



Photo: Township of Schaumburg, Illinois





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NADTC's Mission is to increase accessible transportation options for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers nationwide.

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Meeting the Transportation Needs of Diverse Older Adults and People with Disabilities

Introduction

The population of older adults and people with disabilities in the U.S. continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. The percentage of the population that is aged 65 and over is expected to grow from 15 percent to 24 percent between 2014 and 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). As the population continues to age, the rate of people with disabilities increases. According to the 2017 Disability Statistics Annual Report (2017), the percentage of those with a disability in the U.S. civilian population increased from 11.9% in 2010 to 12.8% in 2016. Addressing the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities is key to ensuring the health and well-being of these groups for years to come. Transportation has been deemed a social determinant of health, noting that a lack of transportation access can have wide-ranging and lasting impacts on a person's health status. The American Journal of Public Health (2020) reported that 5.8 million people delayed medical care in the U.S. in 2017, because they did not have transportation.

As the number of older Americans in the U.S. increases, the aging population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The share of the older population that is non-Hispanic white is projected to drop from 77 percent to 55 percent between 2018 and 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Additionally, the foreign-born population aged 65 and older is projected to increase by over 300 percent between 2014 and 2060, from 6 million in 2014 to 25 million in 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015).

Based on a supplemental analysis of NADTC's 2017 poll of older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers, we found that African Americans, Hispanic Americans and whites differ in notable ways in the way they use alternative forms of transportation. However, the data we collected at that time was not sufficiently representative of the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of the United States from which to draw conclusions. As a Center, we needed to know more and decided to dig deeper.

At the start the Center's fifth year, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) embarked on a multi-pronged initiative to shine a light on transportation challenges that specifically impact diverse older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers. This initiative encompasses racial, ethnic and cultural diversity and includes Tribal elders and people with disabilities, new immigrant groups, those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and non-English speakers.

This Trends Report serves as a brief introduction to the challenges and opportunities of addressing the transportation needs of diverse older adults and people with disabilities and highlights the work that local programs are engaged in regarding these issues. This brief also discusses current research findings and recommendations for future research to move the needle forward in addressing the transportation needs of these diverse populations.

The Challenge

All too often, transportation options for older adults and people with disabilities are limited, lacking in accessibility and affordability or simply just not available in many areas. Accessing transportation for older adults and people with disabilities can be challenging, but for ethnically and culturally diverse members of these population groups, connecting with transportation options poses a unique set of challenges and barriers.



Understanding the transportation challenges facing diverse older adults and people with disabilities can help to shed light on transportation gaps experienced by many, if not all, older adults and people with disabilities. However, it is imperative to recognize that historic inequities based on race, ethnicity and culture continue to produce disparities in service availability and accessibility in communities across the U.S.

Understanding the Key Challenges Facing Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Older Adults and People with Disabilities

In the United States, transportation has been identified as one of three major types of infrastructure that contribute to the separation of the races, along with housing and education. (Brenman, 2007). Transportation services are often not available to all older adults and people with disabilities. This is especially true in rural areas, but it is also true for certain groups who live in communities with extensive transportation resources. Institutional and systemic configurations have been at the core of transportation inequities and disparities affecting diverse groups for centuries, and they remain present today.

People of color are more likely to live in low-income neighborhoods where income inequality is highest and access to transportation options is low. Diverse population groups experience several barriers to transportation that are distinctly their own, including economic challenges. Research supports that “inefficient, crumbling and scarce public transportation options” are directly related to income inequality (Velan, 2015). For example, Black households are more

than three times more likely to have no access to a vehicle as white households (National Equality Access, n.d.). This could be a result of location, cultural or ethnic attitudes and preferences, but certainly illustrates a reliance on public transportation by those experiencing economic hardship.

Culturally and ethnically diverse older adults and people with disabilities who do not drive especially rely on public transportation. NADTC’s 2017 poll of older adults and people with disabilities found that cost was a significant barrier to accessing transportation for many; however, the availability of alternative transportation options was the biggest barrier reported. Currently, we are seeing transportation systems struggle to serve essential workers living in low-income and underserved communities. Service suspensions that have resulted from the global pandemic disproportionately affect people of all ages and circumstances living in these neighborhoods.

There are several challenges diverse older adults and people with disabilities experience when trying to find and access public transportation and other alternatives. These challenges can include a lack of translated materials (i.e., signage, schedules) in the native language of the rider or for limited English-speaking individuals. Another challenge is lack of outreach to communities of color, including Tribes, immigrant groups, those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and non-English speakers by transportation systems and programs to educate and inform these groups about services.

Residential isolation and segregation also play a role in how readily available and accessible transportation is for culturally and ethnically diverse older adults and people with disabilities. Because there is a heavier reliance on public transportation in underserved and vulnerable communities, these areas are often labeled “transit deserts.” “Transit deserts, like food deserts, occur when the demand for public transportation exceeds supply” (Tehrani, Wu & Roberts, 2019). If an older adult or person with a disability is fortunate enough to find a transportation option in their community, barriers may still exist in getting where they need or want to go. For those living in rural, Tribal or frontier communities, which are often segregated and isolated areas, one must consider the vast distances to travel to get to needed services or desired locations as a major barrier.

