

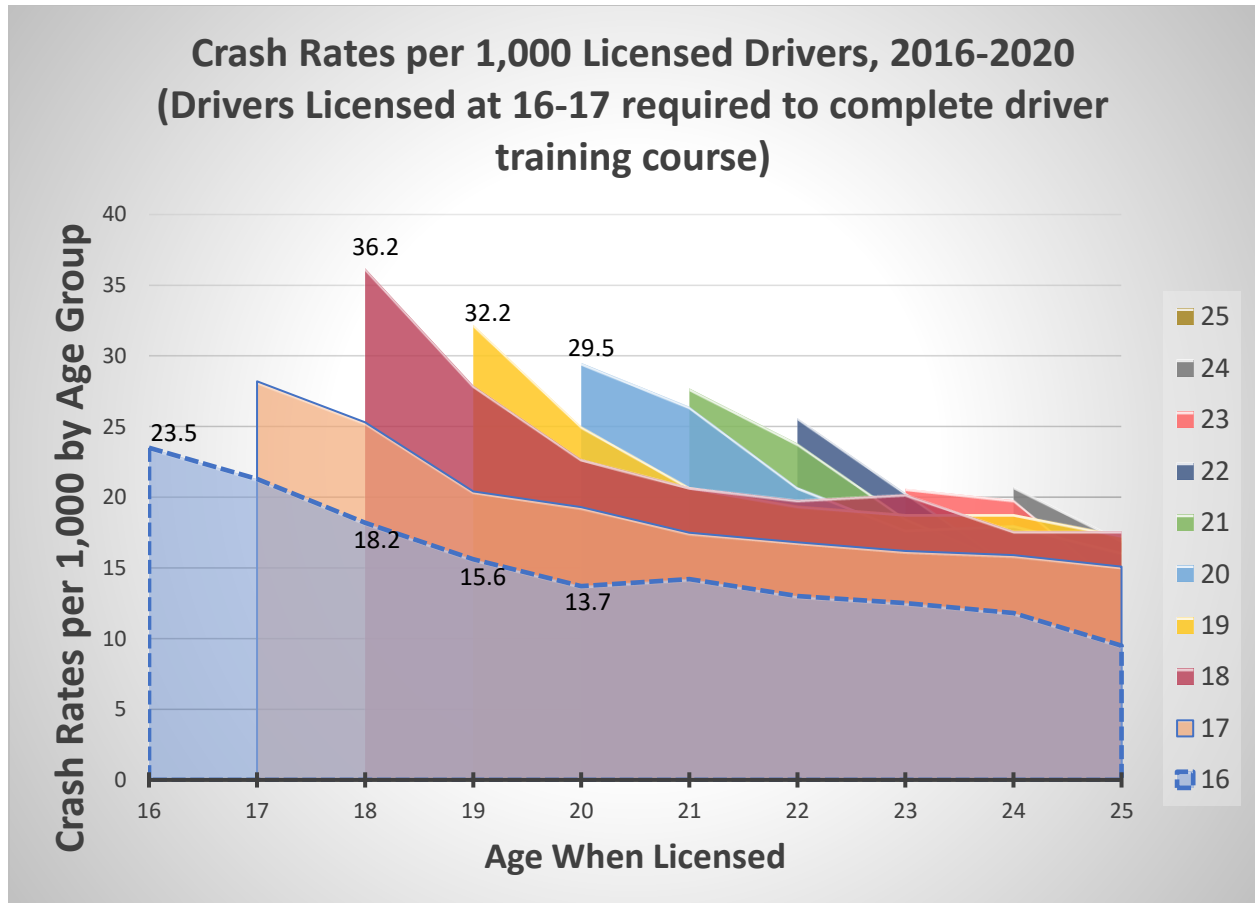
## Policy Brief: Reducing the Risks of Injury and Fatal Crashes among Young Drivers, 16 through 25 Years of Age

### Data

During 2017-2021, drivers between the ages of 16 and 25 years of age represented 20 percent of all drivers involved in a fatal collision. But the differences in crash rates were substantially lower among young drivers who had completed a driver education course. Comparing drivers 18-25, those who had not completed a driver training course had a 70 percent higher rate of injury or fatal crash involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Washington requires young drivers ages 16 and 17 to complete a driver training course that meets the elements determined by the Department of Licensing or the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to obtain an intermediate driver license (RCW 46.20.075). Education coupled with other intermediate license requirements appear to have a dramatic impact on the safety of the youngest drivers.

The graph and table below show that drivers who are subject to intermediate license requirements (ages 16-17) become much safer drivers, compared to their peers who begin driving at ages 18-25.



Source: Washington Department of Licensing, August 2022

Novice drivers ages 18-20 have *crash rates that are double* the rates of same-age peers who were licensed at 16 (and subject to all intermediate license requirements).

		Injury/Fatal Crash Rates per 1,000 Licensed Drivers in Washington, 2016-2020, by Age at Crash (WA DOL, 2022)									
		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Age at first license	16	23.5	21.3	18.2	15.6	13.7	14.2	13.0	12.5	11.8	9.5
	17		28.2	25.3	20.4	19.3	17.5	16.8	16.2	15.9	15.1
	18			36.2	27.9	22.7	20.7	19.8	20.2	17.6	17.6
	19				32.2	25.0	20.7	19.4	18.8	18.8	17.3
	20					29.5	26.4	20.7	17.7	18.0	16.1
	21						27.7	23.8	18.5	15.3	13.7
	22							25.6	20.3	15.0	13.3
	23								20.6	19.8	13.5
	24									20.7	16.9
	25										21.6

## The problem

Among the groups displayed above, only 45 percent had received driver training, while 55 percent had not. Survey data from WTSC in 2020 found that more than half of young drivers who waited or planned to wait to be licensed at age 18 or older did so to avoid the cost of driver education, which is substantial (\$400 - \$750 per course, currently). Low-income students, who also include disproportionate numbers of Black and Hispanic students, were more likely to wait, thereby missing the safety benefits of driver training and intermediate licensing.<sup>ii</sup>

## Possible Solutions

Using the data from DOL, WTSC conservatively estimates that injury/fatal crashes among drivers licensed at ages 18-25 could be reduced by 17 percent if the requirements for driver education and intermediate licensing applied to them. This translates to approximately *4,000 fewer injury or fatal crashes in Washington per year*.

Policy makers can consider multiple strategies. Increasing access to driver education by reducing the cost for students generally or subsidizing the cost for low-income drivers specifically would allow more drivers to receive training and an intermediate license at age 16 or 17.

Extending intermediate license requirements to older novice drivers (18+) is another approach to increase safe driving behaviors. In this approach, it would also be advisable to increase access to and affordability of state authorized driver training courses to avoid exacerbating existing inequities.

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<sup>i</sup> Radford, A. and Zhang, H. (2022). Young driver crash data analysis: 2016-2020. Washington Department of Licensing.

<sup>ii</sup> McCarthy, C. (2020). Graduated drivers licensing (GDL) program attitude and behavior survey results. Colehour+Cohen. Retrieved on 12/23/22 at [http://wtsc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2020/09/GDL-Program-Attitude-and-Behavior-Survey-Results\\_Jul2020.pdf](http://wtsc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2020/09/GDL-Program-Attitude-and-Behavior-Survey-Results_Jul2020.pdf)