WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING

Older Drivers in Washington State: Implications of an Aging Population on Traffic Safety

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Overview

1. Key issues for older drivers (drivers age 70+)

2. Older driver population and licensed driver trends

3. Older driver crash involvement counts & rates

4. Analysis of motor vehicle crashes involving older drivers occurring in Washington State between 2019 and 2023
   - Crash characteristics
   - Behavioral factors

5. Older Driver Feasibility Study (conducted by WSU on behalf of DOL)
   - Overview / purpose
   - Key findings
   - Recommendations

Key issues for older drivers

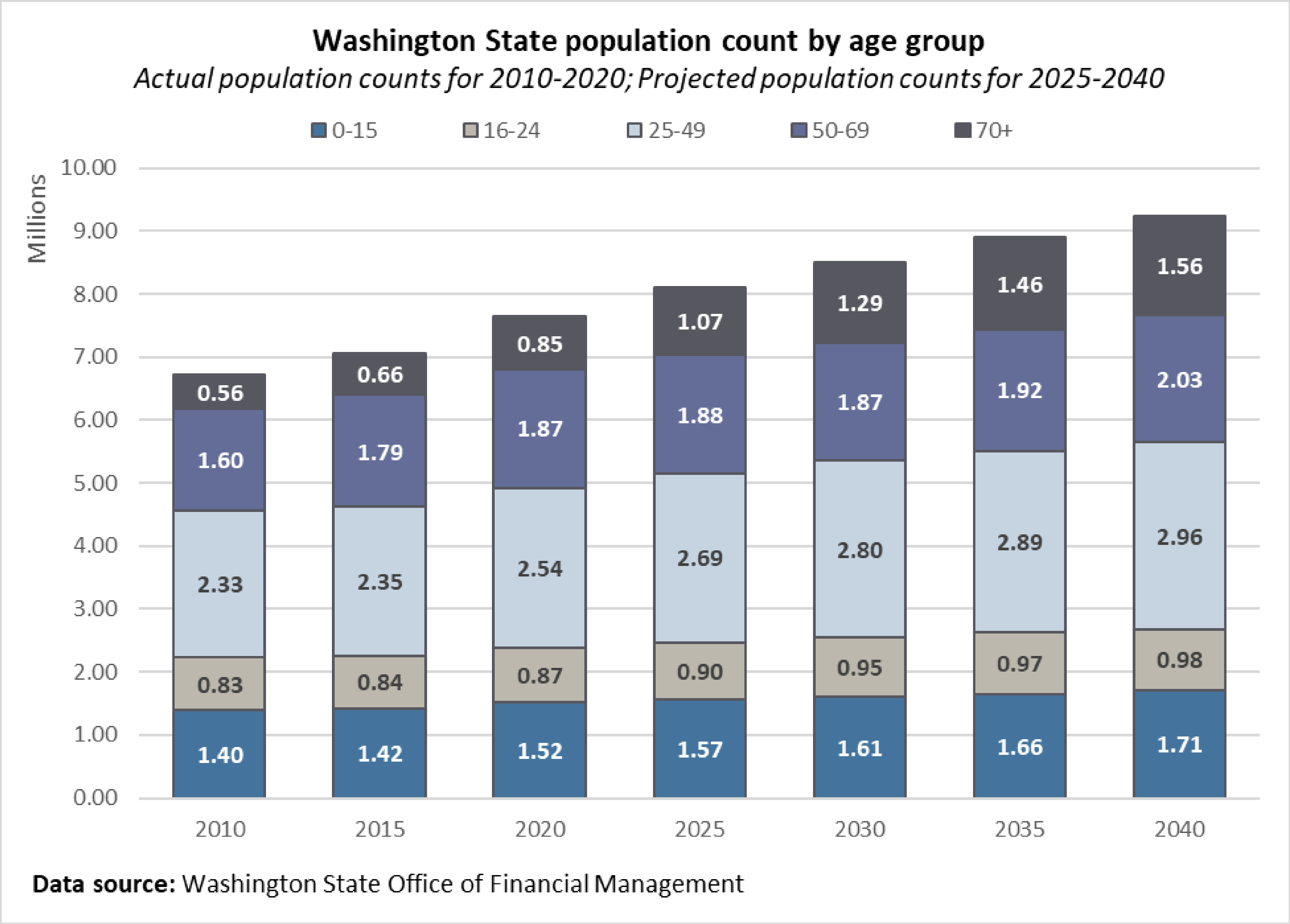
- Most older adults outlive their ability to drive
- Many seniors are vehicle dependent, especially those living in rural areas
- Car ownership and driving highly correlated with life satisfaction and health
- Older adults at increased risk of dying in crash due to fragility/frailty
- Aging adults often experience declines in psychomotor, visual, and cognitive abilities – all required for driving

