

Date: June 22, 2017

To: Board of Trustees
MetroWest Health Foundation

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Subject: Self Propelled Seniors

Overview:

During our evaluation of the social determinants of health in the MetroWest area, our team has identified a lack of centralized resources for information related to transportation. There are currently a wide variety of public and private modes of transportation available, although scattered, through the MetroWest communities, The Ride and MWRTA to identify two. These transportation services are scattered through MetroWest communities, such as Hudson, Marlborough, Southborough, Hopkinton, Ashland, Milford, Holliston, Framingham, Natick, Sudbury, and Wayland.

The ease of access to information through mobile technology has isolated aging populations within our communities. Seniors are left with many options for transportation companies, both public and private, but no convenient means of accessing information that identifies what choice is right for them.

- “59% of 65- to 69-year-olds own smartphones, but that share falls to 49% among 70- to 74-year-olds. Smartphone adoption drops off considerably among adults in their mid-70s and beyond. Some 31% of 75- to 79-year-olds say they own smartphones, while only 17% of those ages 80 and older are smartphone owners.”¹

Seniors rely on public transportation, often times because they are unable to drive themselves, whether it be to a loss of license or medical reasons. By providing a coordinated effort of transportation services to older adults, the hope is to offer convenient alternatives to the older population who are at a higher risk for motor vehicle accidents.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266587/percentage-of-internet-users-by-age-groups-in-the-us/>

- Elders are more likely to be injured or killed in traffic crashes due to age-related vulnerabilities, such as more fragile bones. Medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes and other illnesses also make it more difficult for older drivers to recover from any injuries. With the exception of teen drivers, seniors have the highest crash death rate per mile driven, even though they drive fewer miles than younger people.
- Although Americans are healthier and living longer than ever before, seniors are outliving their ability to drive safely by an average of 7 to 10 years.
- Fifty percent of the middle-aged population and 80 percent of people in their 70s suffer from arthritis, crippling inflammation of the joints, which makes turning, flexing and twisting painful.¹
- Weaker muscles, reduced flexibility and limited range of motion restrict senior drivers' ability to grip and turn the steering wheel, press the accelerator or brake, or reach to open doors and windows.¹

Through the development of a transportation resource center, seniors living in the MetroWest area will have the convenience of making a phone call to speak with a live person. This person will be able to determine what services are available in their town, what insurance eligibility can be applied to transportation services, as well as, what accessibility for those with restricted mobility versus universal access.

History:

In January of 2012 the independent Transportation Network of Great Boston (ITN**GreaterBoston**) began its service in the MetroWest area, through a grant awarded by the MetroWest Health Foundation. ITN**GreaterBoston** offered a means of transportation for seniors living in seven out of the 22 MetroWest communities. This model relied on volunteers that would pick up seniors who had made reservations in advance of medical appointments. This program was designed to overcome barriers to transportation facing aging populations, such as: lack of accessibility to public transportation and expensive alternatives such as taxi services. Programs, such as ITN**GreaterBoston**, serve to provide positive health outcomes to social determinants of health. However, relying on volunteers to piece together gaps in service proved to be a challenging venture, and the program was unable to sustain itself. By looking at the issue of transportation in a different light, we believe the Foundation can make progress in improving the social health of seniors in the MetroWest area.

Local Councils on Aging and Senior Centers typically have an outreach worker or volunteer who can field calls from people needing transportation services. In addition, several organizations; including BayPath Elder Services, which has a referral department for similar services within communities they serve. BayPath only provides services to 14 out of the 22 MetroWest towns identified in the CHNA Health Assessment, which again, leaves a gap in services for seniors.

By protecting the access and availability of transportation, aging populations can maintain their independence and increase access to medical resources that they need to continue living a healthy lifestyle.

Key Findings:

As generations are living longer, and retaining a stronger grasp on their independence, it is important that the community offers resources to support this growing trend.

- “A record 46 million seniors live in the United States today, and older Americans – those age 65 and older – now account for 15% of the overall U.S. population. By 2050, 22% of Americans will be 65 and older, according to U.S. Census Bureau projections.¹

Seniors are a population in the community at an extremely high risk for motor vehicle accidents.

