



## Information Brief

NATIONAL AGING AND DISABILITY TRANSPORTATION CENTER

### Identifying and Overcoming Transportation Barriers for Clients

Have you ever tried to help an older adult or an individual with a disability find transportation? If the answer is yes, then this Information Brief is for you. It was developed to assist hospital social workers, case managers, housing coordinators and others who are trying to help their clients arrange transportation, whether to medical appointments, employment, grocery shopping or for some other purpose.

The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center receives calls and emails every day asking for assistance with finding transportation resources. This Brief is intended to help you navigate transportation in your community, find out about your community's resources and connect with the experts, such as mobility managers, transportation resource specialists, transit and other transportation providers and agencies, who would be willing to assist your clients find transportation when they need it.

Access to transportation can profoundly impact the quality of life of older adults and individuals with disabilities. Lack of transportation is a barrier to employment, health care, social services, and legal aid, as well as recreational

#### **Facts & Figures**

The [Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics](#) predicts that by **2030 the older adult population will more than double to 71.5 million**, and more of these older adults will have disabilities.

A 2010 [Kessler Foundation/ National Organization on Disability Survey of Americans with Disabilities](#) surveyed 1,001 people with disabilities and 788 people without disabilities. **People with disabilities were much more likely than people without disabilities to experience inadequate transportation** (34% versus 16%, respectively).

Between October 1, 2015 and May 31, 2016, the [Eldercare Locator](#) responded to **21,126 calls** from older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers and professionals seeking information on transportation resources.

activities and events. Without transportation, an individual may experience a loss of independence, reduce their involvement in social activities and personal hobbies, or feel they can no longer be spontaneous in daily life.

Community transportation systems often provide services targeted to older adults and people with disabilities, such as reduced fares, accessible vehicles, Dial-a-Ride, and travel training, but transportation assistance is not always well advertised and finding out about transportation options may require multiple phone calls to different agencies. Chances are, though, there is a program or resource in your community who can offer assistance and help your clients find the ride they need. We hope this Brief will help you better connect to those resources and learn more about transportation in your community.

## **Steps to Addressing Client Transportation Barriers**

### **Step 1. Identify transportation needs up front.**

Transportation needs may not be routinely explored at intake or during care assessments and arranging transportation can be a complicated process, especially when there is an immediate need. While ride coordination may not be part of your formal job description, we know that your clients often face transportation challenges that impact the support services that you do arrange. If older adults and people with disabilities cannot travel to their appointments, jobs, or other activities, the resources that you have worked tirelessly to put in place to enable them to live and thrive in the community may not be enough.

It is important to address transportation needs early to help prepare your clients to schedule appointments, outings and visits as quickly as possible. For example:

- Older adults and people with disabilities may encounter eligibility requirements that entail paperwork and processing time that needs to be considered;
- Those who have mobility needs may qualify for ADA paratransit, but to do so they will need to apply for and meet the eligibility criteria set forth by the service, which may include screening by a physician;
- Older adults and people with disabilities may need to meet age, disability and/or income requirements for some transportation services, such as Medicaid's non-emergency medical transportation.

## Step 2. Connect to a local mobility manager.

A referral to the local mobility manager will put you and/or your client in touch with a transportation expert who can offer information on transportation services that are available in your area, offer guidance on how to find a ride, and in some instances, arrange or coordinate rides. Mobility managers may be employed by a Public Transit Provider, an Area Agency on Aging, an Aging and Disability Resource Center, a Center for Independent Living, or other community agencies that provide transportation.

A community mobility manager can be an invaluable resource for health care and community social service coordinators. Simply put, mobility managers help communities optimize all available transportation resources. Their job is to look beyond a single transportation service or solution and to be “person centered,” finding the right option to fit an individual’s unique circumstances. A mobility manager is a trusted and reliable resource for the community at large and should be one of the first contacts you make if you are struggling to help an older adult or individual with disabilities find transportation.

If you are unable to locate a mobility manager who serves your area, reach out to a local Information and Referral Specialist, an Aging and Disability Resource Center or 2-1-1 Program, or any of the organizations listed above. These programs typically offer information about a wide variety of community services, including transportation, and may have on staff a “travel specialist” or “mobility counselor” who has transportation expertise.