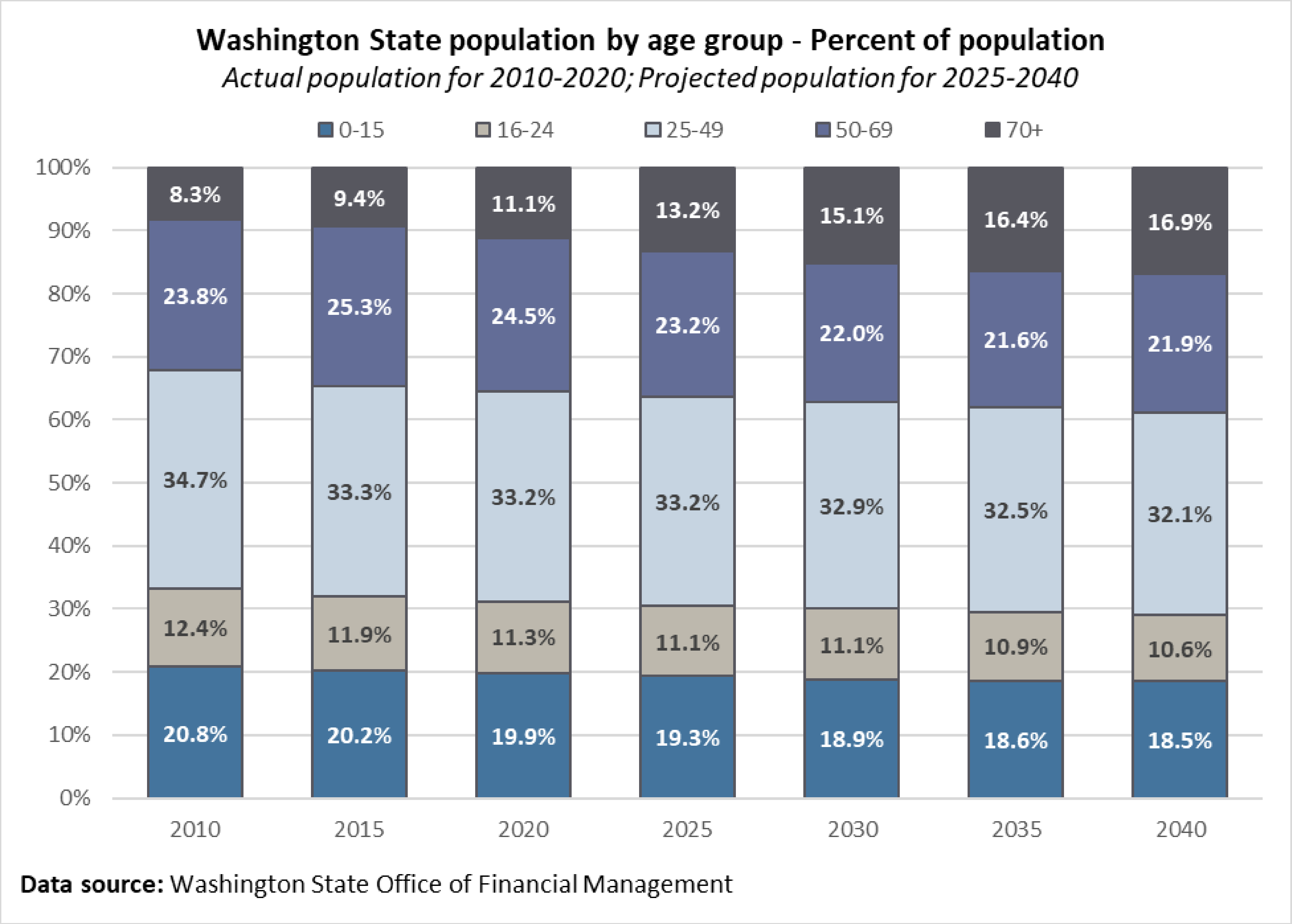
Rates of disability among older adults

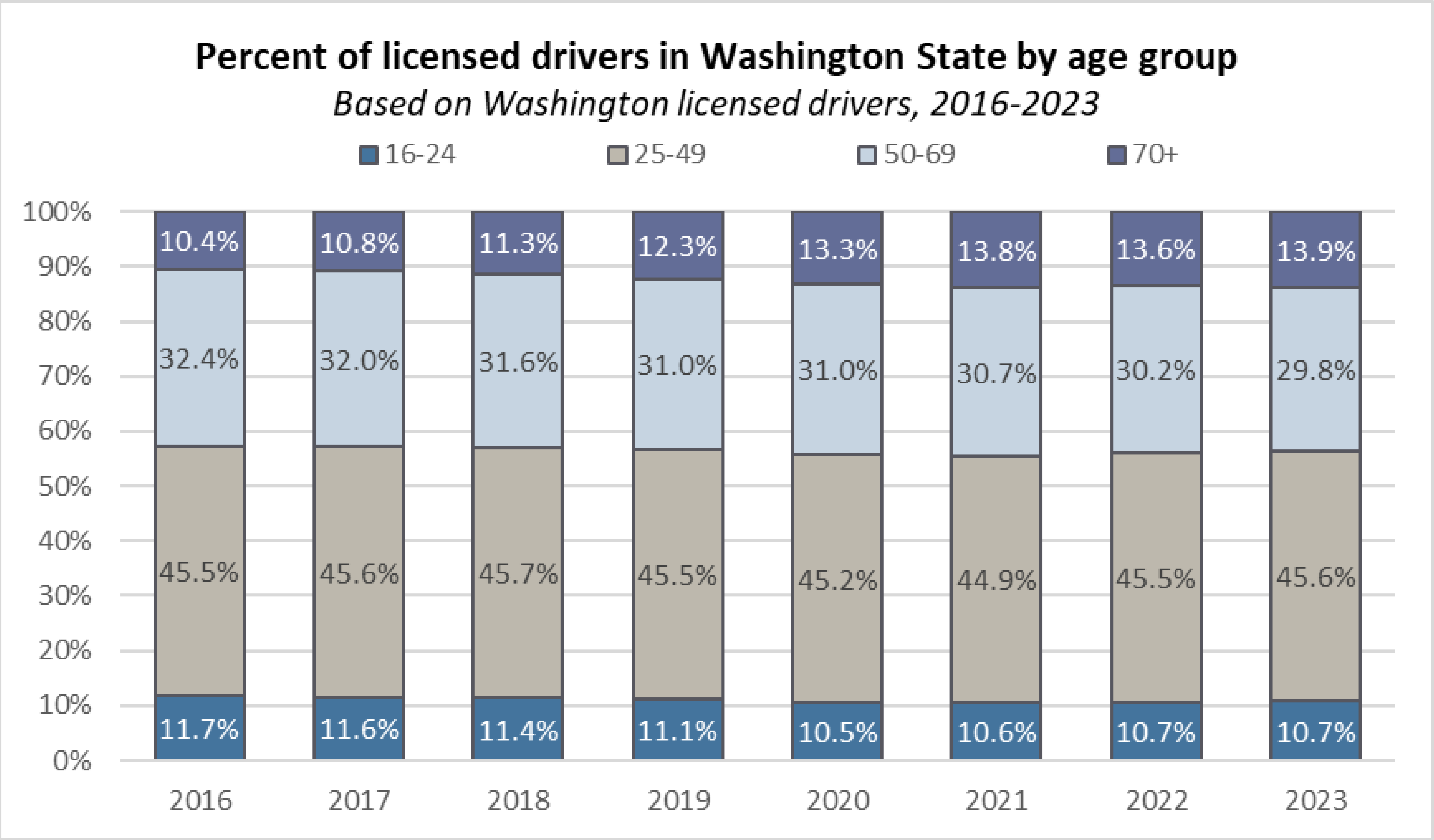
	Percent of population with disability or difficulty by age group American Community Survey - 2023 1-year estimates for Washington State						
Age Group	With a disability	Vision difficulty	Cognitive difficulty	Hearing difficulty	Ambulatory difficulty	Independent living difficulty	Self-care difficulty
All ages	14.1%	2.5%	6.4%	4.2%	6.0%	5.1%	2.6%
Age 70+	39.8%	7.2%	11.8%	18.7%	23.9%	17.9%	10.2%
70-74	27.3%	4.5%	6.5%	11.4%	15.1%	9.0%	5.4%
75-79	38.0%	6.2%	10.2%	17.9%	20.9%	13.5%	7.9%
80-84	45.5%	7.2%	13.2%	20.8%	25.7%	20.3%	10.3%
85+	71.6%	16.6%	28.0%	38.1%	52.1%	48.8%	27.9%

On a positive note…

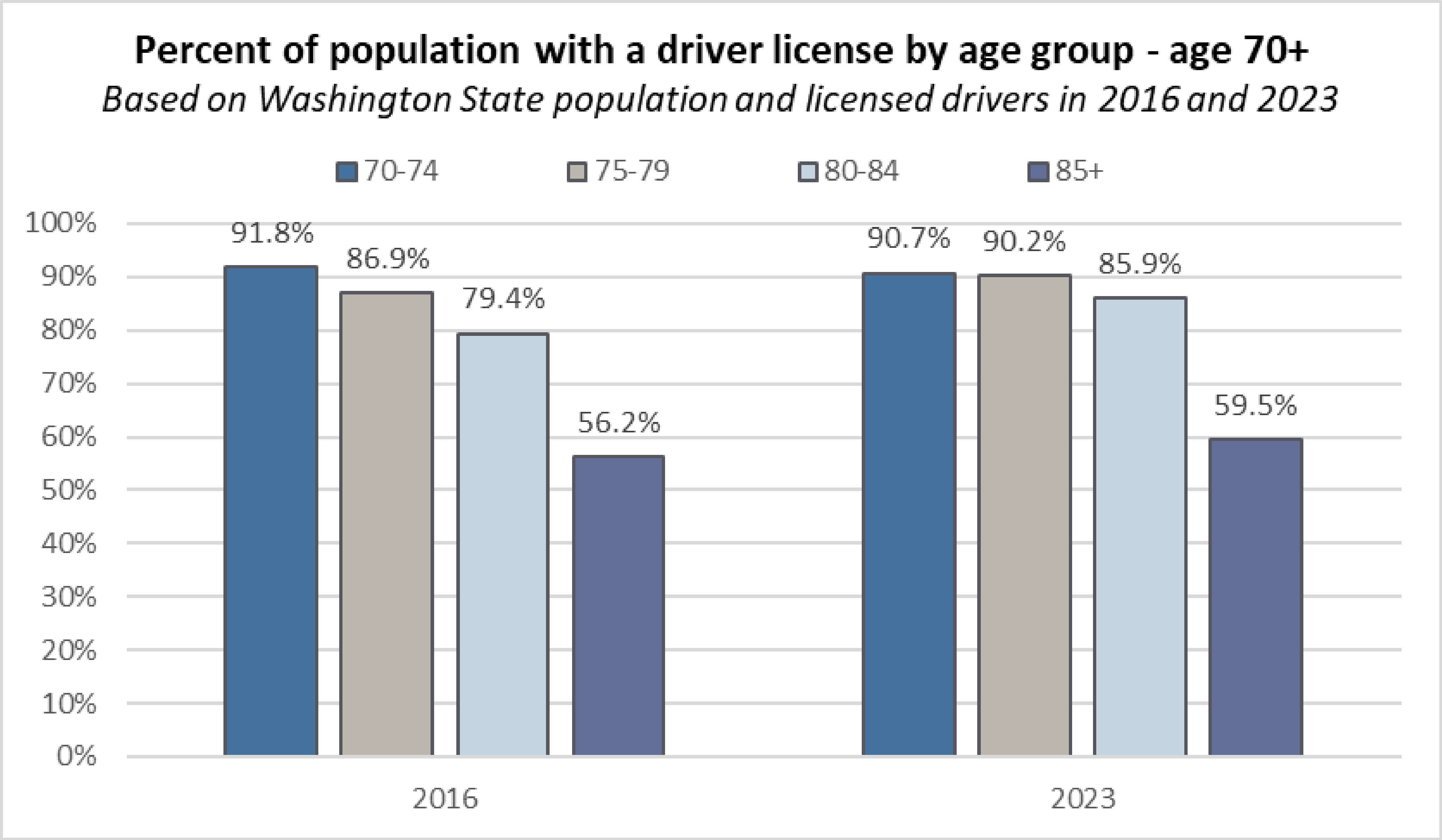
- Seniors today are healthier than previous generations
  - They are driving longer than before – 85% of people age 70 and older had a driver license in 2023
- Older drivers today less likely to be killed or seriously injured if they do crash
  - Due to healthier older adults, safer vehicles
- Older drivers tend to self-regulate their driving
  - For example, limiting trips at night or on high-speed roads


