

# Older Road Users

## Road crashes in South Australia, 2019-2023

### Overview

Between 2019 and 2023, 20 older road users lost their life and 96 suffered serious injuries each year on average. Persons aged 70 and above are overrepresented in road deaths, accounting for 14% of the population yet representing 20% of lives lost. Research shows that although older road users are involved in a small number of crashes, these crashes are often of higher severity, probably because of the frailty of older road users. Older drivers are generally more cautious and tend to exhibit less illegal and dangerous driving behaviour than other age groups, and older drivers typically control their exposure to risk when driving by avoiding driving at night or in peak hours.

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury at intersections involving right angle crashes, and as they get older, they are also more likely to be responsible for crashes they are involved in.

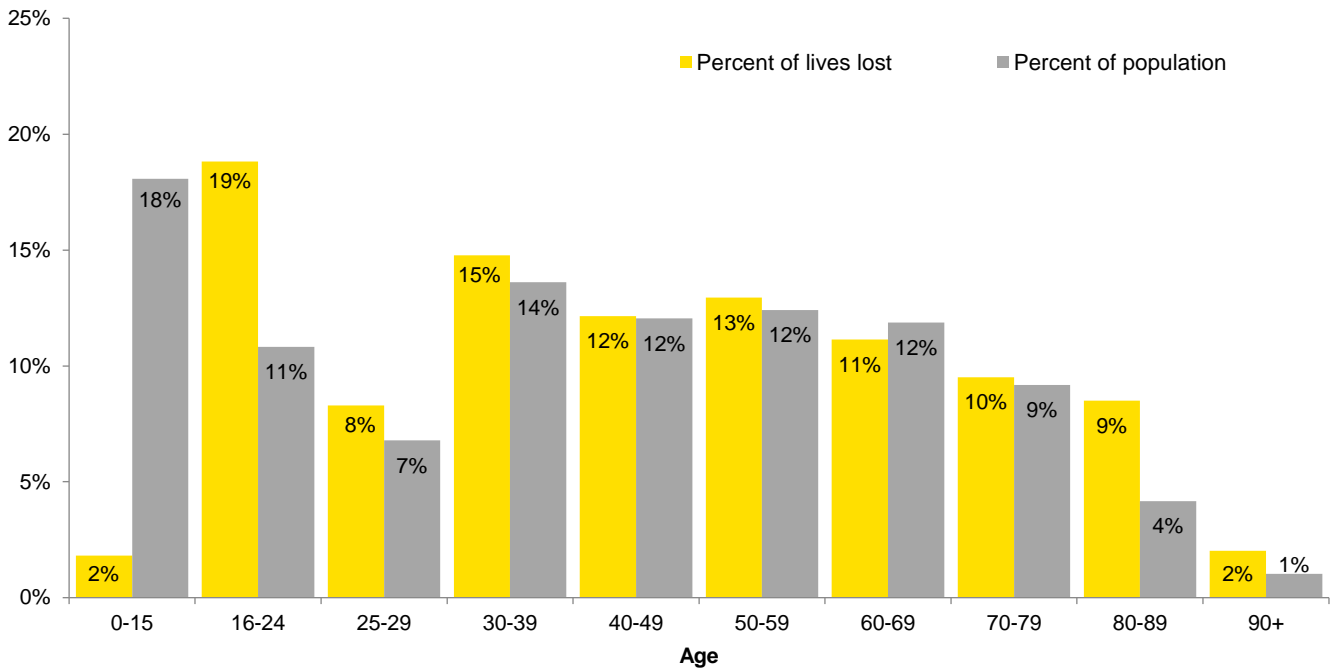
Table 1 provides a breakdown of older road user casualties by year. The number of road users killed aged 70 and over has decreased by an average of 9.1% per year over the past five years. Serious injuries of people aged 70 years and over has also decreased on average by 1.9% per year and minor injuries declined by an average of 1.6% per year from 2019 to 2023.

