

How seniors can retain their mobility to avoid isolation

Simply reaching a certain age is not a contraindication to driving a car, there are currently thousands of licence holders in New Zealand over the age of 90.

However, many illnesses and impairments that may affect driving capability tend to increase with age, such as dementia or impaired vision. There is a demand for balance between maintaining the quality of life for seniors and ensuring their safety and the safety of others on the road. Fortunately, there are many other options available to get out and about.

Retaining a driver's licence

For those seniors who can drive, retaining a driver's licence can be a crucial way to maintain independence and avoid feeling lonely. A survey conducted by the New Zealand Automobile Association (AA) revealed that 34 per cent of members over 75 would feel frustrated if they could no longer drive and 28 per cent said they would feel lonely. For seniors living in rural areas where public transport is not widely accessible, maintaining a driver's licence is particularly important to avoid isolation.



Coping without a car

Having personal freedom and mobility is important to everyone and having to surrender a driver's licence could be extremely difficult for some. Fortunately, there are many other options available to reserve these freedoms without a car.

Public transport offers many advantages that can be a positive outlook when faced with surrendering a licence. Often using public transport is cheaper than running a vehicle and allows time for other activities while travelling such as reading or writing. Public transport also takes the stress out of driving and can even be social, especially if travelling with friends. It can also improve a person's health if they must walk to the bus stop and will contribute to improving the environment by reducing pollution.

Types of public transport for seniors

Free off-peak public transport is available to all seniors 65 and over with a SuperGold card. Many taxi companies will also offer a discount.

There are also options available for taxi, companion driving services, or share ride services. It is worth investigating which services are provided in the local area. If a senior is not able to use public transport easily or has mobility impairments, they can apply for a [Total Mobility](#) card which offers discounted transport fares. An assessment facilitator will have to assess whether an application is eligible.



Community transport services are another transport option which provide a service specifically for seniors and charge by time not distance. This service also offers assistance in areas like help unloading shopping or help with wheelchairs. Many also offer companion services such as taking seniors on scenic routes or spending time with them out and about.

Having personal freedom and mobility can be a crucial factor to support wellbeing as we age. It is important that our senior population maintain their independence whether that is through retaining their driver's licence or becoming familiar with the many public transport options available to them.

Ref: Aged Care New Zealand Issue 02 2022