### **Key Term: Mobility Manager**

A Mobility Manager is an employee of a transit or human service agency who offers one-on-one counseling or group education and counseling on transportation options and alternatives to driving. The overall goal of a mobility manager is to help users choose the best transportation option(s) to meet their individual needs. Professionals who do this work might also go by a different title in their job, including *Transportation Specialist, Information and Referral Coordinator, Travel Coordinator, Programs Specialist*, and more.

### Step 3. Cast your net widely to learn about the transportation options in your community.

If you have difficulty connecting with a mobility manager, you may find it more difficult to find out about the transportation options in your community – and no single transportation option fits all individual client needs. Creating a comprehensive list of transportation resources and options can be a daunting task, but chances are others in your community may have already done so. Contact transportation experts and providers in your community to find out if a list of transportation resources exists. Don't feel as if you have to reinvent the wheel!

Research on the right people to connect with can save you time and help reveal resources not widely advertised. More often than not, the transportation providers in your community are willing, and often eager, to share their expertise and get the word out about the transportation services available. Ask for the best phone number where your clients should call and the process for obtaining a ride, and share that information with your clients to enable them to get a ride more easily in the future.

A mobility manager is likely to be able to walk you through the process and identify the best place to call to obtain a ride for your client. If, however, there is no mobility manager in your community, Public Transit, the local Area Agency on Aging, Center for Independent Living, 2-1-1 service, or other human services agencies may have developed a ride guide or directory that outlines available transportation options. Some communities may also have an online directory, known as a “one-click website,” that lists transportation resources and can help individuals map out their options.

Creating relationships with mobility managers and community transportation programs can make your job easier. With these relationships, you will be better

#### **Key Term: One-Click Websites**

Some communities have developed websites with lists of transportation options called “one-click websites”, usually as a complement to one-call phone Information & Referral programs. The websites enable customers to compare different travel options and costs, including specialized services targeted to older adults, people with disabilities and veterans. Some one-click websites even allow users to make trip transactions including eligibility, booking, scheduling, and payment. Two examples of successful one-click websites include *MO Rides* for the state of Missouri ([www.morides.org](http://www.morides.org)) and *Simply Get There* for the Atlanta region ([www.simplygetthere.org](http://www.simplygetthere.org)).

equipped to communicate transportation-related information to your clients during your counseling process. To help you identify transportation assistance available in your community, use the resources below:

- a. To find the local public transit agency near you, check the American Public Transportation Association webpage directory [www.apta.com/resources/links/unitedstates/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.apta.com/resources/links/unitedstates/Pages/default.aspx).
- b. To find the Area Agency on Aging or the Aging and Disability Resource Center in your community, call the Eldercare Locator at 1.800.677.1116, Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET or visit [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).
- c. To find the Center for Independent Living in your community, visit <http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory>.
- d. Your state's 211 information line can provide you with information on a variety of services, including local transportation options. Dial 2-1-1 or visit <https://www.disability.gov/2-1-1-help-in-your-area/> for a listing of 211 websites by state.
- e. Local faith-based organizations and other community groups may also be able to direct you to transportation programs.

#### **Step 4. Understanding the transportation options you've discovered.**

The list of transportation options in your community could include public transit, ADA paratransit, volunteer driver programs, ride share services, shuttle services, and private pay (such as Uber and taxi). Definitions of these services may vary a bit in different communities, but here are some of the more common transportation choices you are likely to find:

**Complementary Paratransit:** As an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required complement to fixed route public transit, this service is limited to those persons who are not able to use fixed route service. It must operate in the same areas and during the same hours as the fixed route service. It provides door-to-door service for all its passengers. To qualify, riders will need to meet specific eligibility requirements established under ADA.

**Curb-to-curb service:** In curb-to-curb service passengers exit the vehicle at the curb or driveway of their destination. The driver does not assist the passenger to the door of their residence or other destination.

**Demand-Response:** Demand-response generally refers to any transportation service that dispatches vehicles by phone requests. Demand-response does not follow a fixed route and depending on program resources and demand,

requests might need to be made within 24-48 hours or more in advance.