Because there is very little research and limited data on transportation equity for diverse older adults and people with disabilities, there is a great opportunity to focus particular attention on this topic. We are encouraged to know of local transportation agencies and organizations that are working in partnership with ethnically diverse older adults and people with disabilities to

KEY CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- Economic inequities
- Lack of translated materials
- Lack of targeted outreach
- Residential segregation/isolation
- Vast distances to travel to get to places.

highlight and address the barriers associated with accessing transportation in underserved communities. Three of these programs are discussed in the following section.

Addressing the Transportation Needs of Diverse Populations

Demographic Scope

The total population of King County has grown by roughly a quarter million people since 2010. Individuals who were born in another country make up nearly half of this increase. This influx of immigrants and resettled refugees in King County is due to refugee resettlement programs and U.S. policies like the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

Overall, persons of color make up more than a third of Seattle's population. The 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that about 35.5% of Seattle residents are people of color. Based on the 2014-2018 ACS, Asians comprise the largest group (14.9% of the city's population). The next two most populous groups of color are persons of Black or African American race (6.8%) and persons who are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, any race (6.6%). Six percent of Seattle residents indicated two or more races.

Promising Practice

In June 2019, Hopelink and King County Mobility Coalition partnered to conduct a study titled, *“Transportation Barriers and Needs for Immigrants and Refugees: An Exploratory Needs Assessment.”* This report

aimed to provide a better understanding of the transportation needs and barriers immigrants and refugees face in King County in order to provide recommendations for transportation systems and policies that prioritize the needs of these communities. One of four key recommendations based on study findings included the need to develop a “One Stop Shop” for Transportation Services Specific to Immigrant and Refugee Needs. You can learn about other recommendations and access the full report, [here](#).



Promising Practice

Seattle Department of Transportation’s Transportation (SDOT) Equity Program provides safe, environmentally sustainable, accessible, and affordable transportation options that support communities of color, low-income communities, immigrant and refugee communities, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, the LGBTQ community, women and girls, youth, and



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seniors – to thrive in place in vibrant and healthy communities and mitigate racial disparities and the effects of displacement. In partnership with Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, King County Metro and King County Public Health, SDOT is providing income-eligible people living, working, learning, and playing in Seattle with a pre-loaded ORCA LIFT reduced fare card through engagement and enrollment. To learn more about this Low-Income Transit Access program and other activities visit: [Transportation Equity Program](#)

Demographic Scope

The County of Los Angeles is one of the largest, most populous, and ethnically diverse counties in the entire nation, and the aging population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse than any other county in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), Los Angeles had the largest American Indian or Alaska Native population (229,594), the largest Asian population (1,716,196) and the largest Hispanic population (4,881,970) in 2019 in the U.S.



Promising Practice

Purposeful Aging Los Angeles (PALA) – An Age-Friendly Initiative – seeks to prepare the Los Angeles region for a rapidly aging population through an innovative, sustained initiative that unites public and private leadership, resources, ideas and strategies. PALA seeks to improve the lives of older adults and Angelenos of all ages. The PALA Initiative Age-Friendly Action Plan report outlines action plan recommendations across the transportation livable domain for their growing diverse aging populations. Recommendations included: 1) ensuring that current and new public transportation systems reflect the needs of a growing older adult population (including individuals with physical and cognitive needs) and 2) supporting the ability of older adults to safely walk in their communities as a means of transportation, through infrastructure enhancements in areas with a high-density of older adults. You can access the full report [here](#).

Future Work for the NADTC

As a part of NADTC's *Transportation Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* initiative, the Center has partnered with organizations that represent racially, ethnically and culturally diverse groups with expertise in accessible transportation, aging and disability, to serve on our National Advisory Committee on Transportation Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Center will conduct a national diversity transportation environmental scan to gauge opinions and obtain information from a representative sample of racially, ethnically and culturally diverse older

adults, people with disabilities and family caregivers about their experiences accessing and using local transportation options in the United States. This survey will launch in the first quarter of 2021.

Conclusion

From 2015 to 2060, the number of Black older adults in the U.S. will nearly triple, and the number of Hispanic older adults will more than quintuple, while the number of whites will not quite double in size. (Fox-Grage, 2016). Additionally, more than 40 million people currently living in the U.S. were born in another country (Budiman, 2020). Recent events underscore the critical importance of addressing barriers and inequities in public programs and policies that discriminate on the basis of race, culture or ethnicity.



Now, more than ever, is the time to explore the unique transportation barriers and needs of diverse older adults and people with disabilities. We hope that the findings from our national survey and our partnership and coordination with the National Advisory Committee on Transportation Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, as well as other local organizations that are implementing solutions for providing transportation to community residents who are underserved and most vulnerable, will effectively guide our future work in promoting education, guidance and support for communities to encourage development of transportation services that are equitable and accessible to all.

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