Recommendations for Applying the Shared Risk and Protective Factors Approach to Reduce Risky Driving Behavior

A. Use and share the definitions for risk factor, protective factor, behavior change strategies, and evidence-based strategies established by this report and consistent with instituted definitions from global public health organizations.

All state and local public health, traffic safety, mental health, substance abuse, and public safety agencies that implement program strategies related to risky driving behaviors should use and share the definitions when collaborating with key stakeholders or implementation partners on program planning, implementation, and evaluation activities.

B. Identify any biological and personal history factors that protect against risky driving behaviors and promote driver safety.

Some of these factors are age, education, income, or substance use. State and local public health, traffic safety offices, and public safety agencies can collaboratively implement prevention strategies that promote attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that prevent risky driving behaviors. Specific approaches may include population-specific educational campaigns and life skills training.

C. Identify any relational or social factors that increase risky driving behaviors and promote safe driving practices.

An individual’s closest social circle—peers, partners, and family members influence their behavior and contributes to their experience. State and local public health, traffic safety, and public safety agencies can collaboratively implement interventions at this level that may include parenting or family-focused prevention programs, mentoring and peer programs designed to reduce stress and foster problem-solving skills, programs that promote healthy relationships, and provide healthy alternatives for negative coping mechanisms.

D. Identify the settings, such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, in which social relationships occur that encourage or discourage risky driving behaviors and safe driving practices.

State and local public health, traffic safety, and public safety agencies can work together to recognize the characteristics of these settings and how they are associated with engaging in risky driving behaviors and implement the appropriate strategies or interventions designed to impact social and physical environments. For example, reducing social isolation, improving economic and housing opportunities in neighborhoods, as well as enhancing the climate, processes, and policies within local jurisdictions, schools, and workplace settings.
E. Identify the broad societal factors that help create a climate in which engaging in risky driving behaviors is encouraged or inhibited.

These factors can include any social and cultural norms that support aggressive or risky behavior as acceptable. Other large societal factors include the health, economic, educational, and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequities between groups in society. State and local public health, traffic safety, and public safety agencies can work together to implement prevention strategies such as the enforcement of primary seat belt laws, the introduction or testing of technology features in vehicles, enforcement of penalties related to mobile phone use policies for drivers, and reducing the availability of or access to alcohol, illicit or prescription drugs.

F. Prioritize shared risk and protective factors when selecting strategies or interventions to address risky driving behaviors.

Consider addressing risk factors and/or protective factors that relate to more than one driving behavior. For example, high levels of depression and anxiety are known risk factors for aggressive driving and speeding, distracted driving, alcohol-impaired driving, and other drug-impaired driving. Low levels of depression and anxiety are known protective factors against alcohol-impaired driving and other drug-impaired driving behaviors.

G. Collaborate with researchers to operationalize and examine how social determinants of health increase the risk of unsafe driving practices or protect individuals, families, or communities from risky driving behaviors.

Additional research can help state and local public health, traffic safety, and public safety agencies identify the appropriate partnerships (e.g., educational systems, the workplace, housing authorities, healthcare agencies, built environment, etc.) and scale-up program or policy strategies that support healthy behaviors and promote driver safety.

H. Collaborate with research institutions to examine associations between psychosocial factors, environmental influences, social inequity, risky driving behaviors, and multiple health outcomes.

Future research can combine all these elements through theoretical models such as the Social Ecological Model, Theory of Planned Behavior or Theory of Change to develop population-specific interventions that address risk factors and promote protective factors.