

AAMI



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Young Drivers Index

One-quarter of young men have driven after taking recreational drugs

Widespread support for random drug-testing of drivers

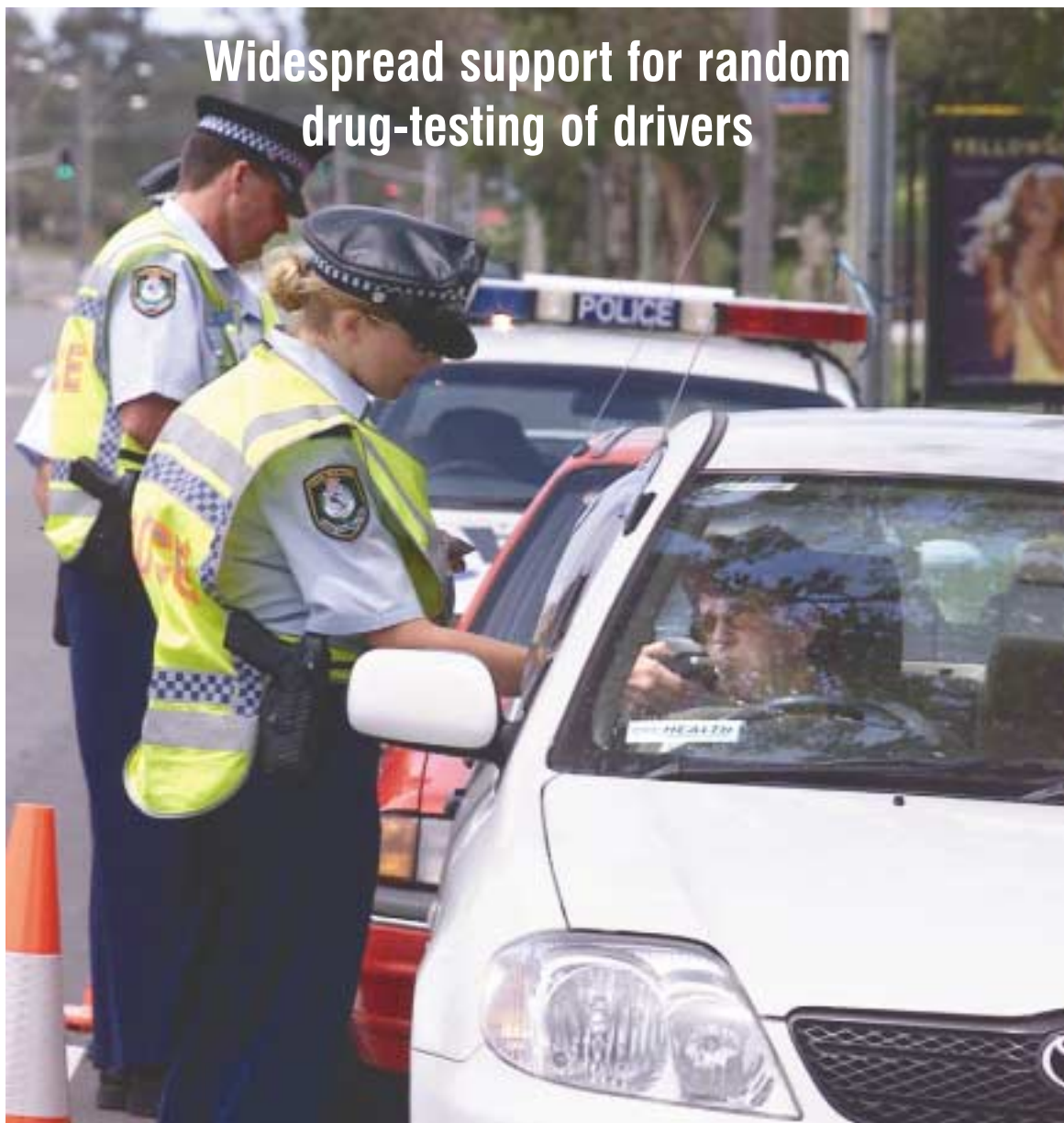


Photo: Troy Bendelich

Young drivers are twice as likely as older drivers to experience physical assault on the road