**Table 1: Lives lost, serious and minor injuries of road users aged 70 years and over, South Australia, 2019-2023**

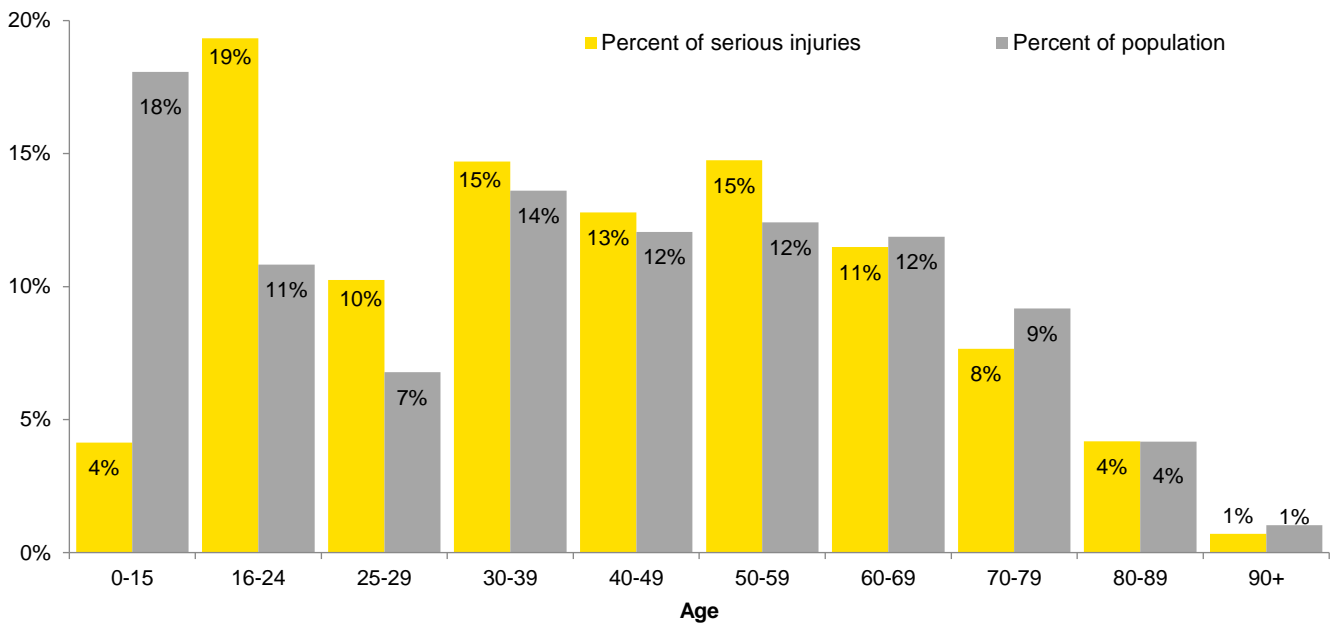
Year	Lives lost	Serious injury	Minor injury	Total
2019	29	109	446	584
2020	18	90	371	479
2021	18	95	393	506
2022	11	83	387	481
2023	23	103	402	528
<b>Average</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>516</b>
Trend change	-9.1%	-1.9%	-1.6%	-2.0%

Older drivers are far less likely than young drivers to be involved in crashes characterised by loss of control, speeding, risky overtaking or drink driving. Figures 1a and 1b highlight the differences in the distribution of lives lost and serious injuries amongst age groups. Road users aged 70+ years are overrepresented in lives lost.

**Figure 1a: Lives lost by age and population distribution, South Australia, 2019-2023**



**Figure 1b: Serious injuries by age and population distribution, South Australia, 2019-2023**



**Older driver crash rates**

Older drivers are much less likely to be involved in a crash resulting in a life lost or serious injury than younger drivers (Figure 2). For drivers/riders aged 70 and over the rate of involvement in a crash resulting in a life lost or serious injury was on average 5.4 people per 10,000 licence holders each year between 2019 and 2023. In comparison the rate of involvement was 12.2 for drivers/riders aged 16 to 24 and 7.2 for those aged 25 to 69 years.