Washington State population count by age group
Actual population counts for 2010-2020; Projected population counts for 2025-2040
0-15
16-24
25-49
50-69
70+
Millions
10.00
9.00
8.00
7.00
6.00
5.00
4.00
3.00
2.00
1.00
0.00
2010
2015
2020
2025
2030
2035
2040
0.56
0.66
0.85
1.07
1.29
1.46
1.56
1.60
1.79
1.87
1.88
1.87
1.92
2.03
2.33
2.35
2.54
2.69
2.80
2.89
2.96
0.83
0.84
0.87
0.90
0.95
0.97
0.98
1.40
1.42
1.52
1.57
1.61
1.66
1.71
Data source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

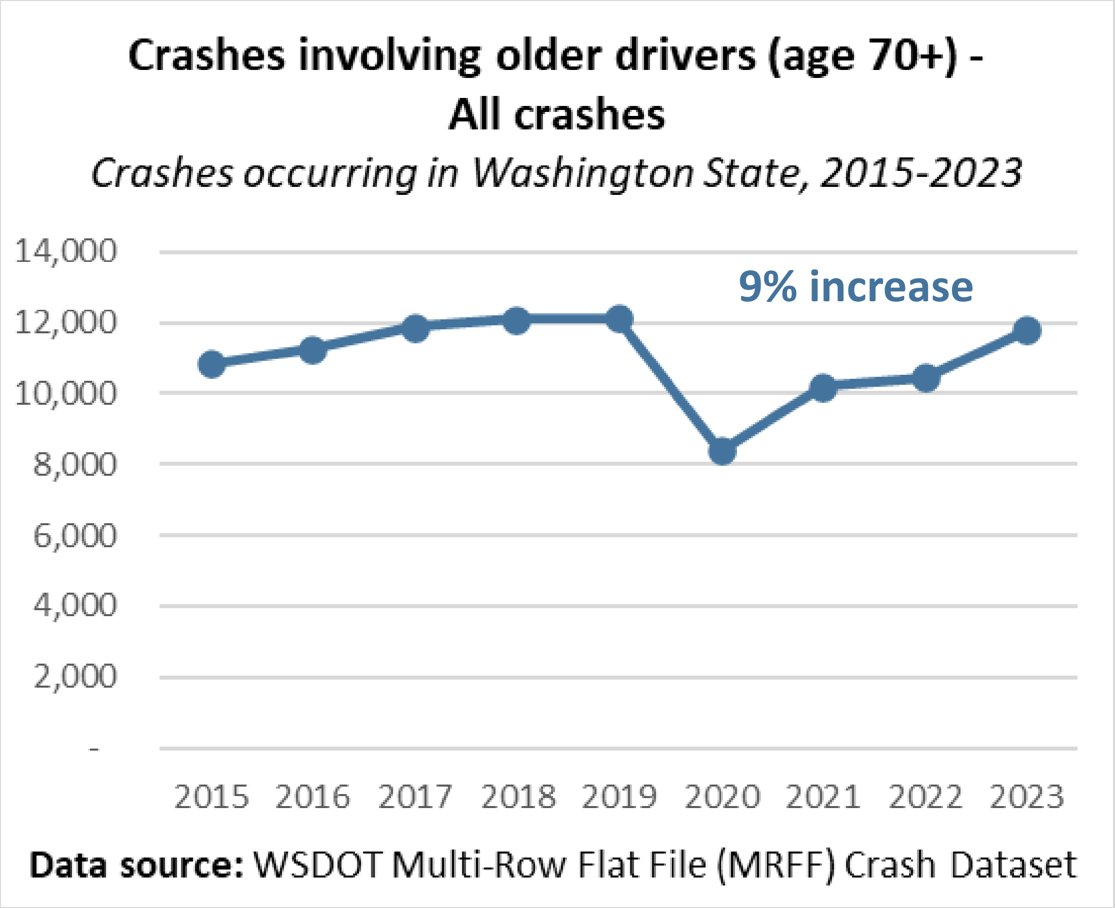

Washington State population by age group - Percent of population
Actual population for 2010-2020; Projected population for 2025-2040
0-15
16-24
25-49
50-69
70+
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
2010
2015
2020
2025
2030
2035
2040
8.3%
23.8%
34.7%
12.4%
20.8%
9.4%
25.3%
33.3%
11.9%
20.2%
11.1%
24.5%
33.2%
11.3%
19.9%
13.2%
23.2%
33.2%
11.1%
19.3%
15.1%
22.0%
32.9%
11.1%
18.9%
16.4%
21.6%
32.5%
10.9%
18.6%
16.9%
21.9%
32.1%
10.6%
18.5%
Data source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

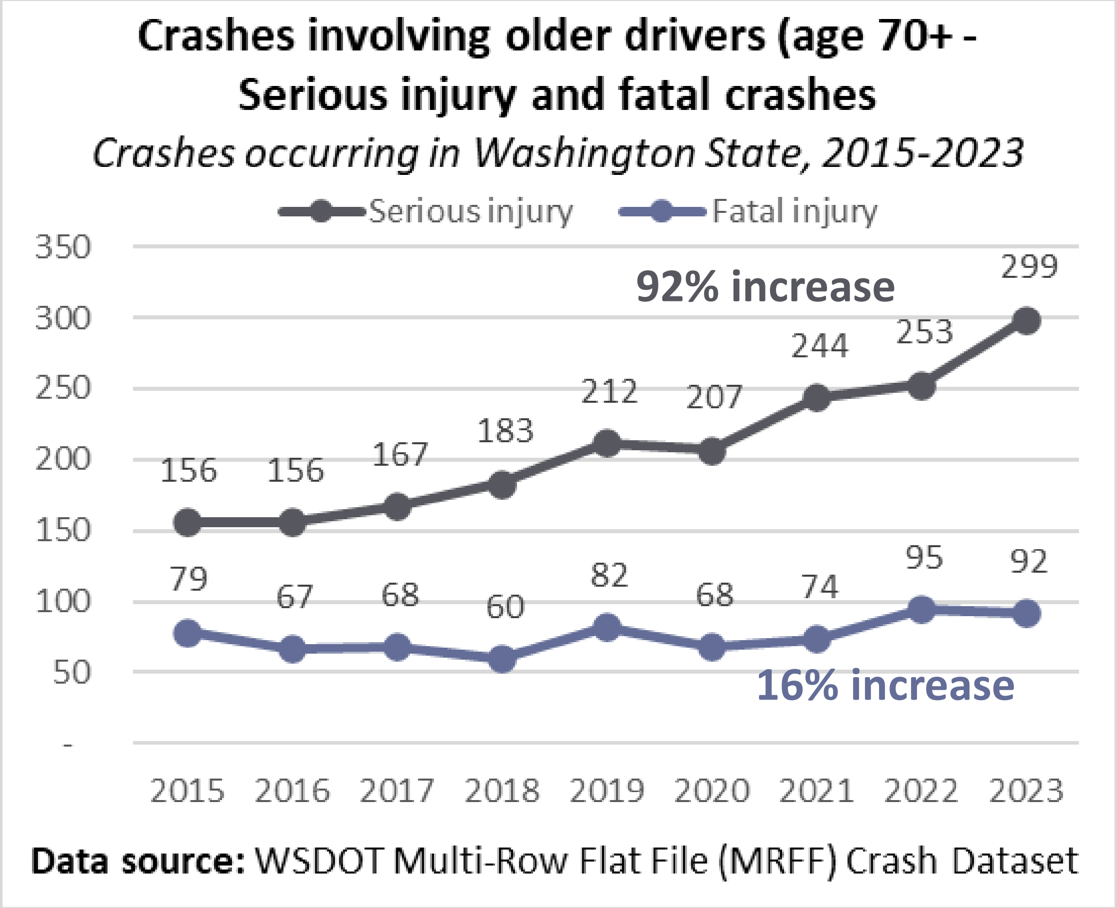


Percent of licensed drivers in Washington State by age group
Based on Washington licensed drivers, 2016-2023
16-24
25-49
50-69
70+
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
10.4%
32.4%
45.5%
11.7%
10.8%
32.0%
45.6%
11.6%
11.3%
31.6%
45.7%
11.4%
12.3%
31.0%
45.5%
11.1%
13.3%
31.0%
45.2%
10.5%
13.8%
30.7%
44.9%
10.6%
13.6%
30.2%
45.5%
10.7%
13.9%
29.8%
45.6%
10.7%
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023

