



# Driver Training and Examination

## 2023 Value-for-Money Audit

### Why we did this audit

- The Ministry of Transportation (Ministry) is responsible for protecting the public by restricting the privilege of driving to those who demonstrate they have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to drive safely.
- COVID-19 pandemic-related closures and restrictions in 2020 resulted in a significant backlog of road tests.
- A 10-year contract with a service provider to deliver driver examination services ended in 2023. The Ministry intended to perform an extensive evaluation of service delivery options.

### Why it matters

- Ensuring that novice drivers acquire effective training and pass the Ministry road test requirements before receiving a driver's licence is a crucial step in keeping Ontario's roads safe.
- Although Ontario's road fatality rate consistently ranks among the lowest in North America, increasing the effectiveness of Ministry programs could help further reduce the number of collisions.

### What we found

#### The Ministry Did Not Have Effective Programs to Consistently Assess Novice Drivers

- Novice drivers from urban areas who took road tests at rural or suburban examination centres had collision rates 16% to 27% higher than novice drivers who took road tests near their homes.
- In January 2022, the Ministry eliminated testing of certain manoeuvres required for the highway road test. Even though the backlog was cleared in fall 2022, the Ministry kept the reduced highway road test for almost two years longer than originally planned without conducting proper policy analysis and evaluation of the road safety implications. At the time of our audit, it was still in place.
- Less-experienced drivers who hold a driver's licence from a country without a licence exchange agreement with Ontario had a significantly higher collision rate (6.31%) compared with the average rate of newly licensed G-class drivers (3.60%), as the 12-month wait period was not required.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS 1, 2 and 7

#### The Ministry's Oversight of Driver Training Services Was Limited

- The Ministry allows novice drivers who complete the optional Beginner Driver Education program to choose to shorten their 12-month wait period for the city road test by up to four months.
  - We found that between 2013 and 2022 drivers who shortened their wait period had collision rates that were on average 30% higher than drivers who completed the program but did not shorten their wait period (4.8% compared with 3.7%).
- We identified questionable driving-training practices, such as instructors "route training" their students on specific streets and manoeuvres tested during the exams. Focusing primarily on route training rather than teaching comprehensive driving skills may undermine the integrity of the driving examination process.
- Eleven out of 14 driving schools we sampled allowed the students to shorten, or even abandon, their in-car training but still issued their students Beginner Driver Education certificates.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS 4, 5 and 6

**Assessment and Monitoring of High-Risk Licensed Drivers Should Be Strengthened**

- The Ministry rarely requires drivers with repeat driving suspensions to take retraining courses. In 2022, drivers who received two or more suspensions in the previous year had a fatal collision rate six times higher than the general driver population.
- The Ministry's assessment of drivers aged 80 and older does not effectively reduce the risk of these drivers causing collisions.

**RECOMMENDATIONS 8, 9 and 10**

**The Ministry's Oversight of the Driver Examination Service Provider Did Not Improve Service Levels**

- Ministry data showed that the driver examination services offered by the service provider experienced numerous performance failures over the 10-year contract period. The Ministry's contract oversight functions were not effective in holding the service provider accountable.
- Even though the service contract stipulated that costs related to providing driver examination services were the responsibility of the service provider, the Ministry paid additional funds to attempt to improve the services.
  - The Ministry estimated that between November 2017 and September 2023 it paid the service provider about \$19.2 million to extend operating hours to respond to growing customer demands.
- The Ministry awarded a new contract to the same service provider without a competition because the procurement process started too late.

**RECOMMENDATIONS 12, 15 and 16**

**The Ministry Did Not Include Key Indicators For Measuring Program Effectiveness**

- When the Ministry compared road safety trends in Ontario with other provinces, it did not include key indicators such as total collision rates in determining the performance of its programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 18**

**Conclusions**

- The Ministry did not have effective evidence-based driver examination programs to evaluate and test novice drivers thoroughly and consistently.
- The Ministry's oversight of driving schools and instructors was limited. It does not regulate driver training services outside of the optional Beginner Driver Education program.
- The Ministry's monitoring programs were not designed to proactively identify drivers with repeat suspensions or high-risk medical conditions, impeding the effectiveness of these programs to maximize road safety in Ontario.
- The Ministry's contract oversight of the driver examination service provider has not been effective in improving driver examination service levels.
- The performance measures that the Ministry used to evaluate road safety programs, including driver training and examination programs, were incomplete.

Read the report at [www.auditor.on.ca](http://www.auditor.on.ca)