



Resources for Rurals Rural Health Chat January 18, 2024

Summary

National RTAP and Rural Health Information Hub (RHIHub) held a [#Resources4Rurals](#) Rural Health Chat on January 18, 2024. The chat introduced many sources of information and training on how rural transit can improve the community's health. There were over **5,466** impressions.

Participants included the following organizations:

- National League of Cities
- Smart Growth America
- Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance (SEEA)
- Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI)
- Transit Happy
- Transportation Research Board (TRB)

A rural community member without public transportation in their area also participated in the chat.

Visit the [chat transcript](#) for questions asked during the chat and attendees' replies. Answers to chat questions are provided below.

Question 1: How is transportation connected to healthcare access and health outcomes?

Answers:

- Travel burdens (like cost and time), as well as lack of transportation options, can result in missed healthcare appointments, which can result in poor health outcomes and ER visits, and

hospitalizations. And the opposite is also true. Robust access to transit can result in improved community health.

- From Matt Crespi of the National League of Cities: “Most healthcare requires transportation to access. If not in an ambulance, transportation is usually on the patient. Mobility barriers can easily reduce consumption of non-emergency care, including high-value preventative care, information and screenings.”
- From TTI: “Transportation is an essential component of a functioning society, offering access to goods, services and individual mobility for a better quality of life!”
- Transportation is a social driver of health that influences access to nutritious food, employment, and social supports. Learn more in Rural Health Information Hub’s [Transportation to Support Rural Healthcare topic guide](#).
- Access to healthy food/healthcare services has a major impact on peoples' health. According to NCMM, transportation plays a pivotal role in impacting almost every social determinant of health by either facilitating or impeding access to services/destinations.

Question 2: Talk about some of the driver and manager training needs to provide transportation to medical care in rural areas.

Answers:

- Rural Health Information Hub believes that some areas where drivers and managers could use training include operating specific equipment and technology, providing accessible and safe transportation for people with disabilities, transportation planning, and customer service, among others. Additional considerations for managers and drivers are discussed in the implementation module of the Rural Transportation Toolkit.
- Safety is key. When driving in rural areas, weather & terrain can pose challenges. National RTAP has a [safety topic guide](#) with many training resources, including several of its own free resources that you can order. National RTAP provides free training materials and eLearning courses for all rural and tribal transit providers. Check out our [resource catalog](#).
- “Your average Uber isn't going to cut it. Patients may need assistance getting in and out of vehicles; they may have wheelchairs, oxygen tanks, or other necessary devices, and you also need to be able to handle infants and toddlers (car seats are important!),” states Matt.
- National RTAP has ADA training for drivers available in two different [eLearning](#) courses. Plus 2 the Point training can help liven up your driver training meetings with quizzes.

Question 3: Are rural residents more at risk for transportation access challenges?

Answers:

- A rural community member answered, “Transportation is a huge barrier for rural communities. I'm in a small town in the mountains of Colorado and the only way to get to a hospital is by a winding mountain road. It's a 2-hour drive to the nearest hospital.”
- Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) explained that access barriers are worsened in rural areas because of limited transportation options, long travel distances and lengthy wait times. Inadequate infrastructure, including sidewalks and street connections, further hinders safe access to public transportation.
- Varying terrain, abundant wildlife, and long distances between services mean that rural roads have a higher risk of fatality or serious injury than urban roads. Find [behavioral strategies to](#)

[make rural roads safer](#) from TRB's Behavioral Traffic Safety Cooperative Research Program (BTSCRCP).

- Approximately 25% of lower-income patients cancel or miss appointments due to barriers to transportation. See the Rural Health Research Gateway's [visualizations and maps](#) about rural areas and access to healthcare. Rural Health Research Gateway released a [recap](#) showing that rural residents experience higher healthcare travel burden in terms of time, distance, and cost. They also have less access to public transportation. A city can achieve pretty good coverage without specifically making a destination type a priority, whereas rural communities have to be more deliberate. <https://civimaps.org/head-start-transit-map> (Compare green node distribution to yellow and red)

Question 4: How has your organization helped provide transportation access to medical care in a unique way? Examples can include volunteer drivers, microtransit, etc.

Answers:

- To streamline access to medical care, providers are offering no-cost transit services to ensure that individuals are not delaying medical care because of limited transportation options. Read NCCM's [article](#).
- TTI Research Scientist Ipek Sener discusses the topic in the article [Breaking Barriers to Healthy Food and Healthcare](#).
- Through National RTAP Community Rides Grant funding, [Elmira Connections](#) became a successful link between rural Schuyler County and the medical sites in Chemung County, NY.

Question 5: How is transportation related to social well-being and mental health?

