

# Older Adult Passengers & their Transportation Challenges

## CONSEQUENCES OF AGING THAT AFFECT TRANSPORTATION UTILIZATION

Aging presents a variety of changes in physical and cognitive skills that impact the utilization of transportation options. For example, starting at about age 55, there may be a slow decrease in how well we process information. Although this does not affect all older adults at the same age or in the same way, these are skills that generally decline with age, and older adults who use transportation options need to be aware of them.

**Visual Decline** is a critical loss for older adults who use transportation options. What some refer to as “aging eyes” may require more light to distinguish uneven sidewalks, result in some difficulty reading signs and markings at bus stops, and even make it difficult to get to the curb to access a van.

**Cognition** includes memory as well as thinking, use of sensory perception, attention, learning, thought, visual processing, reading, and problem solving. Older adults with cognitive challenges may not be able to remember the time transportation services are scheduled, may not be able to handle money to pay for rides, may not be able to stay alone in the vehicle or at the destination, may not be able to tell the driver where they live, or may get lost when dropped off at or near their home.

**Physical Condition** is important in ensuring access to transportation options. Aging results in the loss of muscle mass and bone strength, which can make it difficult to walk to the bus stop or to the curb, or to climb stairs to access a van. It also can impact the ability of the passenger to get from the vehicle to and into the destination.

**Dementia** is a progressive decline in cognitive function due to damage or disease in the brain beyond what might be expected from normal aging. It is a non-specific illness that can affect memory, attention, language, and problem solving. A diminished functioning in judgment, multi-tasking, reaction times, and in spatial skills make it difficult to physically access a vehicle. On the following page are ten warning signs of dementia identified by the Alzheimer’s Association. These can impact on driving behavior and also can impact on the utilization of transportation services.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

*This fact sheet was adapted from Beverly Foundation and NVTC publications in 2020 by Dr. Helen Kerschner.*

## 10 WARNING SIGNS OF DEMENTIA

- Memory loss
- Difficulty performing tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation to time/place
- Poor or decreased judgment
- Abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood/behavior
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

## ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia and, although every person experiences it differently, it typically progresses with a similar trajectory. The most common system breaks the progression into seven stages.

<b>Stage 1</b>	no impairment
<b>Stage 2</b>	very mild impairment
<b>Stage 3</b>	mild decline
<b>Stage 4</b>	moderate decline
<b>Stage 5</b>	moderately severe decline
<b>Stage 6</b>	severe decline
<b>Stage 7</b>	very severe decline

When an individual is diagnosed with dementia, one of the first concerns that families and caregivers face is whether or not the person should drive. According to the Alzheimer's Association, a person living with Alzheimer's will, at some point, be unable to drive.

Research shows that it is best to reduce driving and to use strategies for modifying driving behavior, such as driving shorter distances, driving only in familiar areas, limiting driving to daytime, avoiding difficult left-hand turns, and avoiding driving in bad weather.

### **Below are tips from the Alzheimer's Association for use by drivers and/or family members in planning for driving retirement.**

- Transition driving responsibilities to others. Tell the person you will drive, arrange for someone else to drive, arrange a taxi service, or locate special transportation services.
- Find ways to reduce the person's need to drive. Have prescription medicines, groceries, or meals delivered.
- Solicit the support of others. Ask a physician to advise the person not to drive and/or to write a letter or prescription stating that the person with Alzheimer's must not drive.
- Ask a respected family authority figure or an attorney to reinforce the message about not driving. When the person is still in the early stage of Alzheimer's. It might be helpful to ask them to sign a driving contract that gives you, as a relative, permission to help them stop driving when the time comes. You can then use the document to remind your family member what's been decided.

## CHALLENGES USING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

The same physical and cognitive challenges that made it difficult or impossible for older adults to drive can make it difficult or impossible for them to locate, accept, and use transportation options.

Ten examples are included below.

1. locating a transportation service that is “just like driving the car”
2. knowing the transportation options that are available
3. being satisfied with the level of comfort and convenience of options
4. having physical or cognitive assistance that may be necessary
5. getting to necessary and desired destinations
6. being able to travel at preferred or necessary times of the day, evening, or weekend
7. knowing that the option is safe and that the drivers are helpful
8. being able to afford preferred and/or available transportation options
9. having help to and into as well as not staying alone at the destination
10. Being aware of age-friendly transportation services

### Challenges Faced By Transportation Services

The transportation challenges of older adult passengers also present a variety of challenges for transportation services. These include: providing information about service availability, adapting services to meet visual and physical needs, ensuring access to services for people with cognitive limitations, creating services that are acceptable to prospective passengers, and providing services that are affordable to them and to the communities in which they live.

### Challenges Faced By Volunteer Driver Programs

Volunteer driver programs also face challenges in serving older adult passengers. In a 2016 survey of 146 volunteer drivers that provided transportation to 54,338 passengers: 29,943 were age 65+ and 7,536 were age 85+. Below are other descriptions of those passengers.

- 76% were not able to drive
- 61% could not access other transportation options
- 48% had outlived their driving expectancy
- 46% had cognitive or physical limitations
- 39% could not afford to pay for rides
- 33% needed someone to assist them with transportation
- 29% lived alone
- 20% had no other means of transportation
- 25% had mobility limitations
- 13% used a walker

## MEETING OLDER ADULT PASSENGER NEEDS

Below are ways in which transportation services can meet the needs of older adult passengers who may or may not have cognitive limitations.

### Meeting Availability Needs: The Transportation Service....

- can be reached by the majority of older adults in the community
- provides transportation anytime (day, evenings, weekends, 24/7)
- can take riders to destinations beyond city and county boundaries
- maintains organizational relationships with human service agencies
- provides transportation to older adults regardless of their cognitive capabilities

### Meeting Acceptability Needs: The Transportation Service...

- uses vehicles that are easy for older adults to access
- offers "demand response" with no advance scheduling requirement
- provides "sensitivity" training on older adult issues for volunteer drivers
- adheres to narrow "window of time" for home and destination pick-up
- ensures cleanliness and maintenance of vehicles

### Meeting Accessibility Needs: The Transportation Service...

- can accommodate the needs of a majority of older adults in the community
- has information for improving older adult transportation knowledge
- can provide "door-through-door" transportation when needed
- can provide services to essential and non-essential activities
- can link older adults with "more appropriate" transportation options

### Meeting Adaptability Needs: The Transportation Service...

- will provide transportation escorts when needed
- can provide multiple stop trips for individual passengers
- can offer vehicles that accommodate wheelchairs and walkers
- maintains a policy of "adapting the system to meet the needs of older adults"
- undertakes an annual older adult customer survey for service improvement

### Meeting Affordability Needs: The Transportation Service...

- offers reduced fares (or free transportation) to older adult passengers
- secures and allocates funding specifically for the support of older adult transit services
- offers opportunity to purchase monthly pass instead of paying cash
- offers options for purchasing tickets by mail or the internet
- uses volunteer drivers to reduce costs for providing "extra" services

You may be familiar with and know that the above needs criteria are adapted from the Age-Friendliness Calculator and the 5A's of Age-Friendly Transportation. The purposes and organizational methods of many volunteer driver programs include features that meet these needs criteria and many other transportation needs of older adult passengers.

To review (and calculate) the 5A's and to learn more about Volunteer Driver Programs go to the Shepherd's Centers of America website: [www.ShepherdCenters.org](http://www.ShepherdCenters.org).