

Transportation:
A Crucial Issue for Adult Day Care in Vermont

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THE GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE

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Executive Summary

Transportation services are key to the success of adult day care programs in Vermont. The vast majority of participants travel to an adult day care center on transportation services that are arranged by their center. Adult day care centers are confronted with a variety of concerns about transportation that include: access for elders living in remote places, financing, safety, and the center's role in transportation.

The report provides an overview of adult day care transportation arrangements in Vermont. The report is based on interviews conducted during November and December of 2001 with administrators of all of the adult day care service programs in Vermont. It also includes a statistical profile of individual transportation arrangements reported by nine centers for 389 participants.

The average distance that participants live from their centers is 9.3 miles. For the average participant, the trip to the center takes nearly 30 minutes. For 10% of the participants, the travel time to the center is an hour or more. Centers make transportation arrangements for 87% of participants. The vast majority of participants travel to and from adult day care centers in vans. Families are a distant second most important source of transportation, accounting for only 11% of participants.

Transportation services are organized in two ways: Most centers arrange for transportation through regional transportation agencies; two centers operate their own van services. Both approaches have merit. Smaller centers welcome the availability of transportation services through regional transportation agencies because the centers lack the capacity to arrange transportation services themselves. For larger centers, however, the operation of a van service is a major advantage because it permits greater flexibility in scheduling sessions and provides opportunities for integration of transportation and on-site services.

Transportation for adult day care is heavily subsidized but often in ways that are not evident to the public. Purchases of vans are subsidized through the Federal Section 5310 program and state allocations. Frequently, transportation is included in the package of services that are offered by centers. The third of participants who pay privately for services that include transportation may not be aware of the fact that both their center services and transportation are usually publicly subsidized.

The major transportation issues for adult day care centers are:

- Continued public subsidies for transportation services.
- Safety for elders riding in vans. Some regional transportation agencies recommend the addition of an attendant to each van for elder safety reasons.
- Access for elders who live in the most remote areas. In most regions of Vermont, some elders living in remote areas do not have access to adult day care due to limitations in transportation services.

Introduction

Transportation arrangements are an integral but fragile element in the effectiveness of adult day care services in Vermont and nationwide. Almost by definition, adult day center participants generally cannot drive due to cognitive and/or physical limitations. Since adult day care services are congregate in nature and serve community-residing elders, this long-term care option is feasible only when there are arrangements to transport elders to and from service centers. Transportation is therefore a major issue for adult day care services.

The aim of this report is to call attention to transportation issues in adult day care services in Vermont. The report provides an overview of adult day care transportation arrangements for the state and focuses on the dimensions of transportation arrangements that are critical to the success or failure of adult day care services. The report is based on information from a number of sources. Interviews were conducted during November and December of 2001 with administrators of all of the adult day care service programs in the state. Administrators were asked to report on their involvement with transportation arrangements, their sources of transportation services, transportation financing, and issues in offering transportation services effectively. Additional information for this report was obtained through interviews with directors of several regional public transportation agencies and administrators in the Vermont Department of Aging and Disability. Also reported here is a statistical profile of individual transportation arrangements reported by nine centers for 389 participants. See Table 1. These centers provided information for each of their participants on the mode of transportation used, the distance traveled, the travel time, and the sources of transportation financing.

Background

In Vermont, and in other states that are largely rural, transportation options are limited for those who do not drive. In Vermont, the transportation issues are compounded by the mountainous terrain and harsh winter weather. In rural areas throughout the United States, general public transportation systems tend to be weak or nonexistent (Burkhardt, 2001). Those who do not drive themselves are largely dependent on relatives and friends who drive for them. In Vermont, and elsewhere, all human service and public sector entities that provide services on-site need to be concerned about transportation arrangements to and from their locations. For example, these concerns are paramount for public school systems as well as services for adults with physical and/or mental limitations. Transportation to and from services is particularly challenging to arrange for those who live in sparsely populated areas that are distant from the towns in which services are offered.

Transportation arrangements are integral to the role that adult day care centers play in enabling frail elders to continue to live at home. The preference of elders to remain at home even if they need long-term care is well documented. By providing respite for caregivers or structured and safe activities for the person during the day, adult day care services often play a key role in the support strategies that enable elders with functional limitations to remain at home. However, adult day care centers can play this key role only if reliable, safe, and affordable arrangements for transporting elders to their centers exist.

Formal transportation services can be vital to the relief that adult day care centers provide for family caregivers. While some families are able to drive elders to and from day centers, others are not able to do so. Organized transportation services are particularly important for family caregivers whose work schedules or work destinations make it impossible for them to provide transportation for adult day care themselves.

