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National Aging and Disability Transportation Center  
[contact@nadtc.org](mailto:contact@nadtc.org)  
866-983-3222





# EVERYONE RIDES

Transportation Access for Culturally  
and Ethnically Diverse Elders

## **Acknowledgements**

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- Page 1 – Senior Transports, Laguna Pueblo
- Page 3 – Meeting of the National Coalition, December 16, 2008  
Left to right: Linda Morales, Sergio Perez, Jed Johnson, Mary Brugger Murphy, Helly Lee, Dr. Steven Wallace, Doug Birnie, Kim Ruliffson, Lynn Winchell-Mendy, Maria Carrasquillo
- Page 7 – Cherokee Trails – Eastern Band Public Transit
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# Transportation Access for Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders

## Introduction

The mission of the National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST or Center) is to increase transportation options for older adults, thus enhancing their ability to live more independently within their communities throughout the United States. To accomplish that mission, the Center provides technical assistance and training to transportation, aging and other human services programs and provides support for community innovations. From the Center's inception, cultural and ethnic diversity was identified as an important focus of its work, encompassing the following planned activities:

- Identify problems, challenges and opportunities for meeting the transportation needs of an increasingly diverse older population;
- Develop recommendations for action to address the issues at the local, state and national levels; and
- Assist states and local communities in implementing promising approaches and strategies to meet the transportation needs of diverse elders.



## Overview

To address the unique challenges of elder mobility in the United States today, it is essential to focus particular attention to the needs of the

culturally and ethnically diverse elders who make up an increasing proportion of the 65+ older population. In 2007, 19.3% of Americans aged 65 and older belonged to minority groups, including African Americans, persons of Hispanic origin, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Native Alaskans. In 2020, culturally and ethnically diverse elders will comprise 23.6% of the total older population in the US.<sup>1</sup>

Culturally and ethnically diverse elders face a number of mobility challenges that are distinctly their own. For instance, approximately 21% of all American elders do not drive. However, when the data is analyzed by culture and ethnicity, close to 40% of each group - African-American, Hispanic and Asian elders - do not drive, whereas only about 16% of Caucasian older adults do not.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for these differences are varied and likely to include a combination of residential location, discriminatory practices, and cultural and ethnic attitudes and preferences.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the impact of not driving typically leads to increased isolation, reducing elders' ability to keep medical appointments (by 15%), do grocery shopping (by 59%) and be socially engaged through visits with friends and family and participation in religious and civic activities (65% fewer trips).<sup>4</sup> Elders who do not drive need access to a variety of alternative transportation options.

To identify the challenges involved in addressing the mobility needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders, the National Center on Senior Transportation consulted with national organizations, research centers and transit organizations that target their services to culturally and

<sup>1</sup> A Profile of Older Americans: 2008. U.S. Administration on Aging Web Site ([www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)).

<sup>2</sup> Surface Transportation Policy Project, *Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Sandra Rosenbloom, *The Mobility Needs of Older Americans: Implications for Transportation Reauthorization*. The Brookings Institution, Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Surface Transportation Policy Project. Op. cit.

ethnically diverse elders. Individual interviews were conducted with representatives of the target groups and an invitation was issued to participate in the NCST's **National Coalition on Mobility Needs of Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders**.<sup>5</sup>

The Coalition met for the first time on December 16, 2008. During the meeting, Coalition members identified challenges facing each of the groups represented, as well as cross-cutting issues that impact all groups, and proposed recommendations to address the challenges.<sup>6</sup> An initial list of more than fifty recommendations proposed by Coalition members were subsequently refined and prioritized through an on-line survey and a web-based teleconference. This booklet contains the final list of the Coalition's *Recommendations for Action to Address the Mobility Needs of Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders*.



<sup>5</sup> A list of organizations and individuals involved in the National Coalition is included at the back of this booklet.

<sup>6</sup> A report describing the results of the meeting, *Engaging Stakeholders to Address the Transportation Needs of Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders*, is available on the NCST web site.

## Key Mobility Challenges Facing Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders

The Coalition identified a number of major challenges that impact access to transportation services for culturally and ethnically diverse elders. A major concern is the lack of knowledge among diverse elders and their caregivers about public transit and other transportation services available in the community.

Several issues contribute to this challenge, including:

- A lack of translated materials, as well as limited literacy, in the native languages spoken by immigrant and American Indian elders;
- A lack of targeted outreach by the transportation system to culturally and ethnically diverse elders;
- Isolation or segregation of many culturally and ethnically diverse communities;
- Vast distances to travel to get to needed services, particularly for American Indian elders living on reservations;
- Cultural mores that prohibit getting help outside the family; and
- Economic challenges facing many culturally and ethnically diverse elders, resulting in dependence on publicly funded transportation services.