**Figure 2: Rate of driver/rider involvement in lives lost and serious injury crashes per 10,000 licences held by age, South Australia, 2019-2023**

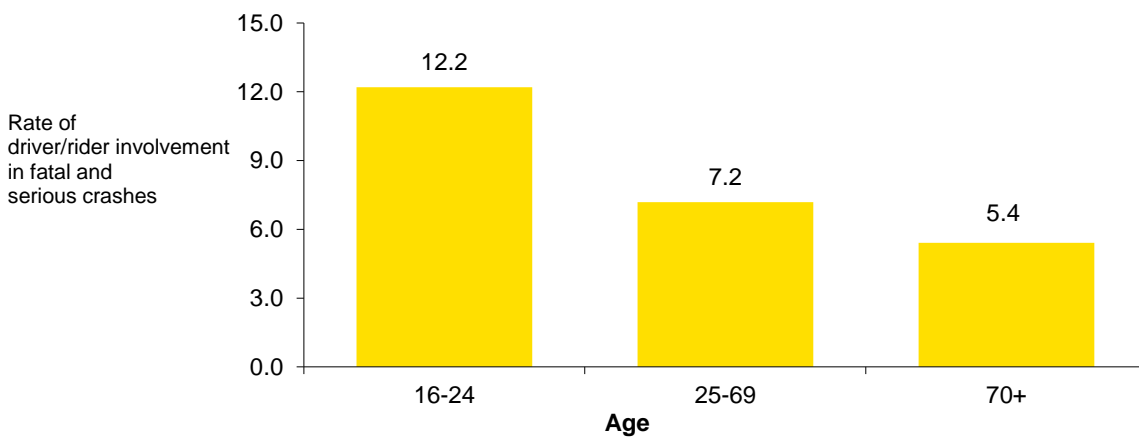
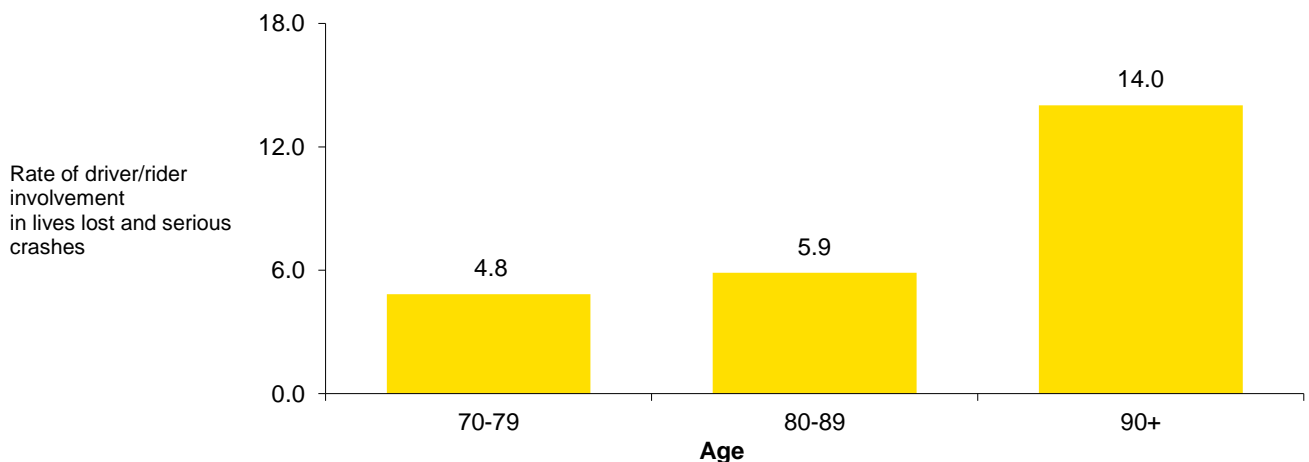


Figure 3 shows that the rate of involvement in a casualty crash for older drivers (70+ years) increases as a driver ages. Licence holders aged 90+ have an involvement in lives lost and serious crashes rate of 14.0 per 10,000 licence holders per year for the past five years. Yet this age group represent less than 1% of all licence holders and less than 1% of all drivers involved in a serious casualty crash.

