concern for their safety.

In some cases, the older relative may refuse to give up their driver's license or their car, despite the fact that it's probably in their best interest. You can get more information about filing reports on driver fitness from the Rhode Island Division of Motor Vehicles, Medical Advisory Board at 462-4368.

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The Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of programs and services for Rhode Islanders ages 60 and older and for adults with disabilities. Questions or requests for additional information on the issues of growing older in Rhode Island should be directed to: Larry Grimaldi, Rhode Island Senior Beat, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs, 74 West Road, Cranston, RI 02920 or faxed to 462-0503. Information may also be requested via e-mail at lgrimaldi@dea.ri.gov.

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