Answers:

- 3-10 trips/month could be provided to an isolated individual at lower cost than the extra medical costs due to isolation. See [SURCOM's report](#).
- Long distances and lack of transportation options can create "true geographical isolation" for rural residents. Learn more in the Rural Health Information Hub Rural Monitor [article on social isolation](#).
- This [report](#) prepared for NCMM recommends collaboration between transit, public health, and aging services to address social isolation, as well as broadening the focus beyond medical transportation to also include social events.
- This is especially important as we grapple with what even the federal government is now calling an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation." (This [report](#) explicitly includes improving access to transit as a "pro-connection policy"). Most people need transportation to access many of the things that contribute to their mental health. From seeing friends to turning would-be-dropouts into degree-finishers to accessing mental healthcare, transportation plays a critical role in supporting mental health.

- Transportation barriers can also redefine what it means for a doctor to be "in network" -- if you don't have a car, they have to be both in your insurance network and reachable through the transportation networks you can access (e.g., bus routes or within paratransit zones).
- “Social Determinants of Health need access for success. Transportation is a key element of engagement, interaction, and learning. Build access into your program and help people focus on barriers to success and connection rather than access to opportunities,” stated National RTAP Executive Director Robin Phillips. “The very attributes that attract people to rural communities can be barriers for healthy aging and access to needed services. Transportation can mitigate isolation and by its very existence reflect the community value for its residents.”

Question 6: Tell us about coordination efforts between transit agencies and healthcare providers to improve health-related transportation access in your community?

Answers:

- American Hospital Association's [Transportation and the Role of Hospitals](#) explains the link between transportation & health and discusses the role of hospitals & health systems in transportation issues for improving access.

Question 7: How can rural communities support transportation access for all citizens? Are there examples of communities that have been successful?

Answers:

- “Plenty of places where a full-sized bus doesn't make sense can make excellent use of special services or paratransit designed around the needs of patients, students, etc.,” said Matt. “Making medical providers aware of challenges & patients aware of resources is an excellent start.” Assessing transportation insecurity during a hospital stay improves attendance at follow-up visits. ([Here's one source.](#))
- Tailoring the transportation to the riders in rural areas can include hospital shuttles, volunteer transportation, microtransit, etc. Rural communities can improve transportation access with practices like dedicated healthcare trips, group rides, individual rides for long medical trips, intercity trip scheduling, dialysis schedule coordination and empowering healthcare providers to schedule rides for patients. There are so many options today.
- Minnesota DOT's [Rural Community Transit Strategies: Building on, Expanding, and Enhancing Existing Assets and Programs](#) introduces promote walking, biking, car sharing, bus sharing, and car and van pooling.
- NADO's [Equitable Transportation Access Solution: Bear River Association of Governments Mobility Voucher Program](#) lets participants submit vouchers reimbursing volunteers for rides to access healthcare with funding from Cache Valley Transit.
- [HealthTran](#) in Missouri is a collaboration of transit and healthcare partners that offers non-emergency medical transportation to allow patients timely primary and preventive care access.
- RHIfhub also has a number of other [project examples](#) from around the country showing how rural communities can meet the medical transportation needs of their residents.

- Don't Forget the Sidewalk! NCMM is holding a [Don't Forget about the Sidewalk in Community Coordination webinar](#) on Feb 1, 12-1 PM ET. Let's make sidewalks safe for rural riders who depend on transit.

Question 8: What are your go-to organizations, websites, and conferences for resources and training on rural health and transportation?

Answers:

- RHIHub's [Transportation to Support Rural Healthcare topic guide](#) pulls together resources, organizations, events, and project examples in one place. RHIHub also posts [Transportation to Support Rural Healthcare Events](#).
- NADO holds a [Rural Transportation Conference](#) that is not to be missed.

Question 9: What resources can rural communities utilize to improve transportation access?

Answers:

- NCHRP's [Connecting Transportation & Health: A Guide to Communication & Collaboration](#) includes tips, tools, resources, process steps, integration opportunities, fundamentals, and case examples.
- States & localities are beginning to recognize the connection between health & transportation. NCHRP's [A Research Roadmap for Transportation and Public Health](#) has an implementation plan to start the process.
- [An Active Roadmap: Best Practices in Rural Mobility](#) from Smart Growth America explores ways that rural communities can adapt to thrive in a changing America, with a primary focus on active and multimodal modes of transportation as a tool.
- RHIHub's [Rural Transportation Toolkit](#), published with the Walsh Center, compiles promising models and resources to support organizations implementing transportation programs in rural communities.

Our next chat will be a [#RuralTransitDay](#) chat on July 16, 2024. Please join us!