**Figure 3: Rate of 70+ years old driver/rider involvement in lives lost and serious crashes per 10,000 licences held by age, South Australia, 2019-2023**



As a driver ages, they are more likely to be responsible for the crash they are involved in. In South Australia, over the past five years, 59% of drivers/riders aged 60 to 69, 64% aged 70 to 79 and 77% aged 80 years and over were responsible for the crashes they were involved in which resulted in a life lost or serious injury.

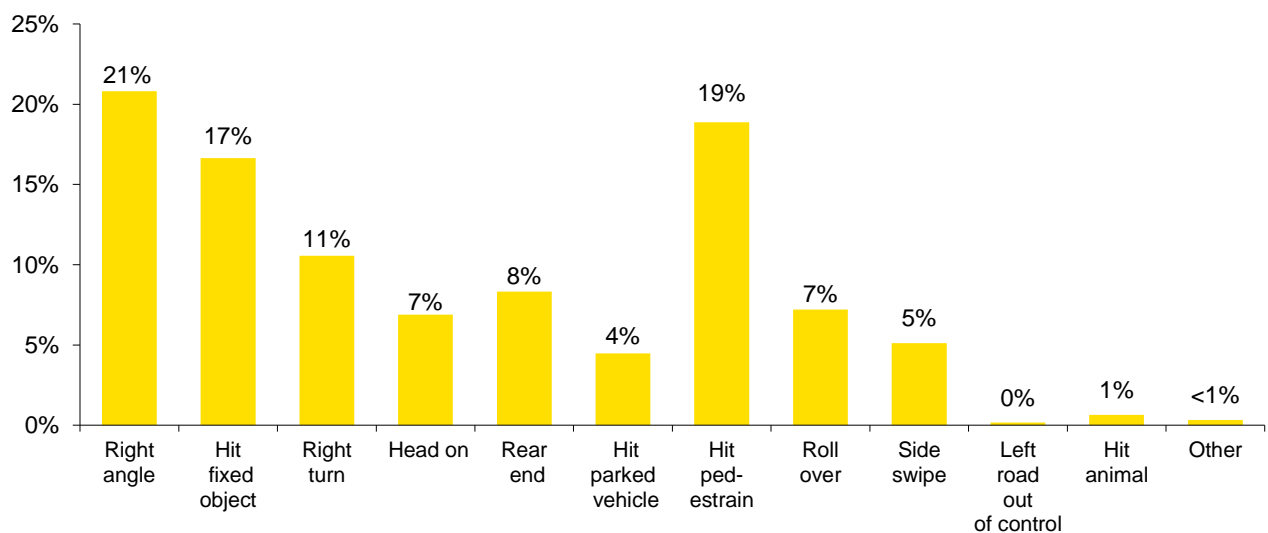
**Types of crashes involving older drivers**

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury at intersections than other drivers. Between 2019 and 2023, 41% of older driver crashes occurred at intersections, compared to 33% of all crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury generally.

As shown in Figure 4, 21% of crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury involving older drivers are right angle crashes. This compares to 15% of crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury for all road users. Intersections and junctions are complex traffic environments, in which the driver has to process a variety of information while under time pressures. Personal conditions that may further complicate this manoeuvre and impair driving ability include diminished hearing and eyesight, slower decision-making, slower reflexes, reduced agility, and reduced muscle strength.

