

Graduated driver licensing in Canada: slowly but surely

Graduated driver licensing programs vary significantly across the country but new evidence about best practices shows there is room for improvement (see editorial, pages 737 and 739).

Since 1994, nearly every province has implemented some form of graduated driver licensing program, where new drivers are gradually introduced to more challenging driving. These include everything from lower demerit point thresholds to zero tolerance for drinking alcohol (the drinking age is 18 in Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec, and 19 elsewhere in Canada).

The Traffic Injury Research Foundation, an independent road safety institute, has identified best practices for graduated licensing, and emphasized 5 priorities (Table 1). Most jurisdictions are doing well in implementing these but there are notable lapses, such as the lack of a ban on night driving for learners, says Senior Vice President, Dan Mayhew.

Mayhew is also concerned that

many jurisdictions now shorten the duration of learner's permit for youths who take driver's education. These so-called "time discounts" are "peculiar to Canada," he says. And there is "little evidence" that driver's education reduces accidents.

"These drivers may have more skills, but not as much practice as another driver," says Mayhew. In British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia "time discounts" proved to have a negative effect; as trained youth had more crashes than untrained ones.

The foundation also recommends a learner stage of at least 12 months with certified practice requirements.

Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and BC are in the midst of updating GDL legislation. Nova Scotia, for example, is planning stronger legislation in regard to blood alcohol levels, as well as an extended learner stage.

For more information see *Best practices for graduated driver licensing in Canada* (www.trafficinjuryresearch.com). — Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

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Mixed reviews for Canada's new food guide

Federal health minister Tony Clement believes it's state-of-the-art and some praise the newly updated Canada Food Guide as sound nutritional advice, but critics aren't convinced that recent revisions to the 65-year-old document will do enough to minimize the risk of chronic disease and have failed Canadians by neglecting to include guidelines for daily caloric intake.

Health Canada lauded the guide's addition of clearer information about serving sizes that are based on age (including preschoolers) and sex, while touting the value of a "create your own guide" Web tool that allows Canadians to integrate personal food preferences into the guide (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/). The 6-page guide, last revised 15 years ago, also advises limiting fat, sugar, salt and processed foods, and encourages more exercise. It also urges Canadians over age 50 to take a vitamin D supplement to reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Three years and roughly \$1.5 million in the making, "the new food guide in-

Table 1: Priorities for best practices for graduated driver licensing in Canada

Province/territory	Learner's permit			Intermediate licence	
	Duration ≥ 12 mo	50 h of supervised driving	No "time discount" for driver's education*	No solo night driving 9 pm-6 am	No teen passengers when driving unsupervised
Newfoundland and Labrador	✓	X	X	X†	X
Prince Edward Island	X	X	X	X	X
Nova Scotia	X	X	X	X†	X
New Brunswick	✓	X	X	X	X
Quebec	✓	X	X	X	X
Ontario	✓	X	X	X	X
Manitoba	X	X	✓	X	X
Saskatchewan	X	X	✓	X	X
Alberta	✓	X	✓	X	X
British Columbia	✓	X	X	X	X
Yukon Territory	X	✓	✓	X†	X
Northwest Territories	✓	X	✓	X	X
Nunavut	X	X	✓	X	X

Source: *Best practices for graduated driver licensing in Canada*, 2005, Traffic Injury Research Foundation, Ottawa, Ont.

*Duration of learner's permits is not shortened for youth who take driver's education.

†These jurisdictions prohibit unsupervised night driving from midnight to 5 am.