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Older walkers being killed and injured by bad driving

New research analysing official crash statistics finds that senior pedestrians injured or killed in crashes are often hit by drivers who were legally required to give way to them.

Victoria Walks, which commissioned the research, is calling for more policing of give way laws, driver focused pedestrian road safety campaigns and better road design that protects seniors when they are walking.

People aged 65 and over represent 14.6% of the population yet account for 39% of pedestrian fatalities.

The report *Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians* suggests that at unsignalised intersections, motorists should have given way in at least 42% of crashes involving older pedestrians. At signalised intersections, motorists were required to give way in at least 72% of crashes.

“Older pedestrians are not risk takers” said Dr Ben Rossiter, Executive Officer of Victoria Walks. “It would appear that they are hit by drivers who don’t know road rules or ignore them, don’t see seniors or simply expect them to get out of the way, and this is absolutely appalling.”

Vehicles colliding with pedestrians on footpaths, footpath driveways or at entrances to car parks, comprise at least 16 per cent of all older pedestrian crashes, and 23 per cent for those 85 and older.

“It is lamentable that so many of our most vulnerable pedestrians are hit on footpaths, precisely where they should be the most safe”, said Dr Rossiter. “As a community we should be ashamed.”

The report analysed more than a thousand crashes in Victoria between 2008 and 2013 affecting pedestrians aged 65 years or older. The research found that older pedestrians experience an average of 17 fatalities, 147 serious injuries and 114 other injuries in Victoria each year, with an estimated economic cost of \$110 million per annum (in 2012 dollar values).

Slater and Gordon Victorian Motor Vehicle Accident Practice Group Leader Joanne Panagakis commented:

“We have assisted hundreds of injured elderly pedestrians with their legal claims over many years and have also represented the families of older pedestrians who have tragically died on our roads. As such, we have seen first-hand the devastating effect that road accidents have on our older clients and their families, both physically and psychologically.”

The report provides detailed recommendations for road design to improve safety for older pedestrians. “Instead of telling older people to ‘take care’ when they are walking, we need to design streets that take care of them”, Dr Rossiter said. “Seniors need things like slower urban traffic speeds, more time to cross at lights and non-slip walking surfaces.”

“The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to almost triple in the next 40 years”, Dr Rossiter said. “It is imperative we do something now, or it will mean more death and injuries in the future.”

Victoria Walks is funded by VicHealth.

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Contacts and further information overleaf

NOTE TO EDITORS: Older people who have been struck by a vehicle and injured while walking are available for interview via Slater & Gordon.

Further comment and contacts:

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The report *Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians* can be accessed at www.victoriawalks.org.au/research/

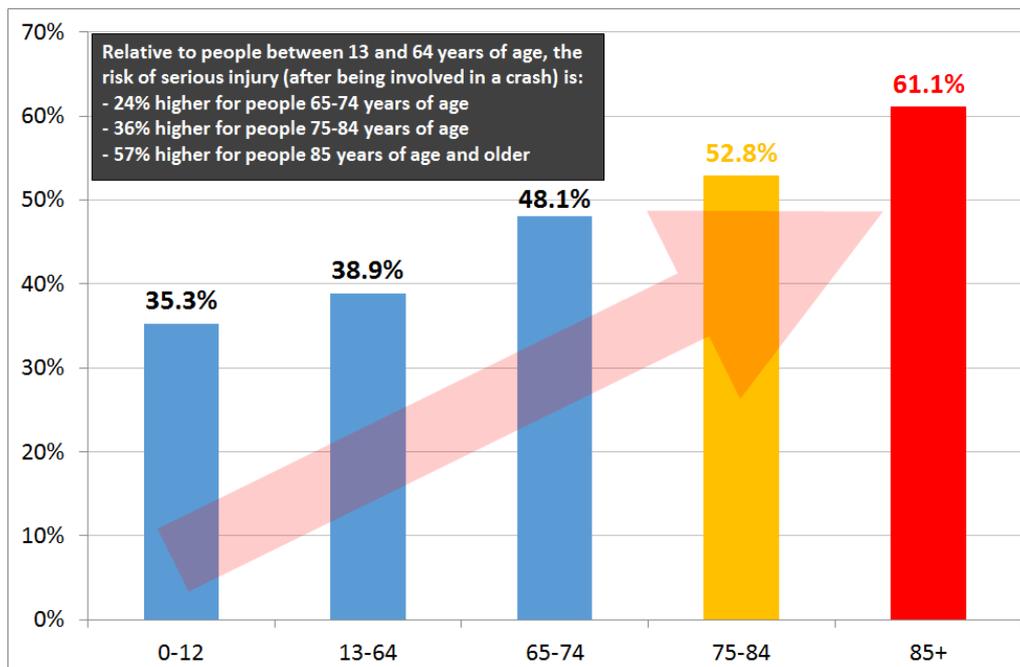
Additional facts from the report

The report includes a detailed review of the crash information for older pedestrians contained in the VicRoads CrashStats database. This analysis included review of the descriptions and diagrams in police reports for 1,149 older pedestrian crashes recorded in Victoria in the five year period between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2013.

The crash analysis found that, in Victoria, people aged 65 and over represent 14.6% of the population yet accounted for 39% of pedestrian fatalities. People between 65 and 74 years of age represent 8% of the population and 11% of pedestrian fatalities, while those between 75 and 84 represent 5% of the population and 14% of pedestrian fatalities.

When involved in a crash with a motor vehicle, the fatality rate for those 85 years of age and older is over five times higher than for those aged 64 years or less. This higher fatality rate is reflected in the proportion of pedestrians who are killed – people 85 years of age or older represent only 2% of the population in Victoria (and 3.3% of pedestrian crashes), but are 13% of pedestrian deaths.

Serious injury data shows similar trends, as illustrated below:



Proportion of Crashes Resulting in Serious Injuries by Age

The most common crash scenario for older pedestrians is being hit by a motorist turning right as they exit an intersection – 18% of all crashes.

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