

04-09

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Graduated Driver Licensing

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports legislation in all states that supports and promotes comprehensive graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws. GDL includes three stages: learner's permit, intermediate license, and full or unrestricted license.<sup>7</sup> The learner's permit stage provides the opportunity to practice basic driving skills and safe driving practices under supervised conditions. The intermediate license stage provides behind-the-wheel practice under restricted conditions and exposes the driver to more demanding situations. The final stage, full or unrestricted license, allows the driver unlimited driving privileges. GDL should be part of a comprehensive motor vehicle safety strategy that includes efforts to address distracted driving, seat belt use and driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

NACCHO supports the robust GDL policies for all newly licensed drivers recommended by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators and the National Highway Safety Administration.<sup>1</sup> These recommendations include:

1. Supervised learner permit period for individuals at least 16 years old for at least six months to accumulate a minimum of 50 to 100 hours of supervised practice driving in a wide variety of supervised driving practice environments and conditions with restrictions on nighttime driving.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
2. A requirement that the driver be accompanied by a supervising licensed driver, who is at least 21 years of age.<sup>2,3</sup>
3. A requirement that the applicant pass a vision screening and knowledge test on general rules of the road, as well as proof of parental consent if applicant is under the age of 18.<sup>3</sup>
4. An intermediate stage of licensing with a minimum entry age of at least 17 years old.<sup>1</sup>
5. A requirement that drivers at the intermediate stage of licensing be accompanied by a supervising licensed driver, that is at least 21 years of age and who has been fully licensed for at least one year.<sup>1</sup> A nighttime driving restriction for intermediate license holders, beginning no later than 10:00 pm and continuing until no earlier than 5:00 am.<sup>3</sup>
6. Driving restriction on the number of teenage passengers allowed in the car.<sup>1,3</sup>
7. A restriction prohibiting the use of mobile devices (including usage of hands-free options) for sending or reading text messages.
8. Ongoing funding and research to test, refine, and redefine the best practices for the ideal state driver education and training program.<sup>3</sup>
9. Inclusion, incorporation, or integration of driver education and training that meets or exceeds current nationally accepted content standards and benchmarks.<sup>4</sup>
  - a. Improve access to affordable driver education programs.<sup>5</sup>
  - b. Develop accessible and culturally appropriate parent and teen training programs that provide information on specific GDL law requirements and provisions, including how parents can support their teens through the GDL process.<sup>6</sup>

- c. Integrate technology into the training and licensing process for new drivers (i.e., simulation).<sup>7,8</sup>
10. Driver education and training for all new drivers under 20 years of age that requires core driver educational hours (a minimum of 45 hours of classroom/theory; a minimum of 10 hours of behind the wheel instruction; and a minimum of 10 hours of in-car observation) that focus on the driving task and safe driving practices sufficient to meet the criteria established by the end-of-course examination.<sup>3</sup>

NACCHO draws attention to the important role local health departments play in working with law enforcement agencies, the medical community, the media, schools, parents/legal guardians, driving instructors, and other stakeholders to monitor teen motor vehicle safety data, to educate the public about GDL laws, and to support the enforcement of GDL and other motor vehicle safety laws.

### **Justification**

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens (ages 13-19).<sup>9</sup> Every year, over 2,000 teens lose their lives in motor vehicle crashes.<sup>10</sup> Among teen drivers, those most at risk of motor vehicle crashes are males, teens driving with teen passengers, and newly licensed teens.<sup>11</sup> Driver inexperience and risk-taking behavior (e.g., speeding, allowing shorter headways, drinking alcohol, and distracted driving) put teens at a heightened risk for crashes.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, compared to older drivers, teens are less likely to recognize dangerous or hazardous situations and are less likely wear seat belts.<sup>12</sup>

GDL programs are associated with reductions in fatal and non-fatal injury crashes among young drivers.<sup>13</sup> Research suggests that comprehensive GDL programs are associated with a 19% reduction in injury crashes and a 21% reduction in fatal crashes among 16-year-old drivers.<sup>11</sup> Comprehensive GDL programs provide longer practice periods, limit driving under high risk conditions (driving at night or with teenage passengers), and require greater participation of parents/legal guardians in their teens' learning to drive.<sup>14</sup> These programs typically include age requirements, a waiting period of at least three months, nighttime driving restrictions, passenger restrictions, and 30 or more hours of supervised driving.

GDL laws vary by state, but all 50 states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have implemented all or some of the GDL components; 37 states and D.C. ban all cell phone use by novice drivers, 49 states and D.C. restrict nighttime driving during the intermediate stage, and 47 states and D.C. restrict the number of passengers during the intermediate stage.<sup>14</sup> Local health departments must work to strengthen GDL laws to prevent crashes and safeguard new drivers, other drivers, passengers, and pedestrians from preventable injuries and deaths.

### **References**

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## **Record of Action**

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