Demand-response vehicles typically carry multiple passengers picked up from different points of entry and dropped off at separate destinations.

**Door-to-door and door-through-door service:** These transportation options are sometimes made available to older adults or people with disabilities who need more assistance than is typically available through curb-to-curb service.

- In *door-to-door* programs, drivers or escorts provide assistance to help passengers enter and exit the vehicles and may walk with passengers to the front door of their residence or destination.
- *Door-through-door* programs help passengers from the vehicle through the doors of their residences or destinations.

**Fixed route transportation:** Public transit agencies typically provide fixed route service by bus and rail along established routes with set schedules and no reservations required. Some human services programs provide limited fixed route services that follow a regular schedule, such as daily trips to and from a Center for Independent Living or a senior center, or weekly trips to the grocery store or shopping mall.

**Medicaid Non-emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT):** Medicaid NEMT transportation is provided for Medicaid beneficiaries to get to and

from medical services. Different states have various Medicaid NEMT qualifications, but the Medicaid beneficiary may be required to illustrate an unmet transportation need, which may include:

- Not having a valid driver's license;
- Not having a working vehicle available in the household;
- Being unable to travel or wait for services alone; or
- Having a physical, cognitive, mental, or developmental limitation.

**Shared Ride Services: (also known as Transportation Network Companies or TNCs):** These services, which include Uber and Lyft, connect private pay passengers with drivers who provide the transportation in their own vehicles. Passengers connect with the drivers via websites or mobile apps on their smartphone and also pay for the services through a personal account on their phone.

**Taxi:** Taxis are licensed vehicles that offer on-demand services to passengers. Trips usually can be scheduled in advance or on the spot, and fares are charged per-mile or per-minute.

**Volunteer Transportation:** Volunteer transportation programs are usually administered by local nonprofit and faith-based organizations and drivers provide rides in their own cars or agency-owned vehicles for passengers

to reach medical appointments, shopping and socialization. Rides are generally arranged by reservation and may (but not always) charge a small fee.

Volunteers may also serve as escorts/assistants in programs offering or door-to-door and door-through-door transportation.

## **Step 5. Help older adults and people with disabilities build their own transportation support system.**

Older adults and people with disabilities should be active participants in developing a transportation plan to meet their ongoing transportation needs. It is important to review all options – from informal arrangements with relatives and friends to formal public and privately funded services offered by an established public transit agency, private company or other transportation, human services or faith-based provider. This type of brainstorming can help clients expand their available transportation options. Friends and family can assist by helping find and schedule transportation, becoming an escort or personal care attendant, or helping to pay for services. This *informal* transportation network can be an important and consistent resource.

A transportation plan must respond to each individual's particular circumstances. For instance, not all older adults and people with disabilities are able to tap into the informal assistance provided by family and friends. And while some may qualify for publicly funded transportation programs or subsidies, others may be able to pay some or all of the cost of their rides.

## **Step 6. Prepare clients to answer eligibility and scheduling questions and to ask questions about any service limitations.**

Depending on the transportation option an older adult or person with a disability chooses, they may need to be prepared to answer sensitive questions about income, age, and disability, as well as provide enough lead time for scheduling. For example:

- A functional or cognitive assessment by a physician or other medical professional may be required to determine eligibility for some transportation services;
- Subsidy assistance may be provided, but proof of household income for all family members might be needed;
- Proof of residence might be required for rides within particular geographic boundaries; and

- Many transportation programs offer only certain types of trips, such as medical or employment rides. Others may serve particular geographic areas, such as destinations within the county boundaries, or particular populations, such as older adults or people with specific types of disabilities. Certain kinds of trips, such as social or recreational outings, may not be provided at all.

At the end of this information brief you will find an attached question list, *“Preparing to Talk to a Transportation Provider”*. You may want to share this reference with the older adults and people with disabilities you serve to guide their planning when applying for transportation assistance.