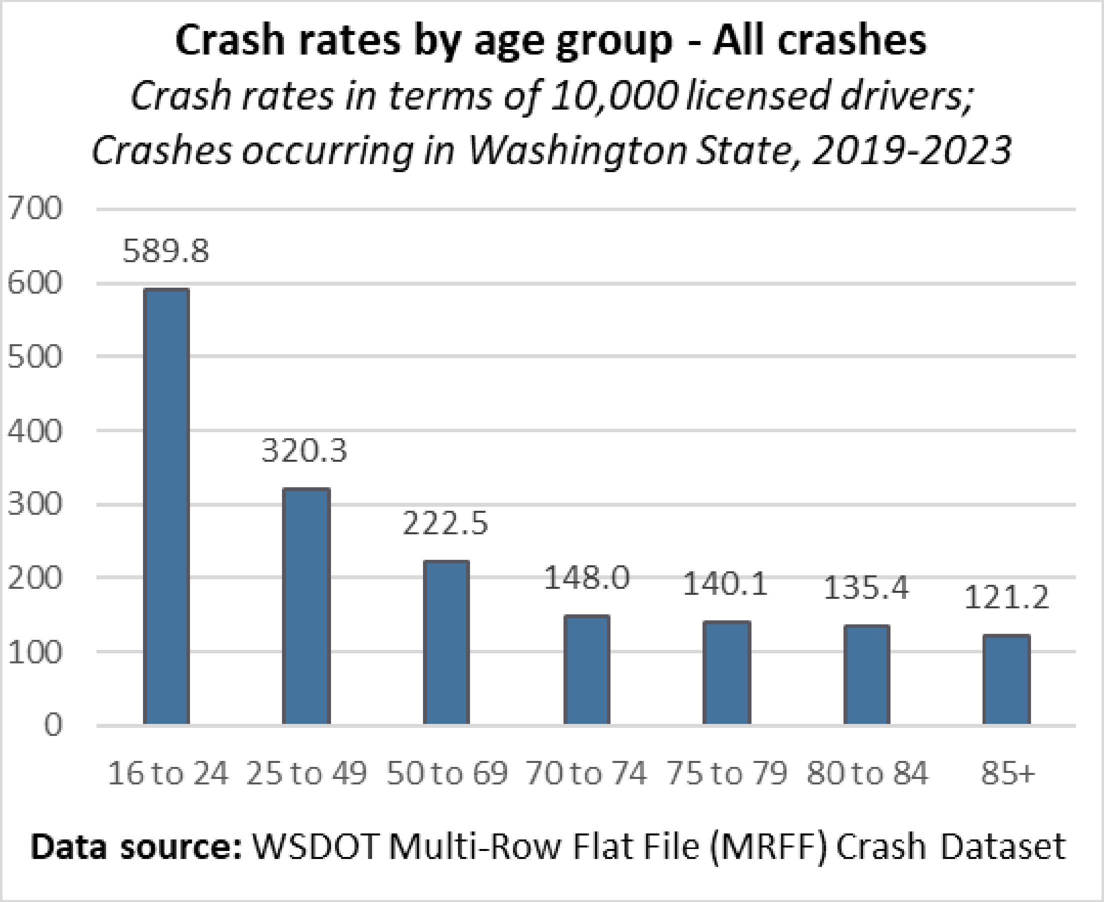

Percent of population with a driver license by age group - age 70+
Based on Washington State population and licensed drivers in 2016 and 2023
70-74
75-79
80-84
85+
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
91.8%
86.9%
79.4%
56.2%
90.7%
90.2%
85.9%
59.5%
2016
2023

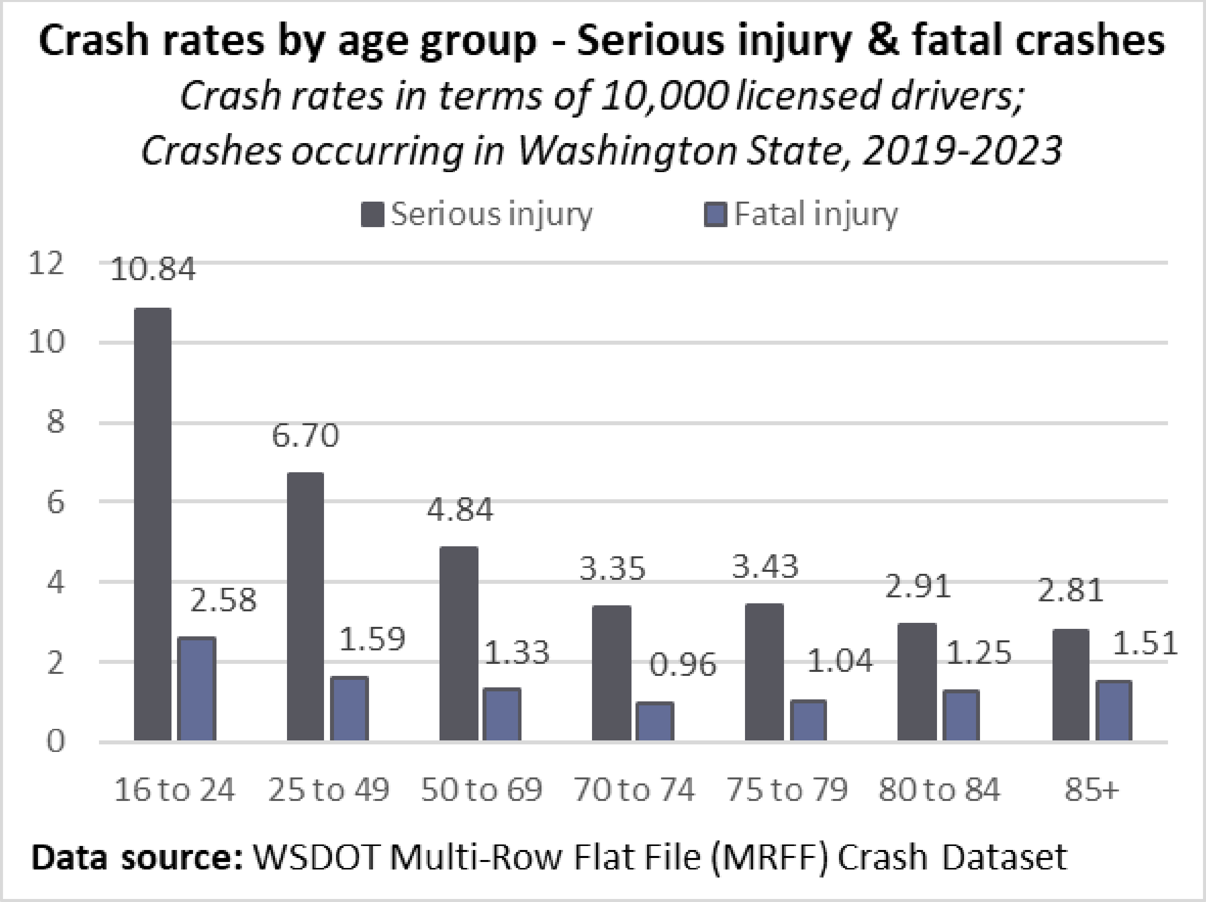
Older driver crash trends – Crash Counts



