

Driving

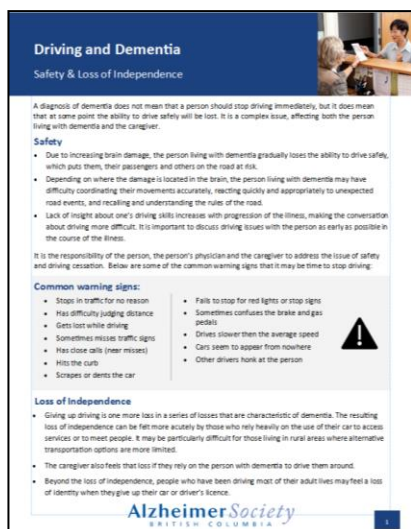
Before the Information Sharing

Goals

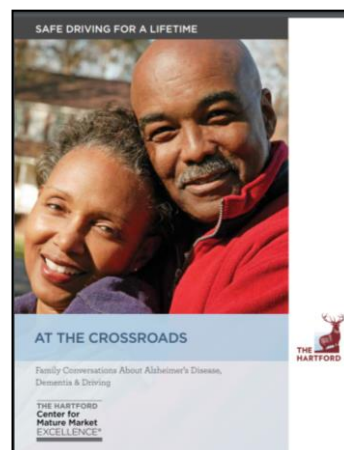
- To talk about what makes giving up driving such a difficult issue.
- To discuss the issues of safety and driving: safety for the person living with dementia, for passengers in the car and for others on the road.
- To share strategies for discussing driving cessation with the person living with dementia.
- To explore alternatives to driving.

Handouts

Driving and Dementia



Optional You may refer group members to an [online toolkit and information booklet](#) for driving cessation.



Please Note

Driving is a complex topic; you may want to introduce this topic in your group more than once.

Driving

Information Sharing with the Group

Questions to ask the Group

Questions around safety and when to stop driving:

- Does the person you are caring for still drive?
- How will you know when it's time for your family member to stop driving?
- For those whose person has already stopped, what alerted you to the fact that driving had become a problem?
 - Did the driving cessation happen gradually or all at once?
 - What led them to stop driving?

Questions around how to encourage the person to stop driving:

- What strategies did you use to talk to the person about their driving?
- Who was the best person to talk to the person living with dementia about their driving?
- What was the most difficult for the person living with dementia when talking about driving cessation?
- What strategies have you used to prevent the person from using the car?

Questions around finding alternatives to driving:

- What alternative modes of transportation have you used?
- How is the person with dementia adapting to not using the car?
- How are *you* adapting to not having access to the car? (If the person living with dementia was the sole driver of the family.)

Facilitator's notes

The following points may come up naturally in the course of the discussion, or you may want to refer to them to keep the discussion going, provide information or correct misinformation.

Why giving up driving is such a difficult issue

- Giving up driving is one more loss in a series of losses that are characteristic of dementia.
- Beyond the loss of independence, people who have been driving most of their adult life may feel a loss of identity when they give up their car, or their driver's licence.
- For many men, the car is a symbol closely connected to their manhood, so losing the use of their car can be especially difficult.
- As a caregiver, if you rely on the person living with dementia to drive you around, you may also feel a loss of independence.

Driving and safety

- A diagnosis of dementia does not necessarily imply that the person should have their driving licence removed immediately. However, the diagnosis does mean that at some point, the person will be unable to drive safely.
- Due to increasing brain damage, the person living with dementia gradually loses the ability to drive safely, which puts them, their passengers and others on the road at risk.
- Depending on where the damage is located in the brain, the person living with dementia may have difficulty coordinating their movements accurately, reacting quickly and appropriately to unexpected road events, and recalling and understanding the rules of the road.
- Lack of insight about one's driving skills increases with progression of the illness, making the conversation about driving more difficult. It is important to discuss driving issues with the person as early as possible in the course of the illness.
- It is the responsibility of the person, the person's physician and the caregiver to address the issue of safety and driving cessation. Some of the **common warning signs** that it may be time to stop driving include:
 - Stops in traffic for no reason
 - Has difficulty judging distance
 - Gets lost while driving
 - Sometimes misses traffic signs
 - Has close calls (near misses)
 - Hits the curb
 - Scrapes or dents the car
 - Fails to stop for red lights or stop signs
 - Sometimes confuses the brake and gas pedals
 - Drives slower than the average speed
 - Cars seem to appear from nowhere
 - Other drivers honk at the person
 - Occasionally drifts into other lanes

Determining Driver Fitness in B.C.

- Receiving a diagnosis of dementia does not mean that the person will automatically lose his/her license. However, there will come a time when driving will no longer be safe.
- Every psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner and nurse practitioner has the responsibility to report patients who have a medical condition that makes it dangerous for them to drive to RoadSafetyBC.

Driving Assessments

- The Driver's Medical Examination Report (DMER) is the primary tool used to assess the effects of a medical condition on the person's fitness to drive. An Enhanced Road Assessment (ERA) may also be conducted if RoadSafetyBC determines that more information or assessment is required to determine driver fitness.
- The ERA is conducted by ICBC on behalf of RoadSafetyBC. The assessment is completed in a vehicle the driver provides. It is designed to evaluate driving skills and behaviour in real-world driving situations that require increased cognitive demand.
- If RoadSafetyBC determines a driver is not fit to drive, a letter is sent to the driver to let them know of the decision to revoke their driver's license.
- If the person is found fit to drive, he/she will not receive a notice from RoadSafetyBC. He/she may also have their driving capability reassessed in intervals determined on a case-by-case basis. A yearly reassessment is typically recommended for drivers with a progressive cognitive impairment.

