

AAA study: Seniors need more talk about driving safely

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NEW BRITAIN — Ann, 93, says she doesn't feel safe driving anymore, but her license has been renewed for identification purposes.

"I could go out and jump in a car and start driving," said Ann, a city resident who chose not to give her last name. "Legally, I've got a driver's license. They should be more careful about who they are screening."

AAA released a statement Thursday on a study conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety indicating that physicians and relatives are not talking enough with seniors about driving safely.

According to AAA, in 2016, there were 125 serious car accidents in Connecticut in which seniors were involved. Thirty-five of those crashes were fatal.

The research revealed that 83 percent of senior drivers report never having talked to family members or physicians about driving. AAA said families must start talking about the subject before it becomes a problem.

"The right time to stop driving varies for everyone," Dr. David Yang, executive director of the



Karla Santos | Staff

Lois Engblon, 89, left, of Newington. Shirley Hiser, 90, of New Britain, are still driving, but both realize that seniors should know when to stop.

AAA Foundation of Traffic Safety, said. "This research shows that older drivers can be hesitant to initiate conversations about their driving capabilities, so it is important that families encourage them to talk early and often about their future behind the wheel. With early discussion and proper planning, elderly drivers may extend their time on the road."

The 17 percent of seniors who

report having driving conversations do it for reasons such as health issues, driving infractions, crashes and general driving safety concerns.

Shirley Hiser, 90, of New

Britain, is still a driver. She took a driving safety course at the New Britain Senior Center through AARP.

"I learned a lot of things from it," Hiser said.

One of the things she was reminded of in the course was to keep her distance from other cars, which she is now doing.

"I try to keep my distance away, I don't get too close because if you have to stop all of a sudden, you are going to hit them if you are that close," Hiser said.

She added that she feels all seniors should take the course, and should stop driving when they feel that they are not safe behind the wheel.

"You slow down when you get older and you need to have fast actions when you are driving," Hiser said.

Hiser added that the state should have a separate identification for seniors who can't drive.

Lois Engblon, 89, of Newington, said that there are seniors who drive better than

young people.

"We are more cautious than they are. They are always in a hurry, and they love to tailgate." Engblon said. "I have been at a stop sign when I've had drivers just go around me because they can't wait to get through. I'm still driving because I feel confident that I'm able to drive. If I didn't, I would not be driving."

AAA's advice is for family and physicians to start the conversation of driving safety with seniors early and to let them play an active role in creating a plan for their driving retirement.

"The best time to initiate this sensitive discussion is long before there's a problem," Amy Parmenter, spokeswoman for AAA in Greater Hartford, said. "Planning for personal mobility to maximize independence is a win-win for older drivers, their families and everyone with whom they share the road."

To learn more about AAA's safety driving research visit www.AAA.com/AAANews.