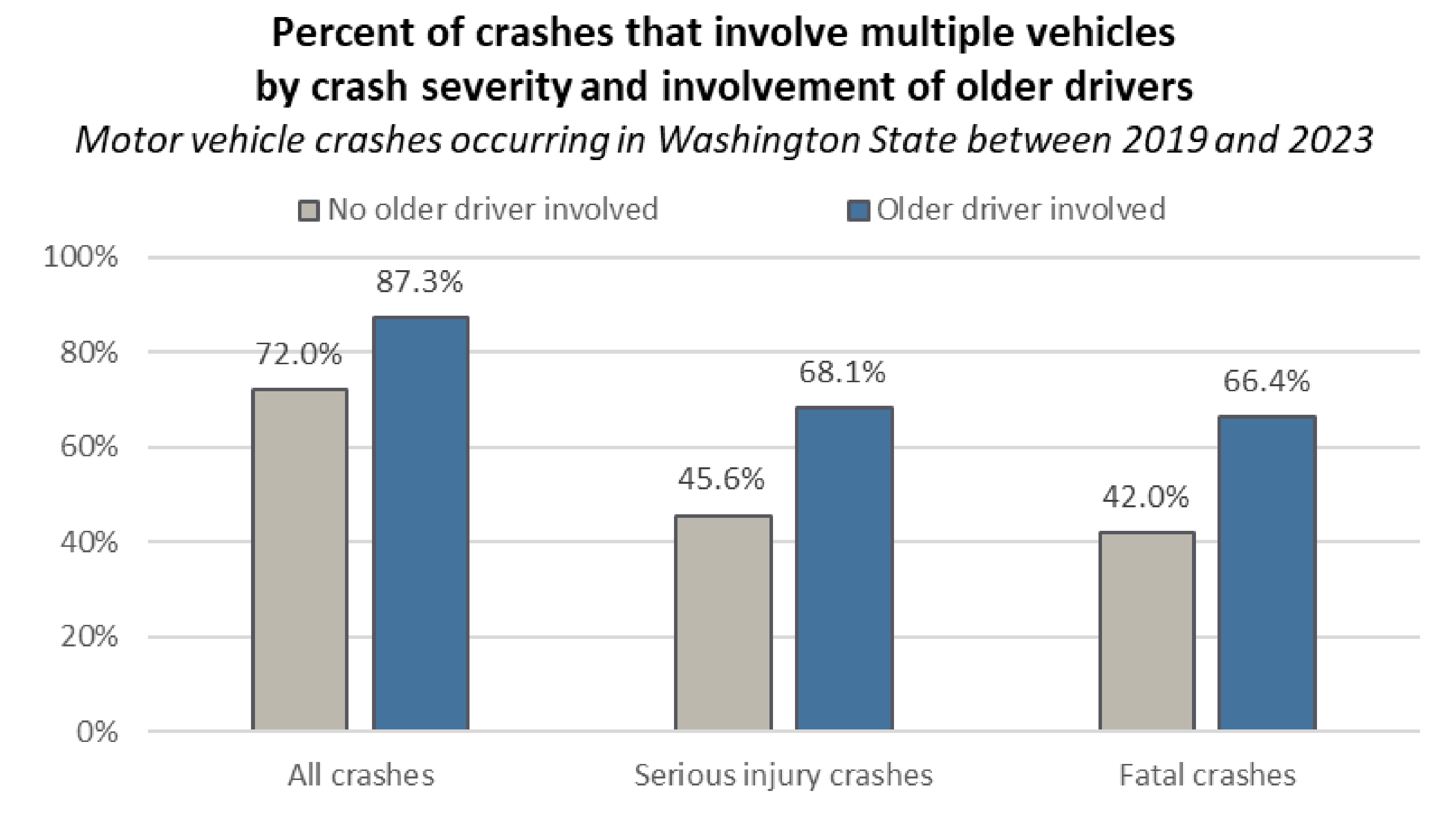


Older driver crash trends – Crash Rates



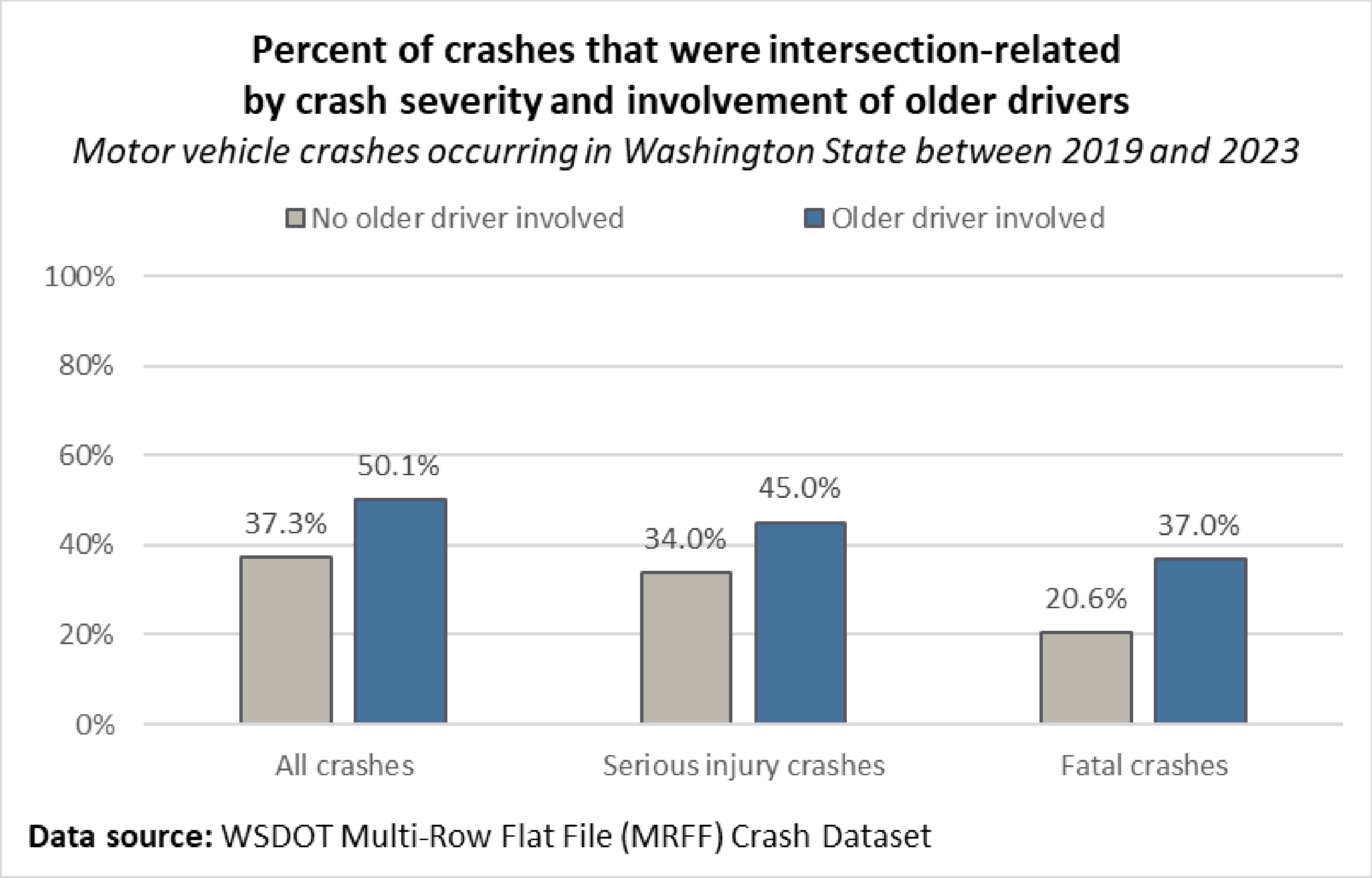


Characteristics of crashes involving older