Other common crash types involving older drivers/riders include hit pedestrian, hit fixed object, and right turn crashes. Older drivers/riders are less likely to be involved in serious casualty roll over crashes compared to the population in general.

**Figure 4: Types of lives lost and serious crashes involving drivers/riders aged 70+ years, South Australia, 2019-2023**



### Crash location and speed limits

Most crashes resulting in a life lost or serious injury involving drivers/riders aged 70 and over occur in metropolitan areas. Table 2 shows the breakdown of crashes involving older drivers/riders by speed limit and area between 2019 and 2023. These results are comparable with those recorded for all South Australian drivers/riders.

**Table 2: Location and speed limits of lives lost and serious injury crashes involving drivers/riders aged 70+ years, South Australia, 2019-2023**

Speed limit	Metropolitan	Regional
50km/h and under	27%	17%
60km/h	53%	11%
70-90km/h	16%	12%
100km/h and over	4%	60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Behaviour

Older drivers are generally more cautious and exhibit less illegal and dangerous driving behaviour than other age groups. Between 2019 and 2023, 5% of older drivers/riders aged 70 years and over who were killed and tested for blood alcohol concentration (BAC), recorded a BAC of 0.05 or above. This is lower than younger (16 to 24) drivers/riders (19%). In the past five years, 11% of older drivers and passengers killed were not wearing their seatbelt, compared to 43% of younger drivers and passengers.

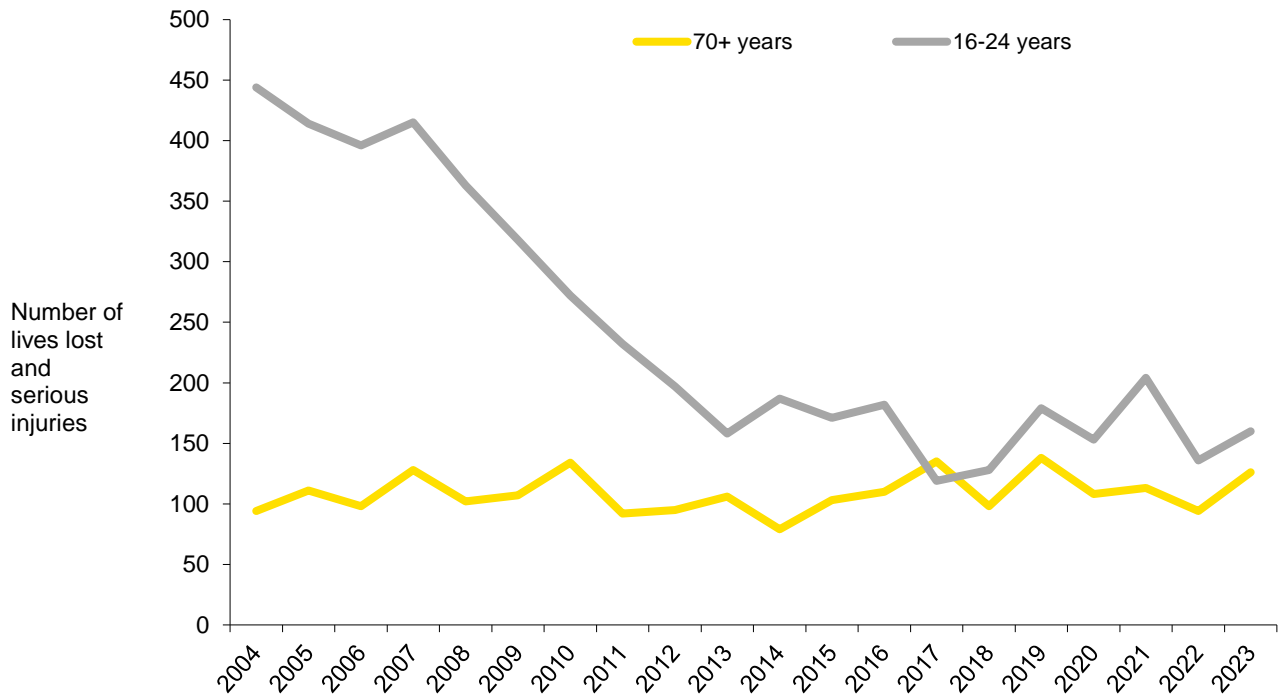
Crash statistics infer that older drivers typically control their exposure to risk when driving by avoiding driving at night or in peak hours. In the past five years, 71% of serious casualty crashes involving older drivers occurred between 9am and 5pm compared to 50% of all drivers/riders.