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Additional challenges include a lack of transportation services of all kinds, including public transit, taxis and alternative transportation services in the neighborhoods where many diverse elders live. Limited resources are dedicated to addressing elders' mobility needs in culturally and ethnically diverse communities, a key issue for elders living in communities that are segregated by culture or ethnicity.

Currently, there is no mechanism for "connecting the dots" between transportation resources and the needs of these populations. Data on culturally and ethnically diverse elders' mobility needs is lacking and information about transportation resources and funding opportunities that might address these needs is not getting to the community organizations that have close connections to diverse elders.

## **Shared and Unique Challenges among Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Groups**

Although Coalition members identified many concerns and challenges that they have in common at the December 2008 meeting, each group also identified issues unique to the elders in their own communities.

- In the African-American community, churches play a pivotal role as emissaries and provide an important support network, including rides to church services, for the elderly.
- The protection of dignity and discretion is critical in Asian cultures and elders feel there is a stigma with asking for assistance. It is also important to keep in mind that multiple ethnicities and nations comprise the Asian community in the United States, each with its own languages and cultural mores.
- Among Latino elders, limited literacy in both their native Spanish as well as English requires the use of plain language and mostly oral presentations.

- American Indians have a distinct political and legal identity, with over 562 federally recognized tribes and tremendous diversity in the governance structures, demographics and funding streams for each tribe. Vast distances between destinations and a lack of paved roads in many parts of the reservation are just two of the challenges that need to be addressed.

## **National Coalition on Mobility Needs of Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders - Recommendations for Action**

The original list of more than fifty recommendations included: recommendations targeted to all culturally and ethnically diverse populations as well as recommendations designed to meet the needs of one particular group; broad-based recommendations and recommendations designed to remedy very specific issues; and recommendations for action at the local, state and federal levels, including recommendations for action by the National Center on Senior Transportation.

The recommendations are organized into five broad categories:

- Advocacy/Regulatory & Policy Change
- Data Collection/Research
- Local Coordination of Transportation
- Funding/Grantmaking
- Training/Information/Dissemination

The Coalition selected its final *Recommendations for Action* through a process that included two on-line surveys and participation in a discussion held via webinar in May 2009. The twenty recommendations that were finally adopted are not meant to be mutually exclusive, but intersect and complement one another. The recommendations are addressed to three specific audiences, each of which has an important role to play in addressing the challenges involved in meeting the mobility needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders. They are:

- The National Center on Senior Transportation (9 recommendations);
- Aging and Transportation Services Networks (6 recommendations);  
and
- Community Based Organizations that Serve Diverse Elders (5 recommendations).



## Recommendations to the National Center on Senior Transportation

The National Center on Senior Transportation should undertake the following actions to support transportation services for culturally and ethnically diverse older people:

### *Advocacy/Regulatory & Policy Change:*

- Raise awareness of the unmet transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders throughout the U.S. among research and advocacy groups in transportation, health care, and aging services (including but not limited to Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI American Indian Aging Services Programs).
- Bring more stakeholders, including grassroots organizations, to the table to identify ways to address these unmet needs at all levels - local, state, regional and national.



### *Data Collection/Research:*

- Get input from the bottom up: convene listening sessions with local community-based organizations and culturally and ethnically diverse elders about their unmet transportation needs.

- Develop a survey tool for culturally and ethnically diverse organizations to use locally to identify the unmet transportation needs of older adults in their communities. The tool should be applicable for use in urban, suburban, rural and frontier communities.
- Serve as a clearinghouse of data on the transportation needs of diverse elders. Gather research, best practices, statistics and information from transportation and aging services organizations and the research community, targeting organizations that provide culturally competent and coordinated services to diverse communities.

### ***Local Coordination of Transportation:***

- Facilitate the development of partnerships (including contracting relationships) between community-based organizations that serve culturally and ethnically diverse elders and transportation programs for older adults. Such partnerships would address senior transportation planning and service delivery in their communities.

### ***Funding/Grantmaking:***

- Target grant funding to local community projects that address barriers to meeting the transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders and respond to local community input.

### ***Training/Information or Product Development/Dissemination:***

- Provide leadership on the unmet transportation needs for culturally and ethnically diverse older adults by putting the issue on the table with transportation and aging organizations.
- Develop and disseminate widely information and technical assistance materials that support planning, implementation and expansion of transportation services for diverse elders.

## Recommendations to Aging Services and Transportation Networks

Aging Services and Transportation Networks, at the local, state and/or federal levels, as appropriate, should implement the following recommendations to address the transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders:

### *Advocacy/Regulatory & Policy Change:*

- Target resources and funding to address unmet transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders.

### *Data Collection/Research:*

- Collect data on transportation usage by culturally and ethnically diverse elders and identify the unmet transportation needs of diverse elders in the service area.