Transportation for adult day care has not been a focus of research attention. A search for published research on the topic yielded nothing. A recent overview article on rural transportation for the elderly included only fleeting mention of paratransit services and no attention at all to transportation for adult day care (Burkhardt, 2001).

Center Characteristics

Most centers are freestanding. However, two centers are located in or associated with a nursing home; one is located in a senior housing development; one is associated with a hospital; another is associated with both a hospital and a nursing home; and one is affiliated with a community mental health center. The centers that provided participant statistical data vary greatly in size. The smallest, Champlain Senior Center/Extra Care in Burlington, serves an average of 4 participants per day and 10 per month. The largest, Elderly Services in Middlebury, serves 65 participants per day in two shifts and 125 per month.

The centers serve a vulnerable population including the following special groups:

- elders with chronic mental illness
- adults with developmental delays
- adults with physical and/or cognitive impairments such as traumatic brain injury
- elders with dementia-related illnesses

Elders with dementia comprise the largest number of participants served by most of the centers. Among the nine centers that provided participant data, 90% of those served are 60 years of age and older. The average age of participants is 76.

Importance of Transportation for Centers

All the respondents agree that transportation is essential to the survival of their centers. One director stated: "Without adequate transportation there would be no program." All of the centers are involved with transportation arrangements for the majority of their participants (average 87%). Families are the only other significant source of transportation arrangements (for 11% of the participants).

Nearly all of the centers have a staff member who is explicitly designated to work with families to arrange transportation. While four centers have special transportation coordinators, one has an operations coordinator, and at the rest, the executive directors (sometimes in combination with assistants) coordinate transportation. Depending on the size of the center, the time spent in organizing transportation varies widely from less than an hour per week to 20 hours per week. Transportation coordinators often spend eight to ten hours per week on organizing transportation. The manner in which transportation arrangements are coordinated is consistent across the centers and involves initial dialog among intake staff, transportation staff, and the family. Typically, a

schedule that has been designed to meet the needs of all parties is then delivered to the transportation provider.

Mode, Distance, and Travel Time

The vast majority of participants travel to and from adult day care centers in vans. Other modes of transportation include individual automobile rides provided by families and volunteers, rides provided by staff members, and occasionally walking or driving by participants. Taxi services are used by only 1% of participants.

Many participants live substantial distances from centers. For them, the travel times are often significant. The average distance that participants live from their centers is 9.3 miles. One quarter of participants live at least 14 miles from their centers. Ten percent live 20 or more miles from their centers. For the average participant, the trip to the center takes nearly 30 minutes. For one quarter of the participants, the travel time to the centers is 40 minutes or more; for 10% of the participants, the travel time to their centers is one hour or more.

For some participants, the time traveling to and from their centers is a substantial portion of their time away from home. The typical adult day care session is nearly six hours in length. Since the typical travel time is 30 minutes in each direction, the typical participant spends 14% of her or his day away from home in transit. Ten percent of the participants spend at least one quarter of their time away from home in transit.

Approaches to Transportation

The centers vary fundamentally in their approaches to transportation arrangements. Most do not offer transportation themselves. Five of the Centers (East Barre, Lyndonville, Morrisville, Springfield, and St. Albans Bay) rely heavily on regional public transportation agencies. In the cases of East Barre, Lyndonville, Morrisville, and St. Albans Bay, a minimum of 88% of the participants are brought to their center by a regional public transportation agency. In the case of St. Albans Bay, 64% of participants make use of regional public transportation agency services. Two providers (Middlebury Elderly Services and Project Independence in Bennington) operate their own transportation services. The differences in the transportation approaches reflect on both the capacities of individual centers and a policy debate in Vermont about the use of public subsidies for specialized transportation services

Regional Public Transportation Agencies. Vermont has 14 regional public transportation agencies. Some are private, nonprofit organizations; others are public agencies. Regional public transportation agencies have a broad mandate to serve all of those who do not use their own automobiles. The regional agencies employ a variety of approaches that include buses that operate on fixed routes, car pools, taxis, vans equipped with lifts, and volunteer drivers.

Regional public transportation agencies serve a variety of groups with special needs. These include not only elder users of adult day care services, but also children and adults with physical and mental handicaps, medical transportation for Medicaid recipients, and transportation to training and employment for participants in welfare to work programs.