Older drivers are also more likely to take short trips in familiar areas. In the past five years, 31% of older drivers crashed in the same postcode they were living, compared to 22% of drivers under the age of 70.

### Trend over the past 20 years

In 2004, the number of lives lost and serious injuries for the 16 to 24 age group was significantly higher than the 70+ age group. Over the past 20 years, the number of lives lost and serious injuries for the 16 to 24 age group has decreased at a rate of -6.2% per year. For the 70+ age group there has been an increase in a rate of 0.5% per year during the same time period (Figure 5).

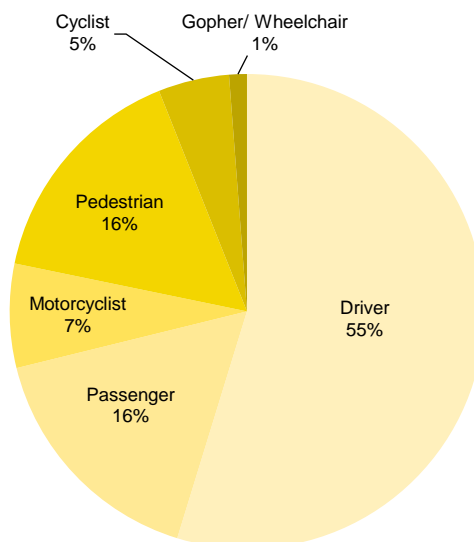
Figure 5: Lives lost and serious injuries, 16-24 years and 70+ years, South Australia, 2004-2023



**Road user types**

Figure 6 shows that between 2019 and 2023, 71% of older road users who lost their lives or were seriously injured were drivers or passengers, 17% were pedestrians (includes gopher and wheelchair), 7% were motorcyclists and 5% were cyclists.

Figure 6: Road users 70+ years, lives lost and serious injuries, South Australia, 2019-2023



