

Kansans with Disabilities: Transportation Barriers = Health Barriers



Disability and Health Program kansans with disabilities can be healthy

Transportation is a social determinant of health that affects people's daily lives. According to the American Hospital Association (AHA)*, more than 3.5 million U.S. residents forego medical care each year due to transportation barriers, such as lack of public transit and costs.

The Problem

People with disabilities report more transportation barriers than nondisabled people. Failure to accommodate disability-related needs often causes these barriers, which impede access to medical care and other life activities, such as employment and education. Researchers cite transportation-related issues as the most frequently reported problems by people with disabilities, including Kansans who must often travel long distances to obtain medical care from specialists.

- Many people with disabilities live in poverty, making transportation cost a common barrier.
- Lack of reliable transportation is a frequent problem, especially in rural communities. It is estimated that 40% of U.S. counties do not have public transportation.
- Transportation inaccessibility includes physical barriers in vehicles and at transit stops, or systems that require skills such as advanced comprehension and literacy to navigate.
- Transportation inflexibility presents obstacles such as limited days and hours of availability and limited destinations; the need to plan in advance may not accommodate sudden illness or scheduling changes from medical providers.
- Research finds that transportation barriers can cause people with disabilities to forego preventive care and use the emergency department more frequently, resulting in both lack of medical care continuity and poorer health.

Personal Experiences

The following concerns about medical transportation were expressed by Kansas Disability and Health Program Consumer Advisory Board (CAB) members and other Kansans with disabilities:

"The bigger issue is the high demand for paratransit. It is good in Hays but because the demand is high, users have to call in advance. Transportation on short notice is very difficult."

"A van with a wheelchair lift costs \$30,000 to \$40,000 more than a typical van, way over the budget of most people with disabilities."

"When the paratransit is late then people miss their appointments, or they are late and this does not sit well with medical providers."

"Transportation outside of the area where people live is not available. If someone needs to see a specialist in another town/city, it is difficult if not close to impossible to get there."

"One of the major barriers that really just keeps me from participating in everything is either accessibility or transportation. And a lot of the time, because of [where] I live, we really don't have any good public transportation here. I live a mile from the nearest bus stop, and if I took a lot of those buses, they can take you 3, 4 hours to get to the city. And so there really is no way for me as somebody who is blind and can't drive to be able to go to things."

*Health Research & Educational Trust. (2017, November). Social determinants of health series: Transportation and the role of hospitals. Chicago, IL: Health Research & Educational Trust. Accessed at www.aha.org/transportation

Solutions

CAB members suggest:

- Gaining cooperation from providers in scheduling medical appointments, procedures, and tests on the same day whenever possible would help to eliminate the need for multiple trips, thereby reducing transportation problems.
- Involving providers in solving the problem, a strategy supported by the AHA, which suggests hospitals, health systems, and other community entities address transportation to reduce missed appointments and unfilled prescriptions. These result in delays in care and worsened health problems.

Kansans with disabilities say they wish medical providers had a better understanding of the considerable barriers involved in accessing transportation for medical appointments. Such understanding could make accessing medical care less stressful and result in better health and quality of life for this group.



For More Information

Kim Bruns, DHP Program Coordinator
The University of Kansas
Institute for Health and Disability Policy Studies
1000 Sunnyside Ave., Room 4089
Lawrence, KS 66045
(785) 864-1561
kbruns@ku.edu
ihdps.ku.edu/dandhkansas

“Access to public transportation is a key to independence and full community participation for people with disabilities.”
--Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund[^]

[^]Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. (2019). *Transportation*. dredf.org/public-policy/transportation

This fact sheet was supported by Grant/Cooperative Agreement Number DD000006 from CDC, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Disability and Health Branch. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC, NCBDDD, Disability and Health Branch.