drivers – Number of Vehicles

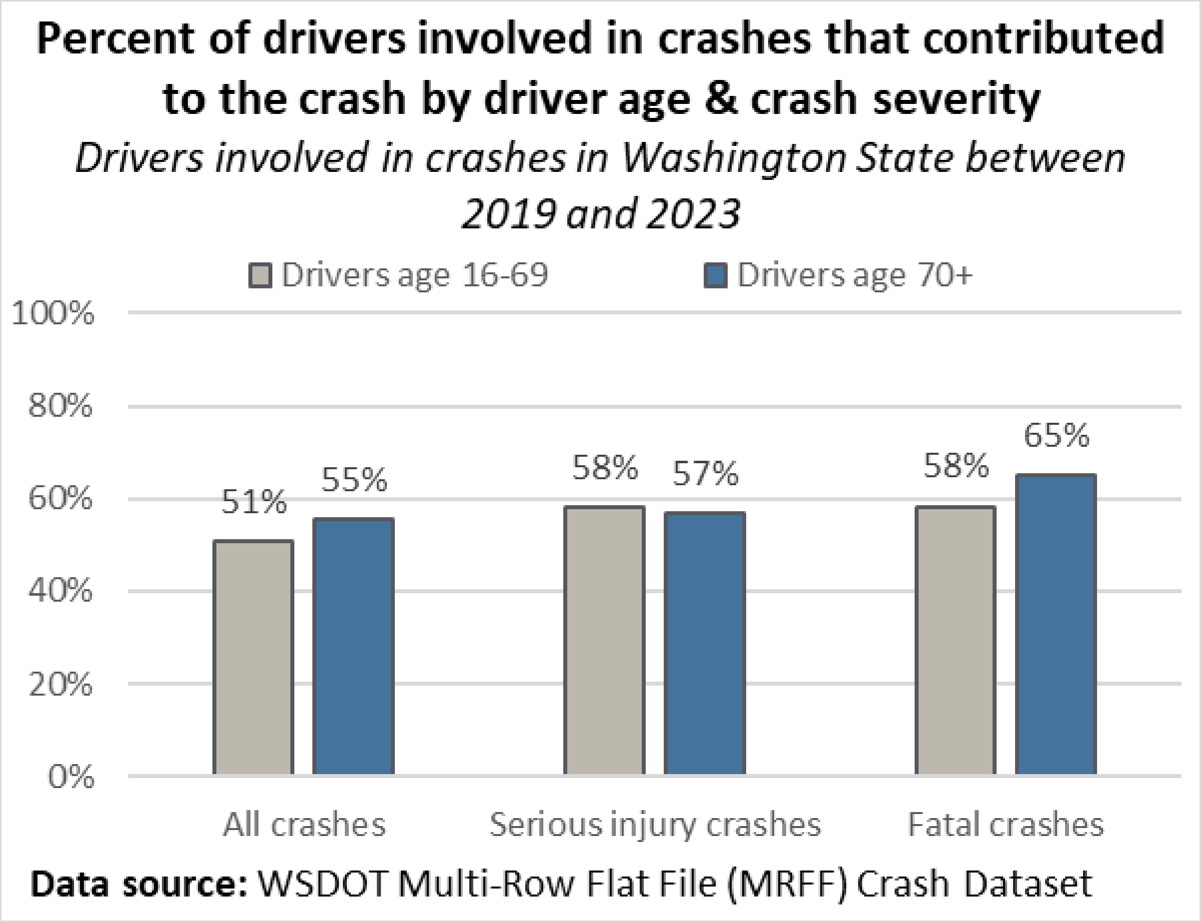


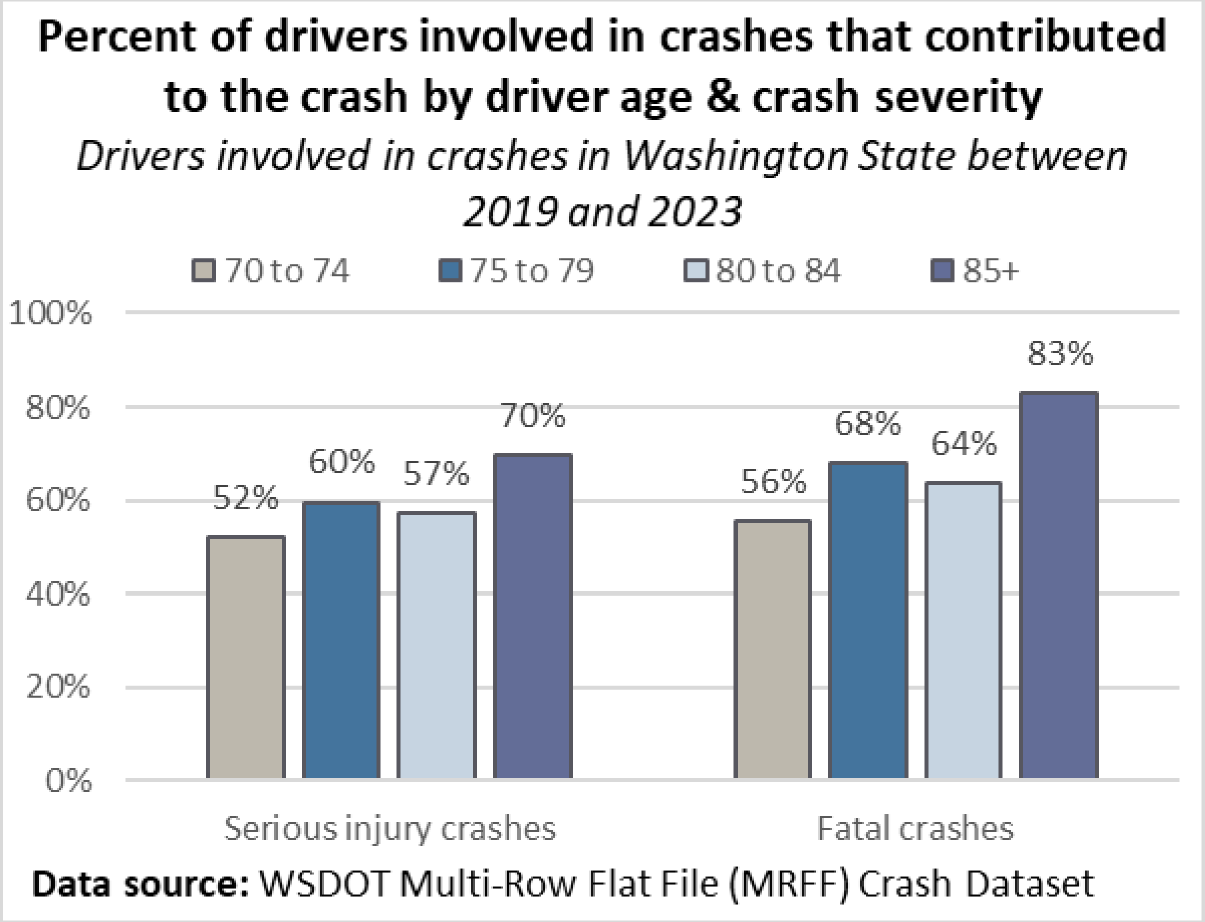
Data source: WSDOT Multi-Row Flat File (MRFF) Crash Dataset