- Since older drivers are more fragile, their fatality rates are 17 times higher than those of 25- to 64-year-olds.
- Older drivers killed were significantly more likely to die of a chest injury (47.3% vs. 24.0% in youngest group) and less likely to die of a head injury (22.0% vs. 47.1% in youngest group).
- Older drivers were more likely to die at a date after the crash date (“delayed death”), as were males ($p=0.003$).
 - A 16-year-old driver had a 10.8%–12.0% probability of delayed death, while a 75-year-old had a 20.7%–22.7% probability. For those having a delayed death, the length of the delay increased significantly with age (2.9 days for age 16 vs. 7.9 for age 75). A subjective assessment of the case files indicated that frailty or a pre-existing health condition played a role in 4.3% of the younger drivers’ deaths, but 50.0% of the older group.

Many seniors have given up their licenses, or no longer drive due to their age. This has them relying on fragmented transportation services, paying out of pocket for taxis, or relying on neighbors, friends and family. This can lead to an increase in missed medical appointments, lack of social interaction and an overall decrease in quality of life for many seniors.

Older populations do not utilize computers or smart phones the way other generations do. Most older adults cannot access information on-line, due to lack of a computer, internet, or the general knowledge of how to use these services. Furthermore, most seniors do not appreciate making a phone call only to be greeted by an automated system. There is then the difficulty of following the steps needed to speak to the necessary person. Having a resource available for human to human interaction via the phone would benefit a large amount of the elderly population who presently don’t use a computer in any capacity, or hang up when frustrated with an automated telephone response.

Proposed Actions:

It is our recommendation that the Foundation focus on services needed for a centralized resource center as it relates to transportation services in the MetroWest area. Through funding

the development of a transportation resource center, out of the Framingham Senior Center, for seniors living in the MetroWest area, seniors will have the convenience of making a phone call to speak with a live person. If they chose to take public transportation, a transportation coordinator will be able to assist them in finding a schedule and route that is the best fit, or completing a reservation through a private transportation company. A transportation coordinator will also determine what transportation services are available, and what accommodations are offered, whether it is handicap accessible, if it provides door to door service, or is only offered to those with a military veteran status. Based on services available, a transportation coordinator will also be able to provide a rating system to the client based on cost, availability, timeliness, etc. As previously stated, there does not seem to be a lack of transportation services available, but fragmented service and no central location that links a destination with a rider in the MetroWest area, has created a need for a transportation resource center, where one call will provide access to multiple services.

A resource center will be a productive use of funds and alternative method to providing access to transportation due to the fact that there are so many different services offered with different requirements, such as accepted insurances, as well as handicap accessibility. Navigating these resources, and determining what services fit an individual's needs can be challenging, especially for older adults and dealing with medical complications.

The funding that will be required for this program is minimal, yet will see a significant impact in the MetroWest communities being served. In order to ensure the success of the transportation coordination project, outreach material will need to be provided to community partners. Community partners include, but are not limited to, town Housing Authority's, assisted living facilities, council on aging, hospitals, clinics, doctor's offices, elder services, existing transportation services and the Department of Transportation. Operational costs will include a multi-line phone system, hosted website domain as well as a database service that will host data collection and storage of information. The resource center will need to be staffed with two on call employees as well as one outreach coordinator that will operate the resource center, remotely, during weekly business hours.

Measurements of Success:

Due to the fact that there is no service that connects all available transportation across the MetroWest area, we are anticipating a positive impact in the community through the funding of the Self Propelled Seniors transportation center. Success for the resource center will be measured in several different ways, including, reduction in missed medical appointments, increased involvement in MetroWest communities that cater to older adults, such as senior center programs, which reduces social isolation issues, as well as the frequency of use of the resource center. We have identified a problem in the MetroWest communities, and there is a clear call to action to fill in the void that faces senior citizens who have a need to maintain their independence and navigate aging in a healthy and safe way. We do anticipate several risk factors, which can be overcome through collaboration and program evaluation. Risks that have

been identified for this project include, underutilization, uncooperative community partners as well as an unsupported infrastructure to support demand.

The program will initially be created out of the town of Framingham, which is central to the MetroWest area, as well as one of the largest towns in the area. There will then be a transition to scale the resource center to the Department of Transportation.

In summary, the creation of a transportation resource center will provide a service that links a multitude of transportation options across all MetroWest communities. This resource center will cater to senior citizens who are faced with a lack of information available to them in our “digital age” and need a central location to access information. With the creation of the resource center, we hope to see a reduction in automotive accidents involving senior citizens, as well as a reduced frequency in missed medical appointments due to lack of coordinated transportation.

Sources:

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