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## **National Grant Funds Project to Address Safety and Wellbeing of Older Drivers**

Researchers at the UC San Diego School of Medicine will share a \$12 million grant with peer institutions across the United States to better understand the factors that influence the safety of older drivers, such as physical and cognitive functions, medical conditions, medications and adoption of vehicle technologies.

The study, called the Longitudinal Research on Aging Drivers (LongROAD) project is funded by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and led by Guohua Li, DrPH, MD, professor of epidemiology at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. As the largest research initiative of the AAA Foundation, the LongROAD project represents a long-term commitment by the agency to support the well-being of older drivers.

“To many older adults, driving is essential for maintaining mobility and independence,” said Linda Hill, MD, MPH, LongROAD co-investigator, professor and specialist in preventive medicine in the UC San Diego School of Medicine. “Unfortunately, declines in physical and cognitive functions may compromise the safety of these drivers. This project will provide insight into how to help older adults retain their driving privilege as long as safely possible, and how to provide them with comfortable and convenient transportation alternatives when they stop driving.”

A total of 3,000 active drivers aged 65-79 years will be recruited from five study sites in California, Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, and New York, and follow these drivers through annual assessments and interviews. To learn about their driving patterns, researchers will fit each driver’s vehicle with a GPS device.

“By 2029, more than one in five Americans will be over the age of 65. Understanding their driving patterns, health, and transportation needs is a matter of public health and safety for all drivers,” said Hill. “Yet we have very limited observed data about the dynamic interplay between health and driving safety during the process of aging – a knowledge gap identified by the National Institute on Aging as a key strategic research priority. This project aims to close that gap.”

The LongROAD project will enhance the extensive outreach that Hill has achieved as director of the Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety (TREDS) project at UC San Diego. TREDS training for health care professionals and law enforcement increases awareness and management of impairments common with aging that can impact driving ability. More than 6,000 health professionals and 3,500 law enforcement officers in California have received TREDS training, and several thousand more have been reached nationwide.

Participating institutions in the LongROAD project include Columbia University, University of Michigan, the Urban Institute, Bassett Research Institute, Johns Hopkins University, and University of Colorado, Denver.

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