## **Step 7. Influencing transportation on the community level.**

Remember to rely on mobility managers and other experts for local transportation resources, but don’t hesitate to become involved in community transportation planning, if you have interest. Organizations such as hospitals, faith-based organizations, housing complexes, other community agencies, as well as staff who work directly with older adults and people with disabilities, can be instrumental in identifying transportation gaps and help to ensure that regional transportation plans are responsive to the needs of the local population. Finding ways to get your voice and the voice of your clients heard can help eliminate, lessen, or raise greater awareness about the transportation service barriers that your clients encounter.

As a healthcare or social services professional, you are in a position to offer valuable information and insights to the transportation services network. If you want to become involved in the transportation planning process in your community or region, there are a number of ways to engage with providers. You can advocate for local transportation systems to respond to the needs of older adults and people with disabilities by sharing the concerns and frustrations you have encountered in your work. You may also have specific ideas and suggestions for improvement. Request a slot on the local riders’ council, if available, or join a transportation coalition.

**To find out how to get involved in the transportation planning process, contact your local Metropolitan Planning Organization: <https://www.planning.dot.gov/mpo.asp>.**

## Provider Examples and Best Practices from the Field

*These examples illustrate some of the ways various agencies and organizations around the country are making transportation information easier to access.*

---

### WSOS Community Action Commission Freemont, OH

---

*In 2015, WSOS Community Action Commission, a general public transportation provider in Sandusky County, Ohio, began a pilot project to incorporate a mobility counseling education module into the annual assessment of homebound older adults who receive home-delivered meals, and into a six-week Chronic Disease Self-Management program.*

WSOS staff used these opportunities to educate older adults on the availability of the Sandusky County Rural Public Transit Service (TRIPS) and its curb-to-curb service. Both group mobility education and individual sessions were provided to give:

- instruction on how to use the transportation access system (e.g., how to call the dispatcher),
- information on fare structure and out of county trip arrangement,
- information on the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles, and
- how to request Passenger Care Attendants who assist with door-to-door service.

Staff led individuals through a mobility assessment and together with the mobility counselor, the older adults developed a consumer action mobility plan. This was also an opportunity to educate older adults on better ways to improve access to their home, public buildings, and shops by using portable ramps, non-slip paint or tape on wooden wheelchair ramps, better lighting, and appropriate door handles. Altogether, this project created opportunities for 18 new riders to use public transportation.

**For more information on this project, contact Todd Robinson at [tmrobinson@wsos.org](mailto:tmrobinson@wsos.org).**

---

## Harris County Area Agency on Aging Houston, TX

---

*In 2015, the Harris County Area Agency on Aging (HCAAA) supported the local Community Care Transitions Program (CCTP) in developing a collaborative effort with an area hospital system and a local transit provider.*

The CCTP utilizes transition coaches who work with hospital patients from pre- to post-discharge to develop strategies and supports that aid in reducing hospital readmissions. Yet, transportation was not specifically addressed as an element of the CCTP process. Patients must have a follow up physician visit within seven days post discharge. It was determined that transportation was one of the barriers preventing some patients from following up with physicians within the prescribed seven days.

Hospital Care Transition Management, Harris County RIDES (the local curb-to-curb transportation service for older adults and people with disabilities) and the HCAAA Transportation Coordinator worked together to develop an expedited transportation referral, eligibility screening, sign up and ride coordination for recently discharged patients, beginning with the CCTP process during formal hospital discharge planning. Eligible patients were provided with support from the HCAAA and a mobility manager at Harris County RIDES to arrange transportation to/from the first follow-up visits post-discharge and for subsequent trips for both medical and non-medical needs.

The project also extended to the Harris Health System (34 Clinics +3 County operated hospitals) and resulted in a similar transportation referral process for outpatients (age-65-plus), with special emphasis on oncology patients.

**For more information on this project, contact LaTosha Selexman at [Latosha.Selexman@houstontx.gov](mailto:Latosha.Selexman@houstontx.gov).**

## ATTACHMENT:

### Preparing to Talk to a Transportation Provider

You might provide your client with a list of similar questions and topics to ensure they are prepared to choose a transportation option that is safe, reliable, and meets their needs.