The regional public transportation agencies mostly deploy vans that are driven by professional drivers. A few also make use of taxis and volunteers who drive their own automobiles. Volunteer drivers can be particularly important for participants who live in remote locations and who need rides at special times of the day. Volunteer drivers play a major role for Rural Community Transportation, the regional public transportation agency that serves the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont's most rural area. According to its web site, Rural Community Transportation has 200 volunteer drivers who drove over 2 million miles in a recent year.

For adult day care however, regional public transportation agencies rely heavily and increasingly on vans. Even in the case of Rural Community Transportation, the use of volunteers for this purpose is gradually being phased out. The use of vans is preferred because so many adult day care participants either have mobility limitations that make it difficult for them to get into an automobile or cognitive deficits that may lead to behavior problems.

For the regional public transportation agencies, adult day care center transportation represents a relatively small but demanding aspect of their overall services. For both Wheels, Inc. and Stagecoach Transportation Services, for example, adult day care represents only 5% of their rides. However, Stagecoach spends approximately 10% of its operating hours on adult day care services.

Adult Day Care Center Provided Transportation. For a large center, the operation of its own transportation service is an attractive option. By providing its own transportation, a center can customize its transportation services to the preferences of participants and their families. Elderly Services of Middlebury, the largest adult day care provider in Vermont, transports 75% of its participants through its own fleet of vans. Project Independence in Bennington provides its own transportation services for 28 of 44 (64%) of its participants.

With 116 participants in a sample month, Elderly Services has more than twice as many participants as any other center. It is probably no coincidence that because it operates its own transportation service, Elderly Services in Middlebury offers a range of attendance options that are not offered by other centers. Elderly Services' participants can attend a morning session, an afternoon session, or an extended day session that spans the morning and the afternoon. Among Elderly Services' participants, 41% attend morning session, 32% attend an afternoon session, and 27% take advantage of the extended day option. Most of the other centers offer only a single daily schedule.

The operation of its own transportation service also enables Elderly Services of Middlebury to address special transportation needs of participants since program staff members do much of the driving. This approach assures that drivers are familiar with the participants they transport. Not only are these drivers well acquainted with participants' special needs; they can interact verbally with riders in transit in ways that complement the social exchange that takes place while they are in the center.

Transportation Access and Timing

Elders in some areas of Vermont do not have access to adult day care services because of lack of transportation. Nine of the thirteen centers reported that portions of their service areas are not covered by regular public transportation services. One respondent indicated that there might be

areas so rural that providers are not even be aware of them. Despite the fact that service plans indicate that transportation is being provided to all regions of their service areas, directors report that there are specific areas, particularly in the Northeast Kingdom, that are chronically underserved. Both transportation costs and travel time make it difficult for centers to serve elders who live in distant and isolated areas.

For families, participants, and centers, the timing of the availability of transportation may be decisive. Transportation services may be available but not at the time sought by participants and families. Although most respondents indicate that the regional public transportation agencies were accommodating "within reason," several directors report having greater difficulty finding transportation at specific times of the day, including early in the morning and late in the evening. Several directors report that the transportation providers need advance notice of one or two days (one up to 75 hours) in order to provide individual rides.

Transportation Financing

Transportation charges are often built into fees for center services. Typically, one daily fee is levied on participants for an array of services, including transportation. Both transportation and day care services are often subsidized. When participants have Medicaid coverage, Medicaid pays for both. Since Medicaid provides financing for 34% of participants, it is a major source of transportation financing.

Roughly one-third (36%) of participants are classified as private pay. For two centers, Bennington and Springfield, more than half of the participants pay privately. However, the private pay designation is deceptive, since 90% of private-pay participants receive discounts both for transportation and center services. These discounts (scholarships) are financed from multiple sources, including federal funds allocated by Area Agencies on Aging and private fund raising.

When centers charge their private-pay participants separately for transportation, the daily transportation charge levied on families ranges from \$1-\$25, depending on the route. One center charges 20% of the daily fee, which is on a sliding fee scale (up to \$9 per hour). It is common for private pay participants to pay approximately \$10 per day for transportation.

Transportation services for adult day care are often subsidized through Vermont's participation in the federal Section 5310 program that provides block grants for paratransit services. These federal funds are supplemented substantially by the state of Vermont. The Section 5310 funds are available both to subsidize the purchase of vehicles and the operation of transportation services. (More of the funds go to support operations than go to subsidize the purchase of vehicles.) According to Peter Dannenberg of the Vermont Department of Public Transportation, Vermont is one of a few states that "allow those human service agencies, which are Section 5310 grantees, to enter into 'purchase of service' contracts with transportation providers. Most transportation providers who are awarded contracts are public transit systems. In a few cases, the human service agencies contract with private for-profit transportation providers for van or taxi services." In Vermont, transportation providers can draw on Section 5310 funds to pay for both taxis and the expenses of volunteer drivers. Both regional public transportation agencies and nonprofit service providers are eligible for funds through Section 5310 program to purchase vehicles. Nonprofit service providers are eligible to receive funds either to purchase vehicles or to subsidize costs of transportation services but not both.