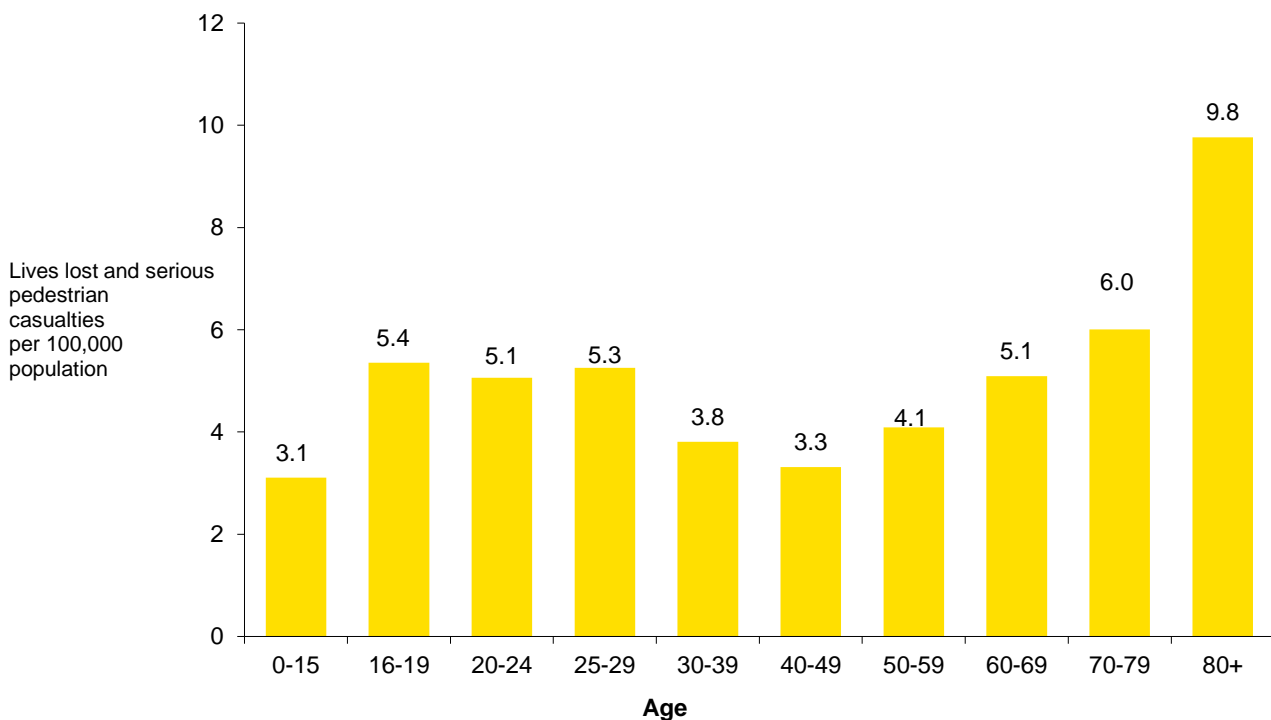
**Sex<sup>1</sup>**

Between 2019 and 2023, 69% of South Australians who lost their life or were seriously injured in road crashes were male and 31% were female. However, for the older road user population, the difference was much smaller whereby 54% of lives lost and serious injuries were male and 46% were female. This can be partly explained by the longer life expectancy of females and a reduction in risk taking behaviour by older males.

**Older pedestrians<sup>2</sup>**

Figure 7 shows the number of pedestrians who lost their life or were seriously injured per 100,000 population by age group. Older pedestrians have a higher risk of collision with road vehicles due to the perceptual, cognitive and physical deterioration associated with ageing. If an older person is hit by a car, the outcome is likely to be more severe, resulting in a life lost rather than an injury. Many older people also have a greater reliance on walking and are therefore more likely to be exposed to traffic as pedestrians than younger age groups<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 7: Pedestrian lives lost and serious injuries per 100,000 population, South Australia, 2019-2023**



<sup>1</sup> Sex as captured by SAPOL officer or as recorded in the Department’s registration and licensing system (TRUMPS). Gender data is not currently collected.

<sup>2</sup> Pedestrians include gopher and wheelchair users.

<sup>3</sup> Page 203 ‘Road Safety in Australia. A publication commemorating World Health Day 2004’ Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

## Definitions of police reported casualty types:

**Casualty crash** – crash where at least one life lost, serious injury or minor injury occurs.

**Casualty** – A life lost, serious injury or minor injury.

**Fatal crash** – A crash for which there is at least one life lost.

**Life lost** – A person who dies within 30 days of a crash as a result of injuries sustained in that crash.

**Serious injury crash** – A non-fatal crash in which at least one person is seriously injured.

**Serious injury** – A person who sustains injuries and is admitted to hospital for a duration of at least 24 hours as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor injury crash** – A crash in which at least one person sustains injury but no person is admitted to hospital or dies within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor injury** – A person who sustains injuries that require medical treatment, either by a doctor or in a hospital, because of a road crash and who was not admitted to hospital and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Property damage only crash** – A crash resulting in property damage in excess of the prescribed amount in which no person is injured or dies within 30 days of the crash.

## Data sources

The data presented in this report was obtained from the Department for Infrastructure and Transport Road Crash Database. The information was compiled from police reported road casualty crashes only.

Note- Percentage totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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