Young Drivers Index



Mixing drugs and driving

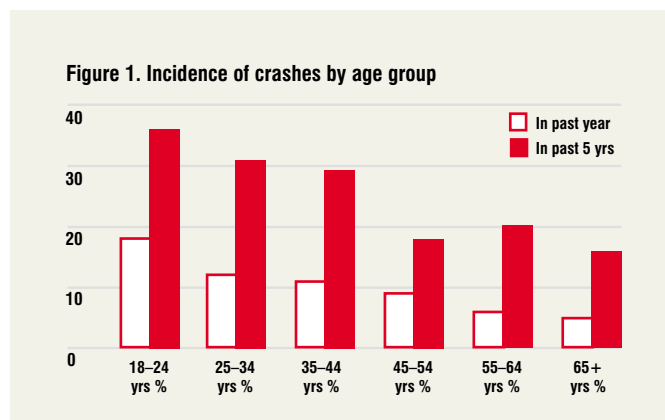
Young drivers are more likely to admit to driving when under the influence of recreational drugs (18 per cent compared with 10 per cent of the total population), however, young men are far more likely than young women to engage in this behaviour. In fact, women in the

18–24 age group are less likely than women aged 25–54 to admit to having done this. Young men, however, top the statistics — they are three times as likely as young women to drive under the influence of drugs (25 per cent compared with 8 per cent of women).

Young drivers also seem to be mindful that driving after taking recreational drugs is risky. Just four per cent think drugs don't 'really affect your driving ability', which compares favourably to the 25–34-year-olds, 7 per cent of whom believed drugs didn't pose a threat to their driving ability.

Perhaps partly because recreational drug use is more prevalent among their peers, young drivers are as likely as older drivers to agree that 'recreational drugs pose a much greater danger on our roads than prescription drugs.' However, they are far more likely to believe that driving after taking recreational drugs is safer than driving after drinking (16 per cent compared with 7 per cent of drivers over 25).

Almost universal support was identified for random



Key findings

DRUG-DRIVERS: one-quarter of young men (25 per cent) have driven after taking recreational drugs.

MEDICINAL DRUGS ALSO AN ISSUE: one-quarter of all drivers have driven after taking medicinal drugs that carried a no-driving warning.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE BAN: most drivers (80 per cent) believe young drivers should be banned from driving high-performance vehicles.

IMPATIENT: three-quarters of motorists (73 per cent) think that young drivers are 'too impatient, drive too fast and are rude'.

MORE TRAINING: most motorists (93 per cent) believe it should be compulsory for all young drivers to complete a 'safe driving course'.

LESS CONCERNED ABOUT DRUG-DRIVING: twice as many young drivers as older drivers believe that driving after taking recreational drugs is safer than driving after drinking (16 per cent compared with 7 per cent).

PHYSICAL ASSAULT: young drivers are at least twice as likely as older drivers to experience physical assault on the road.

Propensity to speed: drivers up to the age of 34 are more likely to exceed the speed limit than older drivers.

This is the fourth annual AAMI Young Drivers Index. It is based on:

- Analysis of car accident insurance claims lodged by AAMI policyholders in all States and Territories except Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
- A survey conducted by Sweeney Research, which included telephone interviews with 1880 licensed drivers of all ages across these same States and Territories.

The AAMI Young Drivers Index is published to inform and educate young drivers about unsafe driving behaviours.

Note: the term 'young drivers' relates to those aged 18–24 years.

drug testing of drivers (90 per cent overall agreed, compared with 85 per cent among 18–24-year-olds).

Driving under the influence of drugs was most prevalent in South Australia (15 per cent) and Queensland (14 per cent) and the lowest in Tasmania (7 per cent).

Medicinal drugs also an issue

Research shows that medicinal drugs pose a similar risk to driving ability as recreational drugs, perhaps partly because of the belief that they are safe and their use is so widespread.

“Drugs have been identified in post-mortem examinations of a significant number of drivers judged to be culpable in crashes. At this stage it appears that prescription and illegal drugs are represented about equally.”*

One-quarter of all drivers say they have driven after taking medicinal drugs even though the label warned them against doing so. People aged 25–54 years are most likely to do so, with younger drivers less likely.

Drug-drivers irresponsible in more ways than one

Drivers who say they have driven after using recreational drugs are more likely to exhibit other ‘careless’ attitudes when driving.

They are far more likely to drive when they are over the .05 blood alcohol limit (71 per cent compared to 33 per cent of non-drug-drivers); are more likely to run a red light if no other cars are coming (58 per cent compared with 32 per cent); and are more likely to drive after taking medicinal drugs that may affect their driving (48 per cent compared with 22 per cent). They are also more likely to have used their mobile phone without a hands-free kit (69 per cent compared with 48 per cent), as well as send or read text messages while driving (44 per cent compared with 21 per cent).

Drink-driving message gets through to youth

Perhaps thanks to sustained education programs and strong enforcement, young men and women are now less likely than older drivers to admit to driving while ‘probably over the .05 blood alcohol limit’. Drivers aged 45–54 are most likely to have done so.

Older driver stereotype unfounded

Despite a lower incidence of accidents, older drivers continue to be criticised, particularly by young drivers.

YOUNG DRIVERS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO ‘OFTEN USE THEIR MOBILE PHONES WHILE DRIVING WITHOUT A HANDS-FREE KIT’.