Overall, the Section 5310 program reduces the charges that providers pass along to consumers for transportation services. Both adult day care administrators and regional public transportation agencies recognize the importance of Section 5310 funds. However, the contribution of the Section 5310 program to the financing of transportation services may not be apparent to consumers.

Transportation Quality Issues

To assure safety of participants, administrators emphasize the need for "door-through-door" transportation service. Both because of cognitive impairments and physical mobility limitations, some participants require assistance in preparing to leave and returning to their residences. Some need help in putting on outer garments; others need guidance and physical assistance with walking (particularly in the snow and ice). One administrator reported that when her center started with its current transportation provider, the drivers who had been accustomed to picking up children, simply honked their horn and left after a few minutes if the participant did not come out of the house. This did not work well, but with training provided by the center's staff, the drivers learned to be more accommodating to the older participants. However, one administrator reported that her center's transportation provider refuses to provide door-through-door service because of liability concerns.

When drivers go into participants' homes to pick them up, the safety of participants left in the van is a concern. Some participants become agitated when left alone; there is also concern that unattended participants may wander away. One regional public transportation agency designs its routes to minimize the travel time of the most vulnerable participants. On the trips to the center, this provider attempts to pick up those most at risk for agitation or wandering last. On the return trip, the provider attempts to drop these participants off first.

The safety and general well being of participants while they ride vans is also an issue. A number of administrators reported that drivers are not able to provide participants with adequate attention while the vans are moving. Some believe that an attendant should be added on the vans to provide door-through-door assistance and to attend to participants while the van is moving. Since transportation costs are already high, the financing of an attendant to accompany the driver poses a major cost barrier.

Sensitivity of drivers to participants is a widespread concern. Most administrators express satisfaction with the regular drivers whom they credit with being generally friendly, accommodating, and understanding of the needs of this population. However, substitute or inexperienced drivers do not receive such high marks for performance. Two respondents spoke of the need to provide training and the importance of good communication between the center's staff and the transportation providers.

Adult day care administrators recommend improved training and compensation for drivers employed by regional public transportation agencies. Directors consider both increased compensation and training as critical factors in improving driver retention. High turnover rates among drivers have implications for quality. Even if new drivers are well trained as drivers and operators of lifts, skill in addressing the more subtle special needs of adult day care participants tends to come only through experience and extensive education. Day care center administrators

maintain that increased training for drivers about disabilities would improve their responsiveness to the special needs of adult day care center participants. Directors also contend that this kind of training is likely to increase job satisfaction among van drivers.

Discussion

The Importance of Subsidies. For all providers, public subsidies are vital. Some of the subsidies are explicitly for public transportation. Section 5310 funds subsidize the purchase of the vans that transport most participants to their centers. Section 5310 also helps to cover operating costs of transportation services. Section 5310 funds are vital for both regional public transportation agencies and the centers that operate their own vans. Medicaid reimburses directly to cover transportation expenses. The Older Americans Act funds that are passed along to centers by the Vermont Department of Aging and Disability can be used for general purposes including transportation. When transportation services are built into a center's overall charges for services, the Section 5310 and Older Americans Act subsidies reduce the rates that centers have to charge to participants. Increases in public subsidies would enable centers to reduce charges to participants and to reach elders who live in remote areas who are currently not being served or who are underserved because of the high cost of providing transportation for them. Increases in public funding could also enable transportation providers to expand their services for outings and other special events. With deeper subsidies, transportation providers could offer more training and a higher level of compensation to drivers. Providers, then, might be able to retain skilled drivers longer. More extensive subsidies might also enable van operators to pay for attendants in vans who would make it possible for drivers to concentrate on driving and to stay with their vehicles when elders need assistance.

Reductions in public subsidies would have the opposite effect. Reduced public subsidies result in transportation services that are less likely to reach remote areas; transportation providers are less likely to attract, train, and retain skilled drivers; centers would have to raise more money privately or pass along more transportation costs to participants and their families. Higher charges to users are likely to result in reduced use of services.

