

AGING MATTERS

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

PRIORITY AREA: TRANSPORTATION



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Goal:

To enhance older persons' ability to access transportation that meets their needs.

Background:

Access to transportation is pivotal to keeping older people in our province healthy and actively engaged in their community. Having appropriate transportation that meets older adults' needs allows access to health care services, employment, recreation and reduces the likelihood of social isolation.

It is essential that we look to further develop a transportation system that provides accessible, affordable and reliable options for older people. This can be done by increasing support for transportation services that provide door through door services, we can look to strengthen our rural accessible (handi-van) services that are essential for older people who choose to age in place in their rural communities and we can look to further reduce the costs of ambulance services throughout the Province.

Rural Accessible Transportation (handi-Vans):

Accessible vans are an important transportation option for people with mobility challenges and to those who no longer drive. It allows eligible riders to work, attend medical appointments, participate in recreational activities, and pursue daily living activities such as banking and shopping.

Handi-van operational costs have steadily increased over the years and the demand is increasing as the population ages, yet the funding formula for rural handi-van has not changed in 29 years, since the Mobility Disadvantaged Program's (MDTP) inception in 1989. This means that communities are not receiving more funding even though the costs and demand for rides have increased.

The increasing cost differential is being born by communities and by riders, the majority of whom are on a fixed income. For example, an older person in Swan River can expect to pay \$600 for round trip transportation to a medical appointment in Winnipeg. Low income seniors cannot afford this.

Volunteer drivers:

Volunteer drivers provide a vital transportation option for seniors who do not drive and do not have family or friends who can help. Volunteer drivers contribute to continued engagement in social and community life that is necessary for health, well-being, and quality of life. Volunteer drivers ensure that older adults can access medical appointments, participate in social events, grocery shop, or visit a friend. They not only get seniors to where they need to go, but they provide door through door, accompaniment services. It is a safe transportation option.

With the aging population, there is an increasing number of older people who no longer drive and find public transportation challenging, which has increased the need for qualified volunteer drivers to support door through door services. Attracting volunteer drivers in Winnipeg is made more difficult by the cost of recruitment. In Winnipeg (unlike in rural areas) volunteer drivers must assume the cost of the criminal record check, which can cost over \$150. Although, non-profit organizations working with older adults sometimes cover the cost of criminal record checks, these organizations operate on very limited budgets. Paying for these costs puts them under even more financial pressure.

Ambulance Costs: As we encourage older people to age in place, access to affordable ambulance services becomes an important priority and especially for those who choose to age in place in rural communities. As a Province, we need to continue considering the impact of barriers such as the costs of ambulances and how it will affect the long-term health and well-being of our residents and older people in Manitoba. Ambulances in our Province not only provide essential transportation services in getting to the hospital but the emergency personnel also provide essential medical assessments /triage and treatment to ensure that immediate care can lessen the long-term consequences of a medical emergency (e.g., heart attack and stroke). In times of emergency, individuals need to know they can afford transportation that will connect them to medical services within a timely manner.

Actions:

Possible mechanisms to enhance older people's access to affordable transportation options might include:

- Encourage the review of Accessible transportation (Handi- van) policies for rural areas to ensure that they meet the needs of older persons.
- Look to sharing resources and create collaborative strategies for Rural Accessible transportation (Handi-vans).
- Encourage expansion of volunteer driving programs throughout the province.
- Work on reducing the costs of criminal record checks for volunteer drivers in Winnipeg.
- Encourage further reductions to the cost of ambulances in the Province and potentially adopt strategies that have been used across Canada that either fully cover or partially subsidize these services to older people.

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