

MEDICAL TRANSPORT NEEDS IN SUDBURY: ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE *LIVABLE SUDBURY ASSESSMENT*

Background

There is robust evidence that missed healthcare appointments in the U.S. add \$150 billion to overall healthcare costs. An unused time slot represents 60 minutes of physician time (about \$200 on average), no-show rates are as high as 30% nationwide, and there are serious health risks for patients.ⁱ Extensive research on this phenomenon indicated “that geriatric patients had more no-show compared to general primary care patients. Potential factors causing higher no-show in elderly may include age, health status, and retirement status and difficulty with transportation.... [S]ubspecialty healthcare services have a higher no-show rate than specialty healthcare providers. Subspecialty clinics provide care to patients referred from various smaller peripheral facilities. Thus, the referred patients may require traveling longer distance for a subspecialty visit compared to their local PCP visit.”ⁱⁱ

Medical transport is a crucial need in Sudbury, according to two sources of recent information. The first, described below, is a 2018 needs assessment completed by researchers from UMass Boston’s John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies. The second, a 2017 survey of three affordable developments in the town, provides additional evidence in residents’ own voices.

Livable Sudbury Assessment

Not surprising, given national data, Sudbury residents age 60 or older expressed elevated level of interest in medical transportation. However, two additional segments of the community—those who are not financially secure and those with a participation limitation—reported interest in transportation to medical appointments.

A broad indicator of need is the response to the following survey question: “Within the past 12 months, did you have to miss, cancel or reschedule a medical appointment because of a lack of transportation?” A substantially higher share of respondents who had an impairment or condition that limits their ability to participate in their community reported that they had missed, canceled or rescheduled a medical appointment due to lack of transportation (42%), along with 14% of respondents who reported financial insecurity. These findings suggest that for these segments of the community, transportation gaps may be more consequential.

Focus groups with residents also emphasized the importance of medical transport—in this case, with regard to community and health service accessibility:

Community and health services	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Sudbury is near Emerson Hospital, which provides services to many Sudbury residents.	Better transition planning from Emerson hospital to home for older adults needed...
There is an active social worker who provides outreach and referrals.	Limited transportation for older adults accessing health care.

2017 Survey

A selection of free-choice comments relevant to medical transport generally and to Emerson more specifically is taken from a 2017 transportation survey conducted by the Senior Center:

“I have ongoing medical appointments in Sudbury on Monday at 4 PM, but transportation services end before my appointment is over, and a taxi is expensive.”

“ [X] is in need of rides to Physical Therapy on Baker Ave in Concord twice a week. So far [X] has two appointments scheduled... Please let me know if you have the time for the above dates or would be interested in future dates as appointments are scheduled.”

“I speak for many of our residents when I say that ... for medical appointments, a flexible reserved service would be more practical. To fill the gap between the above options, a reasonably priced taxi service would be very convenient and desirable.”

“Many of us have medical appointments with Emerson and/or Baker Ave. medical facilities.”

“My doctors are in Concord, and there is no transportation there.”

“My medical care is at [Emerson, MGH, Baker Ave in Concord]” (multiple responses)

“I’m visually impaired and unable to drive.”

“People with health issues need to get to places and have no car.”

“FISH doesn’t provide transportation on short notice”

“Need transport to Emerson Hospital.”

ⁱ <https://www.healthmgtech.com/missed-appointments-cost-u.s.healthcare-system-150b-year>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4714455/>