Characteristics of crashes involving older drivers – Intersections



Drivers that contributed to crash by age

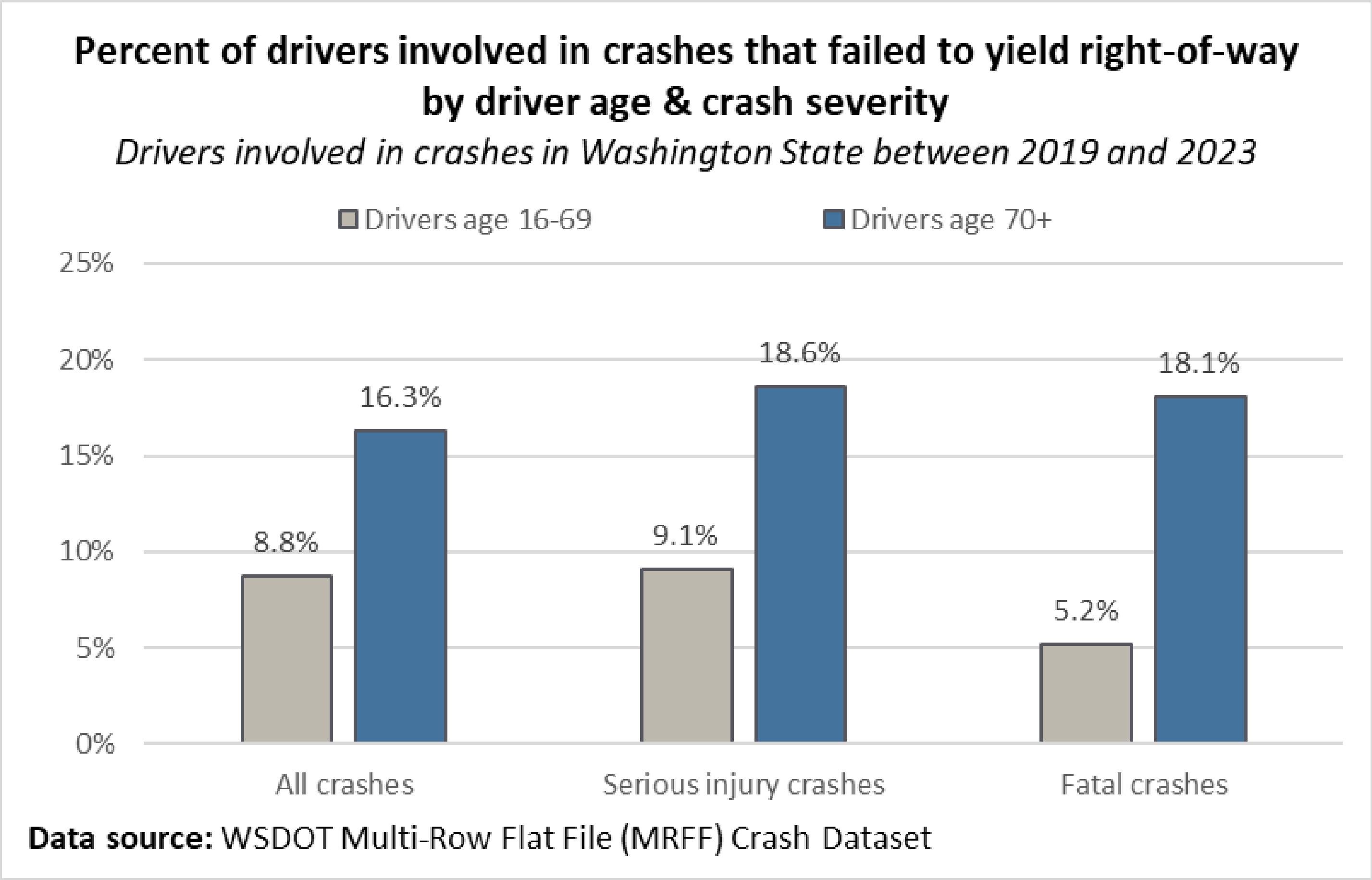




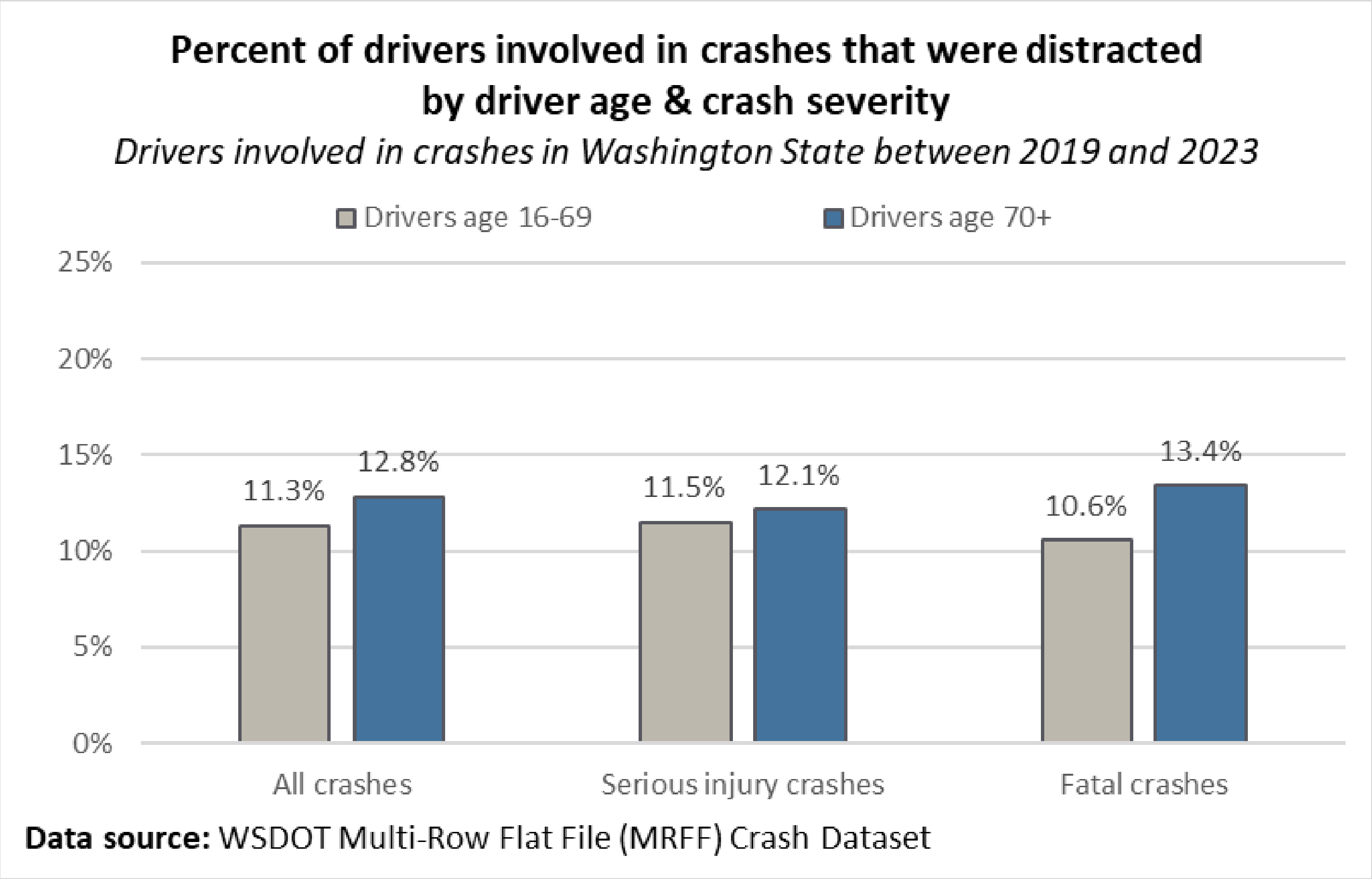
Top behavioral factors for older drivers involved in crashes

Behavioral factor:	% of older drivers involved in crashes	% of older drivers involved in serious injury crashes	% of older drivers involved in fatal crashes
1. Failing to yield right-of-way	16.3%	18.6%	18.1%
2. Distraction	12.8%	12.1%	13.4%
3. Speeding	4.0%	5.8%	7.9%
4. Impairment	1.2%	2.9%	3.7%
5. Unrestrained	0.7%	4.2%	10.0%

