

Penquis C.A.P., Inc.

[Penquis](#) is a nonprofit community action agency based in Bangor, Maine, incorporated in 1967 to alleviate and eliminate the causes and conditions of poverty, primarily serving low- and moderate-income individuals in Penobscot, Piscataquis and Knox counties. Penquis uses a community-informed approach to expand general public transportation.

Project Goal:

Penquis will develop a plan that will reduce the transportation barriers for older adults and people with disabilities so they can be healthy, safe and connected to their communities, with increased independence and quality of life.

Population Served:

- Older adults who are 55 and older and within 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- People with developmental, physical or visual impairments.
- People of any age who need dialysis or cancer treatments. According to the Maine Cancer Foundation Transportation Needs Assessment Summary Report, 38 percent of cancer patients receiving treatment travel over 75 miles round trip. The distances, frequency, cost and inability to drive due to illness create barriers to treatment.

Transportation Barriers:

- The Maine State Plan on Aging 2020-2024 identified transportation as one of the unmet needs for Maine seniors (ages 55 and older) and is a barrier to meeting basic needs such as reliable access to food and social engagements.
- Of those who identified transportation as a barrier, 45 percent reported it was due to lack of services, and 30 percent did not know how to access information about the services.

Community Needs:

- A decrease in missed medical appointments. An increase in employment, support group participation, socialization and shopping. Caregivers missing fewer days from work due to time off to transport their loved ones.

Community Engagement Efforts:

- Shared paper surveys with current riders and at community meetings to learn what locations, times and types of transportation are needed:
 - 34% return rate for surveys out of 388 sent
 - 92% of them fell in at least one of the target demographics
 - 71% of them have transportation needs Monday-Friday
- Six advisory meetings and eight community events, including one at the Aging Expo in Bangor, connected the outreach team with 90 people. Penquis offered rides to the meetings.
 - The team talked to each community individually to learn its specific needs.
 - Some in-person presentations were planned at medical facilities to inform staff of transit options, so they could inform their patients.

Multi-sector Collaborative Partnerships:

An advisory group of individuals from each town represented the community, for geographical representation. To form the group, Penquis targeted a familiar person as the local lead and chose outspoken attendees from local meetings. Members included riders, a potential rider, community leaders, librarians and a local aging services case manager.

Penquis has created lasting relationships with community members and agencies throughout the region (Eastern Area Agency on Aging, Thrive Penobscot, Helping Hands with Heart).

Funding and Sustainability:

- Section 5310 funding has been received each year to purchase vehicles for urban and rural use, provide preventative maintenance for agency vehicles, provide Expanded ADA within the urban area and provide software enhancements.
- Partial Section 5311 funds have been received each year to provide general public services within rural areas. This funding will grow with ridership.
- State discretionary funding for capital purchase has been received each year and a number of small donations from local charities.
- Penquis has been awarded a Federal Transit Administration Areas of Persistent Poverty grant to fund software enhancements.

Outcomes:

- Using the input received from community outreach, Penquis drafted a new general public schedule that increases the hours and days service is available to the entire region. Transportation expanded to Monday-Friday, with the hope to open weekends as more drivers are hired.
- Four more agency vehicle operators were hired.
- Promotions for the expanded service were developed: A public brochure, press release, announcement to partners and advisory members.
- Community members will have increased access to these benefits:
 - Increased options for employment for the target population, yielding economic stability and food security for workers plus increased labor force and economic development for the area.
 - o Increased educational access and quality with transportation to classes. Penquis will share information about its childcare and preschool opportunities, which enable parents to work or continue their education.
 - o Improved health care access and quality, with fewer missed medical appointments.
 - o More access to grocery shopping.
 - o More opportunities to volunteer and connect with community members; lower isolation.

Learnings:

- Need to better educate riders on after-hours transportation; they are afraid of being stranded and are adjusting behavior to match.
- Reworking documents, brochures, policies to be more accessible is needed.
- Effectiveness of outreach methods varied by town and by internet access.
- Incentives were not persuasive.
- An advisory group of individuals from each town represents the community's needs.
- Travel to each town and learn from the locals to build trust and rapport.
- Libraries knew how to reach their communities.
- Smaller groups supported more meaningful conversations

