

## Mobility—A Key to Independence for Older Americans

*A look at some of the many transportation options for older Americans*



To understand the importance of transportation to older Americans, consider the case of a group of older adults in the community of Evergreen, Colorado.

This group of mature gentlemen who live in a suburb of Denver saw the need for transportation. A couple of years ago, the group mobilized to call attention to the need for more and expanded transportation options for older adults in their community. They gained the attention of local media and eventually, the Regional Transportation District

(RTD), which serves the Denver area.

As a result of the attention these gentlemen garnered, RTD initiated on a test basis a new program called Call-and-Ride, a curb-to-curb service for the Evergreen area. It has now been operating successfully for a year. “It’s a good example,” notes Jane Yeager, director of transportation services, for the Seniors’ Resource Center in Denver, “of how a local group of people with concerns can get some action. It doesn’t happen all the time, but they were successful.”

Yeager notes that in addition to the new bus service the mature gentlemen won for their own community, they can use a variety of other services, from other demand/response options such as Call-and-Ride, curb-to-curb, door-to-door, and where available, through-the-door services. This last option, she adds, is especially helpful to older people whose frail condition makes it difficult to even get to the door. Because assisted transportation requires more time from the driver, it is more costly to provide and is not available in every state or locality. Sometimes, an older person needs more assistance than just the provision of a ride.

“Our mission at the Seniors’ Resource Center,” Yeager explains, “is to try to keep older persons in the community independent—and sometimes the only

# WHAT WE DO *makes a difference*

## *Mobility...cont'd.*

issues they have involve mobility. So we've made sure that our drivers know how to serve people in a variety of ways, from knowing when to lend an arm for support to understanding how to handle an oxygen tank."

## **Transportation Choices—Vital Component of Home and Community-Based Services**

In some ways, the transportation needs of the mature gentlemen of Evergreen are similar to the needs of older Americans across the country. In their case, they wanted more choices in local transportation. In other parts of the country, older adults may have other concerns—but what ties them all together is that transportation services are a vital aspect of their independent lives. Older persons need transportation for shopping, socializing, and recreational activities; to and from medical appointments; and, for a growing number, to employment or volunteer activities.

What's more, the concerns of older adults like those in Evergreen serve as road signs to issues that will become increasingly significant as our country's population grows older in the next few decades. Older Americans, currently represent 17 percent of the total U.S. population. In the 2000 national census, 46 million Americans age 60 and older were counted; of these, 4.4 million were 85 or older. By 2030, the number of older adults 85 and older is expected to triple, to approximately 13 million.

Some older persons are frail and have special transportation needs. Some older adults do not drive or own a car and need

access to services in the community. Still others live in suburban and rural areas and need transportation. According to the Community Transportation Association of America, 40 percent of rural residents live in areas where there is no public transportation, and 28 percent have negligible access. Without transportation, these older adults are isolated and unable to get to community-based services.

## **Where to Find More Options**

Fortunately, older persons have a resource to turn to: their local area agency on aging (AAA). Across the country, these organizations work to coordinate and facilitate access to a variety of home- and community-based services for older adults—from transportation services to nutrition programs that provide meals to older adults in group settings and through home delivery, to legal assistance and more. These programs and home and community-based services are all made possible by the Older Americans Act, passed in 1965.

The Act provides for a range of services for older adults provided through the National Aging Services Network. This network is comprised of state and local AAAs, tribal and native organizations, and thousands of service providers and volunteers.

Coordinating and supporting the network is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging (AoA). To meet its mission of protecting the rights and well-being of the nation's older Americans, AoA focuses on three areas in transportation:

First and foremost, AoA encourages

federal, state, and local governments to begin to prepare for the growing aging population by implementing solutions that focus on the coordination of transportation services. The AoA knows the only way the country can truly be ready for the increasing needs of an aging population is by working together to use resources more wisely and effectively. This cannot be truer than in the case of transportation services for older adults.

Second, AoA encourages more community transportation options. The AAAs provide funds for local transportation solutions. They work with the local government and community groups to expand transportation options and services for older persons.

Third, AAAs have assisted older adults and families in locating driver education programs operated by state and local organizations for programs that address the unique needs of older drivers.

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*As the nation celebrates Older Americans Month (OAM) this May, you can learn more about transportation options and other programs by visiting [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov). This year's OAM theme—"What We Do Makes a Difference"—highlights the critical roles each of us play in our own older years and those of others. For information about what resources are available locally, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).*