



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
RURAL HEALTH  
RESEARCH CENTER

# **Transportation as a Social Determinant of Rural Health**

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# Background & Policy Context

- Nearly 2 million rural households (4%) do not have access to a personal vehicle
- Rural communities are much less likely to have access to public transportation
- Transportation affects accessing health care services, particularly vulnerable populations
- Medicaid provides medical transportation to eligible individuals
- FTA programs offer funding matching opportunities for public transportation for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and rural areas

# Approach

- Interviews conducted between November 2016 and May 2017
- Contacted 113 key informants in all 50 states
  - 39 via phone
  - 74 via email
- Key informants represented
  - State Offices of Rural Health (n=50)
  - US Administration on Aging and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (n=63)
    - Aging and Disability Resource Centers
    - Area Agencies on Aging

# Approach

- Five questions:
  1. Frequency of transportation inquiries?
  2. Rural transportation issues unique to their state?
  3. What transportation programs exist that you refer callers to?
  4. Issues changing in next five years?
  5. Anything else?
- Focused on responses to #2 and #4 in developing the policy brief
- Content analysis techniques were employed to identify themes

# Results

- Six themes emerged among challenges described by key informants:
  1. Infrastructure (63%)
  2. Geography (46%)
  3. Funding (27%)
  4. Accessibility (27%)
  5. Political Support and Public Awareness (19%)
  6. Socio-Demographics (11%)

# Infrastructure (63%)

- Quality of roads
- Availability of vehicles and transportation equipment
  1. Services concentrated in urban areas
  2. Not enough handicap-accessible vehicles
  3. Not enough options for non-medical transportation
  4. Overreliance on emergency departments and ambulance services for accessing non-emergency health care
- Sufficient personnel

# Geography (46%)

- Challenging landscape
  1. Mountainous
  2. Large bodies of water
  3. Long distances between towns
- Weather
  1. Particularly winter
- Seasonal traffic
  1. Tourism
  2. Oilfields

# Funding (27%)

- Lack of public and private investment
- Personal finances
- Limitations on insurance-eligible services

# Accessibility (27%)

- Lack of services for individuals with mobility impairments
  1. Door-to-door services
  2. Lack of sidewalks
- Grouped travel
- One-way transportation

# Political Support & Public Awareness (19%)

- Lack of federal, state, and local political support for improving transportation
- Boundary policy
- Lack of public awareness of available transportation options and challenges

# Socio-Demographics (11%)

- Aging population
- Poverty
- Cultural
  1. Proud
  2. Independent

# Proposed Policy Solutions

## LOCAL

- Use of vehicles across programs
  1. Use school buses to delivery meals during the day or summer
- Volunteers

## FEDERAL

- Telemedicine
- Broadening reach of new technologies
  1. Ride-sharing services
  2. Driverless cars

# Policy Recommendations

- Change the transportation conversation from one of convenience to one of necessity
- Identify best practices for communicating with potential users
- Re-evaluate boundary policies
- Cultivate non-traditional partnerships
- Create tracking system for new and adapted transportation models



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# Questions and Discussion



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