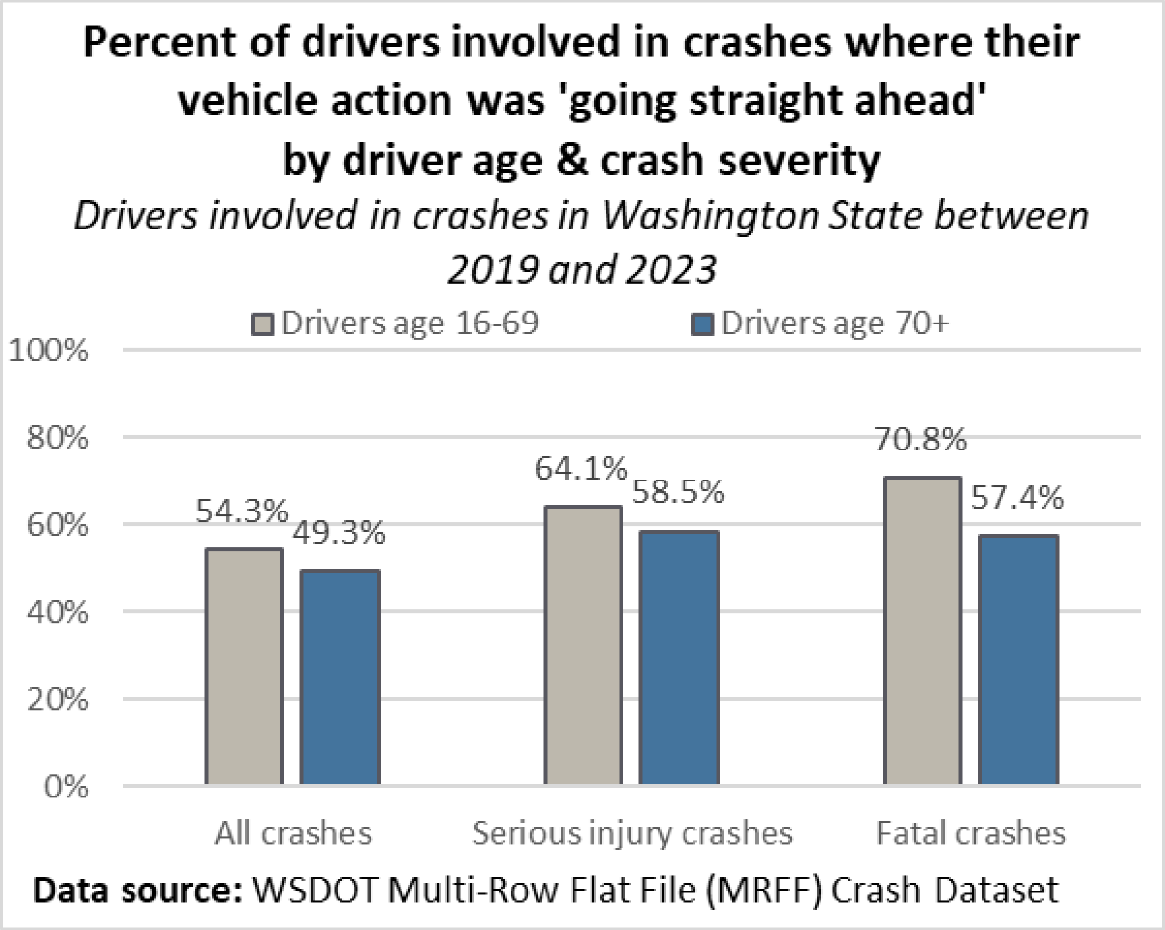
Top behavioral factors for older drivers involved in crashes – Failing to yield

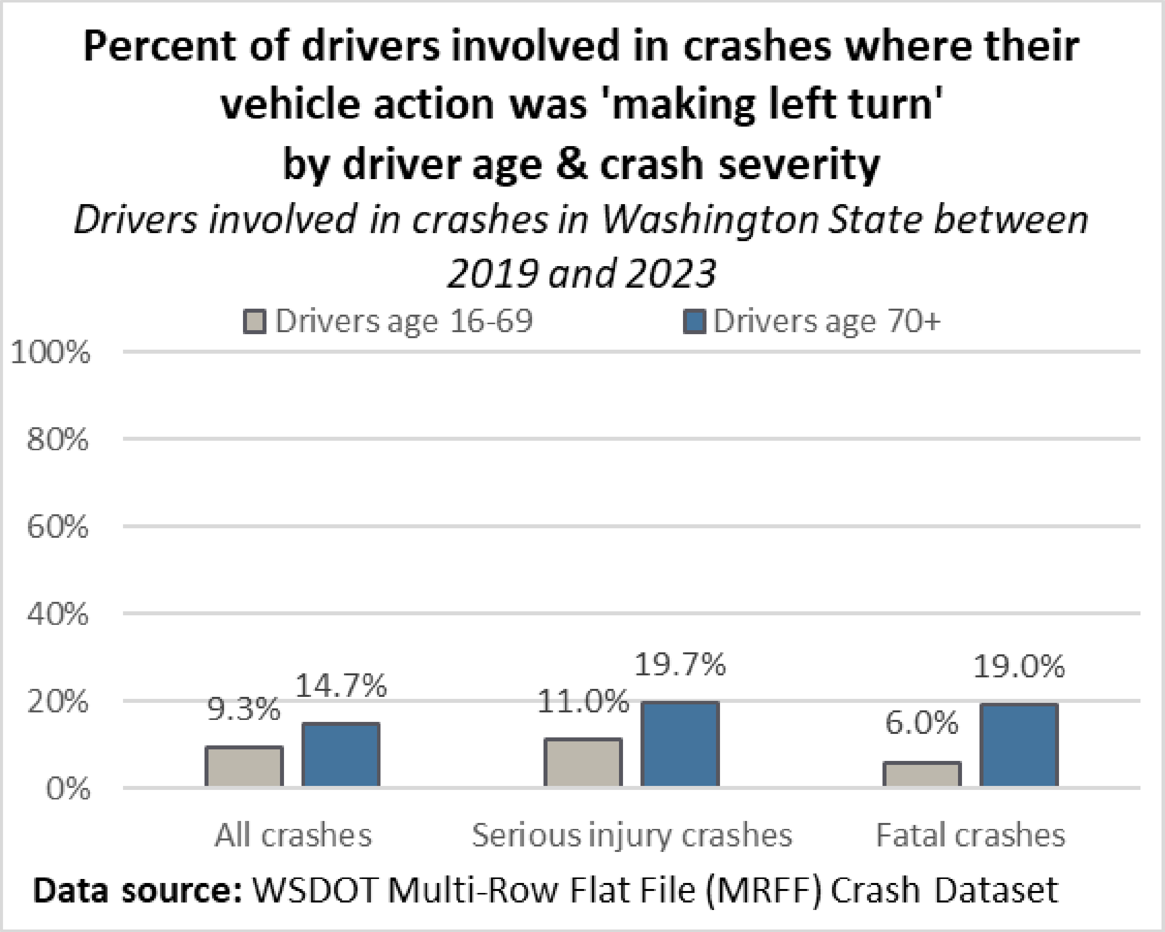


Top behavioral factors for older drivers involved in crashes – Distraction



Vehicle actions for older drivers involved in crashes





Conclusions

- Mobility is essential for the well-being of older adults, and many seniors are vehicle dependent.
- Older adults can experience age-related declining abilities that make driving more difficult, and most adults outlive their ability to drive.
- Seniors today are driving longer than prior generations, and they tend to self-regulate their driving.
- People age 70+ are the fastest growing segment of the state's population.
- The number of crashes involving older drivers has been trending upward, but their crash rates in terms of licensed drivers are still the lowest among all age groups (except for fatal crashes involving drivers age 75+).
- Older drivers tend to be involved in multi-vehicle crashes that involve intersections.
- Failing to yield and distraction are the top behavioral factors associated with older drivers involved in crashes.

Older Driver Feasibility Study

DOL was directed to develop a comprehensive plan aimed at improving older driver safety.

https://dol.wa.gov/media/pdf/3652/2024-older-driver-reportpdf/download?inline

Older Driver Feasibility Study

The legislation required the plan to include at least four primary components:

- Comprehensive review of DOL policies surrounding older drivers and medically at-risk drivers
- Feasibility analysis of establishing a medical advisory board to advise DOL on policy related to:
  - General policy for at-risk drivers
  - Driving privileges for individual medically at-risk drivers
  - Appeals process for drivers whose privileges are revoked or restricted due to medical conditions
- Recommended assessment tool for DOL to better assess a driver's potential risk to themselves or others
- Information on how each component of the plan improves older driver safety while preserving maximum level of older driver independence and privacy

Older Driver Feasibility Study

Recommendations:

- Establish an Older & Medically At-Risk Driver Program at DOL
  - Establish a campaign to normalize aging out of driving and develop resources to help make this transition easier.
- Implement changes to DOL policies and counter assessments
  - Expand and evaluate use of licensing restrictions; enhance the appeals process; pilot new screening tools; promote use of standardized assessment tools.
- Establish a permanent medical advisory board at DOL
  - Board should include 7-10 members from a variety of medical and professional backgrounds to advise on policy, recommend assessment tools, and consult on licensing restrictions for medically at-risk drivers.

Older Driver Funding

ESSB 5161

$300,000 of the highway safety account—state appropriation is provided solely for additional actions in accordance with the recently completed evaluation of ways to implement an older and medically at-risk driver program.

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Questions?

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