Access for Elders Living in Remote Areas. Access to adult day care services for elders living in remote areas is problematic. As indicated above, most of the center directors report that elders in some portions of their service areas do not have access to adult day care services because of lack of transportation. Ironically, elders living in remote locations may particularly benefit from the services that are offered at adult day care centers because of their tendency to have a more isolated existence. Cost is a major barrier to extending transportation services to reach those living in the most remote areas. One regional public transportation agency, who charges \$28.50 per hour for van services, estimated the cost of serving a new adult day care participant living in a remote area as \$50 per day. Neither the center nor the family is likely to accept the charge on a sustained basis.

Merits of a Dual Approach to Transportation Organization. Vermont adult day care centers employ two strategies for offering transportation to clients. Through services operated by

- regional public transportation agencies
- the centers themselves

Both approaches have merit. For operators of small adult day care services, the option of drawing on van services operated by regional public transportation agencies is highly welcome. Small adult day care providers would find it difficult to purchase, operate, and maintain vans of their own. For them, regional public transportation agencies are a valuable resource. Even though they have only limited leverage with regional public transportation agencies, adult day care administrators find the services to be sufficiently responsive to the needs of center administrators and participants.

For a large center, the option of owning and operating its own vans is also highly attractive. Elderly Services in Middlebury is large enough to own and operate its own fleet of vans. As indicated above, Elderly Services has greater confidence in the ability of its drivers to be sensitive to the special needs of participants as they travel because the center's program staff does much of the driving. Elderly Services does not perceive a need for an attendant on vans because of the great familiarity of its drivers with participants. Elderly Services is also able to provide participants with more scheduling options, in part, because of its flexibility in deploying its vans. For this reason, access to Section 5310 funds is highly important for Elderly Services. In the future, other centers may be large enough so that they, too, will want to take advantage of the option of owning and operating their own vans.

Van Attendants. The majority of day care center administrators agree that having an attendant on the vans would be helpful. One stated that it is only “a matter of time” before an incident occurs that will make an attendant a necessity. Yet because of the cost, both adult day care centers and regional public transportation agencies are likely to resist placing a second paid person on vans to attend to the passengers. One less costly alternative could be recruiting and training volunteers to serve as attendants on vans when participant safety is a concern. Some volunteers might be attracted to a role that largely involves surveillance and interaction with participants without the responsibilities associated with driving. Pointing to the Head Start program as a precedent, one Regional

Transportation Provider representative suggested family members as possible attendants. Her proposal was that families might take turns in serving as attendants. Each family might be asked to assist one day a month. The practicality of this option is uncertain since it might detract from the respite that is a major benefit that adult day care offers to family caregivers.

Stipends may be needed to make it attractive for volunteers to accept assignments as attendants. One transit administrator observed that volunteer drivers receive mileage reimbursement while a volunteer serving as an attendant currently would receive no payment. In the absence of funding to pay for attendants and the absence of pure volunteers who are willing to serve as attendants, offering volunteers a modest stipend may be a viable compromise.

Reference

Burkhardt, J.E. (2001). Transportation for the elderly in rural America. *The Public Policy and Aging Report*. 12, 1, 9-13.

Appendix

Table 1

Summary Statistics: All Centers
(n=389)

Variable	Mean/Percentage
Age of participant	76.3
Distance from center (miles)	9.4
Travel time to center (in minutes)	28.1
Sessions per month	11.4
Time of sessions	
Morning	13.3%
Afternoon	10.5%
Morning/afternoon	76.1%
Length of sessions (hours)	5.9
Arranges transportation	
Center	86.9%
Family	11.3%
Other	1.8%
Sources of payment*	
Medicaid	33.7%
Veterans Affairs	7.7%
Mental health	12.8%
State general funds	37.3%
Other public	11.6%
Private	36.5%

*Multiple sources of payment are possible

Administrators of the following adult day care centers were interviewed:

Elderly Services, Inc. of Addison County
Bennington Project Independence of Bennington County
Riverside Life Enrichment Center of Caledonia County
Club Respite of Franklin County
Out and About of Lamoille County
Randolph Adult Day Services of Orange County
Oxbow Senior Independence Program of Orange County
Barre Project Independence of Washington County
Townsend Adult Activity Center of Windham County
Springfield Area Adult Day Services of Windsor County
Champlain Senior Center of Chittenden County
Adult Day Services of Orleans County
Interage Adult Day Center of Rutland County
The Gathering Place of Windham County

Administrators of the following Regional Public Transit Providers were interviewed:

Rural Community Transportation, Northeast Kingdom
Stagecoach Transportation Services, Orange & Northern Windsor Counties
Wheels, Inc, Washington & Orange Counties