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## **Fitness to drive**

Thematic File Road Safety N°14



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## Summary

Drivers suffering from one or more medical conditions may also have impaired visual, cognitive and/or motor functions that interfere with their ability to drive. Faced with an ageing population and the high prevalence of medical conditions, it is important for us to identify drivers who are at risk of having accidents, while at the same time looking for solutions that will help maintain their mobility and keep them independent for as long as possible.

The question of the driving ability of individuals suffering from one or more medical conditions is at the heart of the concerns of doctors, the individuals themselves and their families, as well as driving licence policies and the licence-issuing authorities. From a legislative point of view, the European Union and the authorities that issue driving licences have imposed certain conditions on the renewal of driving licences and even obtaining them in the first place for people who have specific medical conditions. But despite everything, the procedures used to evaluate a person's ability to drive vary from country to country. In Belgium, to be able to drive a motor vehicle, the driver needs not only to be in possession of a driving licence, but also be capable of driving safely. This means that he or she must be physically and mentally able to drive in traffic in complete safety. Belgian regulations on driving ability will be detailed in this report. Evidence from the literature notes that the number of fatal road accidents is higher for individuals suffering from problems associated with alcohol or sleeping disorders.

Drivers may be considered as being at risk of having accidents based on detailed accident data and/or the opinions issued as to their ability to drive provided by doctors or assessors on the road. Individual drivers' performances on a driving simulator or out on the road are sometimes taken into account to identify any difficulties they may have when driving and also to determine whether they are likely to be at risk of having an accident. In Belgium, assessments of driving ability are carried out by doctors and/or by the CARA, the body accredited for assessing the driving ability of individuals with reduced functional capabilities. The key figures relative to driving ability in Belgium will be the subject of section 4 of this report.

A literature review shows that the risk of accidents varies according to the group of medical disorders. The problems associated with substance abuse (such as alcohol and drugs), psychiatric problems, sleep disorders (such as sleep apnoea) and neurological conditions (such as dementia) have been identified as the medical conditions most likely to have an adverse effect on driving behaviour.

Measures in terms road safety policies may be envisaged in order to mitigate the functional problems associated with the presence of one or more medical conditions in a person. The individuals in question may also make changes to their driving habits and behaviour based on their particular difficulties. Vehicle technology, as well as the arrival of self-driving cars may also be of value in ensuring safer driving. However, the level of acceptance and the effectiveness of these new technologies still remain to be determined. Modifications in terms of infrastructure may also improve the way they drive.