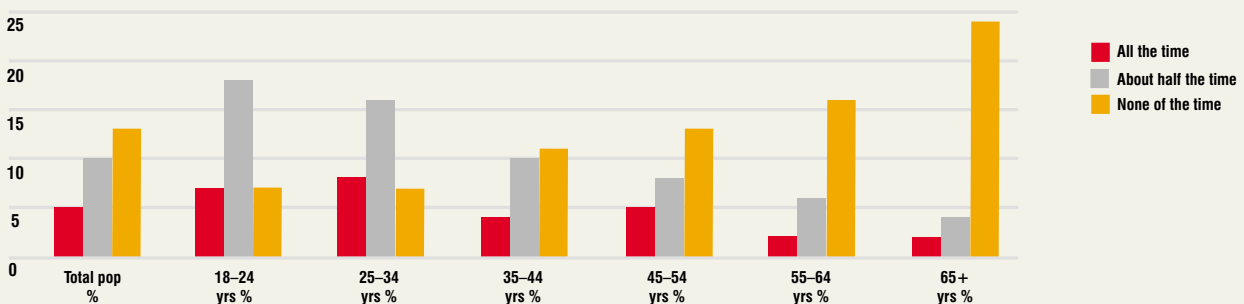
Young men were the most critical, with two-thirds (65 per cent) agreeing that ‘older drivers are worse drivers due to failing eye sight and loss of confidence’. Half of young women (55 per cent) also agreed with this. However, AAMI’s figures do not support this belief. As figure one shows, one in ten drivers (10 per cent) has experienced an accident in the last year — and this number was higher among young drivers. Almost twice as many 18–24-year-olds (18 per cent) have experienced a car accident in the last year.

Support for more restrictions

Eight in ten drivers (80 per cent) believe drivers up to the age of 25, not just P-plates, should be banned from driving high-performance vehicles. Support for this measure was significantly lower among young drivers, although more than half of young drivers (58 per cent) also agree that restrictions on under-25s are necessary. Less than half of drivers (45 per cent) believe that young drivers should be restricted from driving at times when fatalities are most likely to occur (midnight–3 am). Not surprisingly, less than one-quarter of young drivers (24 per cent) think this would be a positive change. Half of all



Figure 2. How often do you speed



*www.legalonline.vic.gov.au

drivers (49 per cent) believe young drivers should not be able to carry more than two passengers in their car, yet only 18 per cent of young drivers agree.

Mixed messages on speeding

Young drivers are almost twice as likely as other age groups to agree that they 'sometimes speed to get to work or home sooner'. Two-thirds of young drivers (62 per cent) compared with 34 per cent of the total population agree with this statement. However, three-quarters of young drivers (73 per cent) agree that lower speed limits in city areas have influenced them to drive slower – a figure that is consistent across all age groups.

Only seven per cent of young drivers say they never exceed the speed limit – a figure that remains consistent among 25–34-year-olds and rises to 24 per cent among people aged 65 and older. As figure two shows, the propensity to speed decreases steadily after the age of thirty-four.

Risk-taking

Young men are the most likely to say they sometimes have more people in their vehicle than there are seatbelts. One in ten (11 per cent) admitted to this, compared with eight per cent of young women.

Young drivers are also more likely to agree that they would keep driving when they are tired, even though they know they should not. Two-thirds of young women (65 per cent) and 56 per cent of young men agreed.

Distractions greater for young drivers

Losing concentration while changing a CD, tape or the radio when driving is most common among young drivers. Sixty-one per cent of young drivers say they have done this, compared with 45 per cent of the total population.

Young drivers are twice as likely to 'often use their mobile phones while driving without a

hands-free kit'. Thirty-seven per cent of young drivers admitted to this, compared with 18 per cent of the total population. Young drivers are also more likely to send or read a text while driving. Two-thirds of young women (69 per cent) and 57 per cent of young men have done so, compared with one-quarter (24 per cent) of the total population.

Anti-social driving behaviour

Although there was little overall difference in the experience of anti-social driving behaviour between the age groups, drivers under the age of 25 were more likely than other drivers to be:

- tailgated;
- physically assaulted; and
- followed.

In fact, young drivers were at least twice as likely as other drivers to be physically assaulted (10 per cent compared with 4 per cent of over-25s).

There are also some differences in the kinds of anti-social driving behaviour young drivers say they exhibit. Young drivers are far more likely to use rude gestures when angry with other motorists (29 per cent compared with 18 per cent). They are also more likely to be verbally abusive and tailgate people. Women, however, are far less likely than men to be verbally abusive, tailgate or use rude gestures when angry with other drivers.