Appealing a decision

- If someone disagrees with the final assessment by RoadSafetyBC, they can write to the RoadSafetyBC office to request the decision be reconsidered.
- Anyone can send a written report to RoadSafetyBC regarding concerns about a driver's fitness. Reports must be in writing, give supporting reasons for the concerns, and be from a person who has first-hand knowledge for the concerns.

Email: RoadSafetyBC@gov.bc.ca **Toll-free phone:** 1-855-387-7747

Mail: RoadSafetyBC PO Box 9254, Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC V8W 9J2

Finding alternatives to driving

- Using alternative modes of transportation can make giving up driving less of a loss of independence.
- The conversation with the person with dementia might go more smoothly if you can present alternate ways of getting around instead of using the car. Some alternatives include:
 - Encourage the use of other modes of transportation prior to the cessation of driving in order encourage comfort with alternatives to driving.
 - Organize a driving pool of relatives and friends.

- Have TaxiSaver coupons on hand to use on short notice.
- Find reasons to take public transportation. For example, suggest a change of pace from driving or mention avoiding traffic and the cost of parking.
- Consider having groceries and other purchases delivered to the home.
- By not using the car, people can often cover the expenses associated with using alternative modes of transportation.

COST OF DRIVING	
Monthly vehicle payment	Yearly car maintenance
Monthly gas and oil costs	Registration / license costs
Monthly parking costs	Accident costs this year
Auto insurance	Vehicle value if it is sold

Suggestions to prevent the use of the car

- Gently mention that you prefer to drive because it's dark out or there is a lot of traffic.
- It may be necessary to remind the person of their physician's recommendation not to drive, or if their license has been revoked.
- Take the car keys from the person.
- Substitute the car keys with other keys, to let the person hang on to their keys if this is important to them.
- Make the car non-operational (install a kill switch, disconnect the sparkplugs, remove distributor cap, disconnect the battery). If the person is a member of BCAA make sure that BCAA is informed as they may receive phone calls asking for assistance to start the car. These type of measures should be used as a last resort.
- Sell the car.

Strategies for discussing driving

Starting the conversation. Wherever possible, introduce the topic of driving early in the illness when the person has the most insight.

- Be prepared to have several conversations. This gives time for the person to get used to the idea of driving cessation and process some of the losses associated with it.
- In most cases, it is easier for the person if they make the decision to stop driving for themselves, rather than have someone else make that decision against their will.
- Try to discuss the topic in a way that will encourage the person to come to their own conclusions regarding driving cessation.
- Keep in mind the person's feelings and possible threat to their self-esteem and independence.
- Acknowledge their feelings and allow time to talk to them.

Consider family and friends – Who is the best person to initiate the discussion?

The person with dementia might be more receptive to talking about driving with someone else, perhaps a family friend or another family member. Some men might prefer talking to other men about the issue.

Talk to the family physician. Physicians play an important role in the driver fitness assessment process. Talk to the family physician ahead of time about your concerns. Ask the person's doctor to write "Do not drive" on a prescription pad.

Make safety a priority.

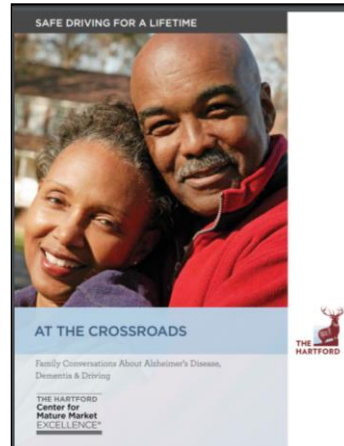
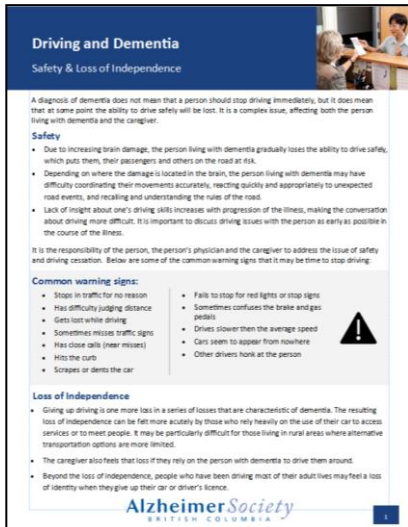
- Make their safety, passengers' safety and the safety of others on the road the focus of the discussion. Things to consider when having the conversation:
- Take responsibility for your own feelings and use "I" statements instead of "you" statements in your conversation. For example, *"I am worried about your safety when you are driving."*
- Help the person recognize that their own assessment of their driving ability might be impaired by the illness. Share your observations. Suggest using others' input in order to provide a more complete picture of the situation.
- Recognize the person's past good driving record, but once this is done, refocus the discussion to how dementia can effect their driving abilities.
- Acknowledge that even the best of drivers will be affected negatively by a medical condition. Focus on the illness, not on their lack of skills.
- Stay calm, respectful and positive. Do not use an accusatory tone, since this may incite a defensive attitude.

Handouts

Distribute handout and review the main points with support group members.

Driving and Dementia

Optional You may refer group members to an [online toolkit and information booklet](#) for driving cessation.



In Conclusion

- Driving cessation is a complex issue that has practical and emotional implications for the person with dementia.
- Whenever possible, introduce the topic of driving early in the illness and plan for driving cessation.
- The safety of the person with dementia, of the passengers in the car and of others on the road should not be compromised.
- Trust your 'gut feelings'; if you feel uneasy with the person driving, it is probably time for the person to stop driving.
- Work with the person's physician to begin the driver fitness assessment process.
- Use alternative modes of transportation, take advantage of community driving programs where possible, and organize a driver pool, if needed.