### *Local Coordination of Transportation:*

- Ensure that transportation services in the community address the transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders by inviting community-based organizations that work with culturally and ethnically diverse elders, as well as elders themselves, to participate in developing the coordinated transportation plan for the community.

### ***Funding/Grantmaking:***

- Provide information and technical assistance on transportation grant opportunities to organizations that serve culturally and ethnically diverse elders.

### ***Training/Information/Dissemination:***

- Provide information and technical assistance on mobility management to community-based organizations that serve diverse elders, including how it works and what it offers the community.
- Help facilitate state-to-state and organization-to-organization collaborations that have the same goals and objectives related to senior transportation for culturally and ethnically diverse elders and their unmet needs.



## Recommendations to Community-Based Organizations that Serve Diverse Elderly Populations

Considering their role in representing the interests of specific diverse population groups, Community-Based Organizations that Serve Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders should:

### *Advocacy/Regulatory & Policy Change:*

- Get to the table and advocate for additional transportation resources and targeted funding to meet the transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders.

### *Data Collection/Research:*

- Collect data on transportation usage and needs of the culturally and ethnically diverse elders the organization serves.

### *Local Coordination of Transportation:*

- Advocate with local aging services organizations, transportation networks and government agencies for inclusion of culturally and ethnically diverse elders and their caregivers in transportation planning.

### *Funding/Grantmaking:*

- Seek out technical assistance on how and where to apply for transportation-related grants and take advantage of opportunities to obtain additional resources for addressing the unmet transportation needs of culturally and ethnically diverse elders.

### *Training/Information or Product Development/Dissemination:*

- Learn more about mobility management development – how to do it and what it could offer to culturally and ethnically diverse elders. Collaborate with other organizations that have similar goals and objectives related to senior transportation.



# National Coalition on Mobility Needs of Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Elders

## **Asociación Nacional Pro Personas Mayores (ANPPM – National Association for Hispanic Elderly)**

234 East Colorado Boulevard, Suite 300  
Pasadena CA 91101

Tel: 626-564-1988

Website: [www.anppm.org](http://www.anppm.org)

*Dr. Carmela G. Lacayo, President & CEO*

[anppm@aol.com](mailto:anppm@aol.com)

*Sergio Perez, National SCSEP Coordinator*

[anppmsergio@aol.com](mailto:anppmsergio@aol.com)

## **Cherokee Trails – Eastern Band Public Transit (EBPT)**

PO Box 455

Cherokee, North Carolina 28719

Tel: 828-497-7494 (Direct)

Website: [www.cherokeetransit.com](http://www.cherokeetransit.com)

*Kathy Littlejohn, Transit Manager*

[kathlitt@nc-cherokee.com](mailto:kathlitt@nc-cherokee.com)

## **Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO)**

818 18th Street NW, Suite 850

Washington, DC 20006

Tel: 202-530-0551

Website: [www.comto.org](http://www.comto.org)

*Julie Cunningham, President & CEO*

[jcunningham@comto.org](mailto:jcunningham@comto.org)

*Amelia Seaton, Chief of Staff*

[aseaton@comto.org](mailto:aseaton@comto.org)

## **National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)**

1511 Third Avenue, Suite 914

Seattle, WA 98101

Tel: 206-624-1221 or 800-336-2722

Website: [www.napca.org](http://www.napca.org)

*Christine Takada, Interim President & CEO*

[christine@napca.org](mailto:christine@napca.org)

## **National Caucus and Center on Black Aged (NCBA)**

1220 L Street, NW, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20005

Tel: 202-637-8400

Website: [www.ncba-aged.org](http://www.ncba-aged.org)

*Karyne Jones, President & CEO*

[kjones@ncba-aged.org](mailto:kjones@ncba-aged.org)

*Cynthia Schultz, Field State Monitor*

[cschultz@ncba-aged.org](mailto:cschultz@ncba-aged.org)

## **National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCOA)**

The Walker Building

734 15th Street, NW, Suite 1050

Washington, DC 20005

Tel: 202-347-9733

Website: [www.nhcoa.org](http://www.nhcoa.org)

*Dr. Yanira Cruz, President & CEO*

[ycruz@nhcoa.org](mailto:ycruz@nhcoa.org)

**National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA)**

University of North Dakota  
School of Medicine and Health Sciences  
Room 4535  
501 North Columbia Road Mail Stop 9037  
Grand Forks, ND 58202-9037  
Tel: 800-896-7628 or 701-777-3848  
Website: [www.nrcnaa.org](http://www.nrcnaa.org)  
*Twyla Baker-Demaray, Interim Director*  
[tbakerdemaray@medicine.nodak.edu](mailto:tbakerdemaray@medicine.nodak.edu)