Of the young drivers who say they have subjected another motorist to 'road rage', 14 per cent say they did so because the person was driving too slowly – this compares with seven per cent of all drivers nationally.

YOUNG DRIVERS ARE ALMOST TWICE AS LIKELY AS OTHER AGE GROUPS TO AGREE THAT THEY 'SOMETIMES SPEED TO GET TO WORK OR HOME SOONER'.

Young drivers readily admit to being impatient. One-quarter (25 per cent) said they were impatient drivers, which is ten percentage points higher than the total population.

More training needed

There is almost universal support for compulsory 'safe driving' courses for young drivers. Young men favour the idea least, although only marginally — 88 per cent agree it is a good idea, while more than 90 per cent in all other age groups agree it would be a good initiative.

Youth self-critical

Eight in 10 motorists (79 per cent) believe 'young drivers always think they're better than anyone else'. Three-quarters of drivers (73 per cent) think that young drivers are 'too impatient, drive too fast and are rude', however, young drivers themselves are critical of their age group on the road – 72 per cent say other young drivers are too impatient, drive too fast and are rude.

Young drivers also seem to be less confident about their driving ability than other age groups. The 18–24 age group are least likely to agree with the statement, 'I would think I'm a better driver than most others on the road' (41 per cent compared with 48 per cent of total population).

Younger drivers' accidents more costly

AAMI's claim data shows that the average cost per accident decreases with driver age. The lowest average cost per claim during 2003–2004 was incurred by drivers aged 51 and older.

AAMI has provided a young driver education program for more than 20 years. The *AAMI Skilled Drivers* program is designed to educate participants about safe and responsible driving behaviour. It is available free of charge to licensed drivers up to the age of 25 who hold an AAMI comprehensive car insurance policy in their own or a parent's name. The course is taught by expert trainers from the Driver Education Centre of Australia. Other young drivers can undertake the course for \$165. **For more information call 13 22 44.**

Alcohol and marijuana put young drivers on a collision course

BY PROFESSOR NICK CROFTS, THE DIRECTOR OF TURNING POINT ALCOHOL AND DRUG CENTRE



It is a typical Saturday night. A group of young people at a party are out for a good time. The person who drove them there has had a few drinks but is under the .05 blood alcohol limit. The driver is normally responsible and wants to make sure he gets everyone home safe, including himself.

At the party, a few marijuana joints are passed around and before he knows it, the driver is stoned. He has a few glasses of alcohol and his inhibitions begin to fade even further. Rather than walk or take a taxi, the group piles into the car.

Without realising it, the driver's perception of the risk of the dangers of driving is impaired because of the combination of marijuana and alcohol. The chances of the young driver being involved in a serious accident on the night – even a fatal one – are very real.

Based on the findings of the *AAMI Young Drivers Index*, Australian drivers who say they have driven after using recreational drugs are more likely to exhibit other “careless” attitudes towards driving. In fact, the survey shows that 58 per cent are more likely to run a red light if no other cars are coming, and 71 per cent would drive when they are over the .05 blood alcohol limit.

These findings are supported

by other scientific research. The message that all drivers need to embrace is clear: if you get in a car after drinking alcohol and taking drugs like marijuana, the chance of being involved in a fatal accident is multiplied. You become, effectively, an accident waiting to happen.

The medical facts are stark: the more alcohol or cannabis that is consumed, the more physically impaired a person will become. Interestingly though, both drugs have opposite effects on motorists, with alcohol decreasing their perception of risk, and cannabis heightening it.

I heard a story a few years ago about a young woman driver that had been stopped by police in Geelong Road, Melbourne. The motorist told the officer she was not speeding and wanted to know why she had been stopped. The officer explained to her that she was travelling at

20 kmph, creating a dangerous hazard for other vehicles on the road.

Police believed she was affected by cannabis and all of her behavioral indicators confirmed this. If the same driver had consumed alcohol as well, it is highly likely she could have been booked for speeding, or other unsafe and illegal road behavior.

Alcohol and marijuana affect drivers in different ways, but it is the combination of the two that is highly dangerous, and potentially deadly. As a result, we need to educate young people about the reality that they are likely to encounter drugs and alcohol in every day life, and that there will be occasions when they might be confronted with situations where the two are combined with driving.

This is where driver education programs are so important, because they help young people develop constructive strategies. And there is no doubt that changing attitudes through public education programs and driver training will save lives in the long run. Every dollar spent on pre-driver education and training will produce huge financial returns in terms of the billions spent reducing the road toll annually.

ALCOHOL AND MARIJUANA AFFECT DRIVERS IN DIFFERENT WAYS, BUT IT IS THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO THAT IS HIGHLY DANGEROUS, AND POTENTIALLY DEADLY.



Photo: Steve Morenos