1. **Service Area and Trip Type:** *Many transportation options have a defined service area and set hours of operation and days of the week that should be considered when planning your trip. A transportation service may limit services by type of trip. For example, some services may only provide rides to doctor appointments.*
  - **Information you will need to provide:**
    - How far and when you need to travel.
  - **Ask the provider:**
    - What is the service area? Is there a limitation on distance?
    - Is there a limitation to the kind of service provided? Are rides provided to social as well as medical or shopping appointments?
2. **Scheduling:** *Some services do not require reservations, some may take same-day reservations, and others will require reservations to be made days in advance of your trip. It is important to ask if there is a waiting list for services and what the typical wait time is for ride requests to be accommodated. If there is a waiting list, some ride requests may not be accommodated, or they may be prioritized by urgency or type of trip.*
  - **Information you will need to provide:**
    - When you will need to travel.
    - Do you need one round trip ride, or rides to multiple appointments?
  - **Ask the provider:**
    - How much advanced notice is required before using the service? Is there a waiting list?
    - Are rides provided in the evenings, on weekends or on holidays?
    - Will there be a wait when picked up from home? If so, how long?
    - How do I let the driver know that I am ready to be picked up for my ride home?
    - Will there be a wait when picked up for my return trip? If so, how long?
    - What is your cancellation policy?

3. **Eligibility:** *A person may have to qualify for services by age, disability or income level that prevents them from using an alternative transportation option.*
  - ***Information you will need to provide:***
    - Age.
    - Household income.
    - Disability or mobility limitations.
  
  - ***Ask the provider:***
    - Are there requirements to qualify for the service? If so, what are they?
    - Is there an evaluation that must take place prior to the first ride?
  
4. **Cost:** *The fees for the transportation services in your community will vary. One service may operate on a fixed-fare system or may have a reduced rate available for older adults and people with disabilities. Services may calculate costs by distance traveled, others may provide vouchers or coupons, and some transportation services are provided at no cost.*
  - ***Information you will need to provide:***
    - Your income and the amount you can afford to pay for the trip.
  
  - ***Ask the provider:***
    - What is the cost for the service?
    - Will insurance pay for rides provided by the service?
    - Is there a membership fee that must be paid before scheduling rides with the service?
  
5. **Special Accommodations:** *Consider any needs you may have that will need to be accommodated when traveling.*
  - ***Information you will need to provide:***
    - Do you need a vehicle that can accommodate a wheelchair, scooter or other mobility device?
    - Do you need assistance getting in and out of the vehicle or walking between your door and the vehicle?
  
  - ***Ask the provider:***
    - Can the service accommodate special assistance?
    - Is there an escort or attendant in the vehicle with the driver?
    - Does someone stay with me/my family member during appointments?
    - Can a family member serve as a personal care attendant?







**Call toll-free:** 866.983.3222

**Email:** [contact@nadtc.org](mailto:contact@nadtc.org)

**Web:** [www.nadtc.org](http://www.nadtc.org)

**Find us on Facebook, Twitter,  
YouTube & LinkedIn!**



---

## Who We Are

Established in 2015, the NADTC is a federally funded technical assistance center administered by Easterseals and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging based in Washington, D.C.

The **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center** is funded through a cooperative agreement of Easterseals, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and the U.S Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

The **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)** is a 501c(3) membership association representing America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and providing a voice in the nation's capital for the 256 Title VI Native American aging programs. The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of its members so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible. [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)

**Easterseals** is the leading non-profit provider of services for individuals with autism, developmental disabilities, physical disabilities and other special needs. For nearly 100 years, we have been offering help, hope, and answers to children and adults living with disabilities, and to the families who love them. Through therapy, training, education and support services, Easterseals creates life-changing solutions so that people with disabilities can live, learn, work and play. [www.easterseals.com](http://www.easterseals.com)

**Special thanks** to the following individuals for their contribution to this document: Roberta Habowski, AAA1B, Southfield, MI; Mary Blumberg and Patti Szarowicz, Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, GA; LaTosha Selexman, Harris County Area Agency on Aging, Houston, TX; Robin Richter and Todd Robinson, WSOS Community Action Commission, Fremont, OH.