**National Title VI Grantees Association (NTVI) & National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA)**

Linda Morales/Laguna Rainbow  
PO Box 241  
Cubero, NM 87014  
Tel: 505-552-6034  
*Linda Morales, NTVI Chair/NICOA Board Member/Title VI Director for Laguna Pueblo*  
[lmorales@pinonmgt.com](mailto:lmorales@pinonmgt.com)

**New Ventures in Leadership (NVL)**

Jarmin Christine Yeh  
1216 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10029  
Tel: 212-419-3547  
*Jarmin Christine Yeh, Partner*  
[jyeh@nyam.org](mailto:jyeh@nyam.org)

**Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research (RCMAR)**

RCMAR Coordinating Center  
10945 Le Conte Ave.  
Suite 2339  
Box 951687  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1687  
Tel: 310-312-0536  
Fax: 310-312-0546  
Website: [www.rcmar.ucla.edu](http://www.rcmar.ucla.edu)  
*Dr. Janet C. Frank, Director*  
[jcfrank@ucla.edu](mailto:jcfrank@ucla.edu)

**UCLA Center for Health Policy Research**

10911 Weyburn Ave.  
Suite 300  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-7143  
Tel:(310) 794-0910  
Website: [www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu)  
*Dr. Steven P. Wallace, Co-Director, RCMAR & Director, Health Policy Research*  
[swallace@ucla.edu](mailto:swallace@ucla.edu)

**Senior Service America, Inc. (SSAI)**

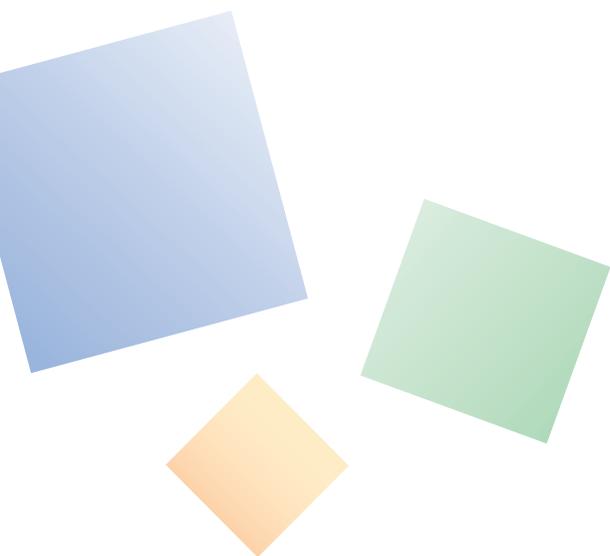
8403 Colesville Road, Suite 1200  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Tel: (301) 578-8900  
Website: [www.ssa-i.org](http://www.ssa-i.org)  
*Tony Sarmiento, Executive Director*  
[tsarmiento@ssa-i.org](mailto:tsarmiento@ssa-i.org)

**Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)**

1628 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20009-3099  
Tel: 202-667-4690  
Website: [www.searac.org](http://www.searac.org)  
*Doua Thor, Executive Director*  
[doua@searac.org](mailto:doua@searac.org)  
*Helly Lee, Director of Policy*  
[helly@searac.org](mailto:helly@searac.org)

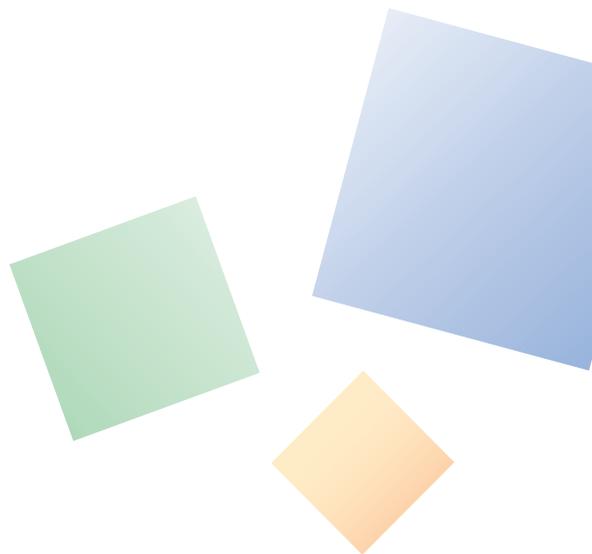
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<b>NCST</b>	<i>National Center on Senior Transportation</i>
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**National Center on Senior Transportation**

1425 K Street, N.W., Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20005



*Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.*

(202) 347-3066  
(202) 347-7345 (TDD)  
(202) 737-7914 (Fax)  
Toll-Free: (866) 528-NCST (6278)



Email: [ncst@easterseals.com](mailto:ncst@easterseals.com)  
Web site: [www.seniortransportation.net](http://www.seniortransportation.net)