

Alaska Commission on Aging Teleconference on Senior Transportation in Alaska

Purpose

The teleconference aims to guide the Alaska Commission on Aging in fulfilling its statutory responsibility to produce actionable recommendations for the governor, legislature, and AMHTA regarding the enhancement of transportation services for seniors in Alaska. This involves a comprehensive analysis of current challenges, service gaps, and funding limitations to improve transportation availability and effectiveness throughout the state.

Participants

The teleconference will include commissioners of the Alaska Commission on Aging, experts in the field, service providers across Alaska, partners, and members of the public. These participants bring valuable expertise, knowledge, and experience regarding transportation services.

Objectives

- **Data Collection:** Gather essential information on transportation challenges and services in Alaska.
- **Insight Gathering:** Capture diverse perspectives and insights from various regions to understand unique challenges.
- **Needs Assessment:** Identify critical areas in transportation care requiring additional support and resources.
- **Recommendation Development:** Formulate evidence-based recommendations as a joint advocate to the Alaska Mental Health Trust and legislature for better allocation and usage of funds for transportation services.

Agenda

1. Introduction and Meeting Objectives (10 minutes)

- Welcome and introductions.
- Review of the meeting's objectives and expected outcomes.

2. Presentation on the Status of Transportation for Seniors (20 minutes)

- General information
- State and Federal Opportunities

3. Regional Breakout Rooms (30 minutes) *Participants will be divided into regional breakout rooms to discuss key challenges and impacts. Each room will focus on the following questions, with each question allotted approximately 10 minutes for discussion:*

1. What are the most pressing and/or unique challenges in providing transportation services to seniors in your region?
2. What works well in providing transportation services to seniors in your region?
3. Based on challenges and successes identified in questions 1 and 2, what immediate steps can be taken and what long term strategies can be adopted to improve transportation services in Alaska?

4. Breakout Lead Presentations (35 minutes)

- Each breakout room leader will present a summary of their group's discussion to the larger group, highlighting key challenges, impacts, and proposed solutions.

5. Recommendations Development (10 minutes)

- Open forum for brainstorming and discussion to develop a set of recommendations aimed at improving transportation services.

6. Summary of Discussions and Decisions (10 minutes)

- Recap of key points discussed, decisions made, and next steps outlined.
- Assignment of responsibilities for action items.

7. Public Comment

- Open the floor for comments, suggestions, and questions from the public and other stakeholders.

Information on Transportation in Alaska

Challenges

1. **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Many Alaskan communities, particularly rural villages, lack organized transportation systems. Seniors in these areas often do not own cars and rely on ATVs for local travel, with few options for reaching larger towns or cities.
2. **Geographic and Climatic Barriers:** Alaska's immense size, rugged terrain, and severe winter weather complicate transportation, making it both difficult and costly. The vast distances and lack of road connectivity between many places add to the challenge.
3. **Limited Public Transportation:** In most rural parts of Alaska, public transportation is sparse or non-existent. This lack of accessibility makes it hard for seniors to access essential services such as healthcare, grocery shopping, and social activities outside their immediate community.
4. **Economic Constraints:** Transportation can be prohibitively expensive, especially for low-income seniors who do not qualify for Medicaid and cannot afford private transportation services.
5. **Accessibility Issues:** There is a notable lack of transportation options that are equipped for wheelchairs or designed to accommodate seniors with mobility limitations, restricting their ability to travel.
6. **Socio-Demographic Challenges:** Many seniors live in poor, isolated Alaska Native communities with low vehicle ownership. The insular nature of these communities also makes inter-community transportation both socially and logistically challenging.

Opportunities and Innovations

1. **Tele-Medicine:** The expansion of tele-health services by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network is reducing the need for long-distance travel for medical consultations, serving over 200 communities.
2. **Community-Based Solutions:** Examples like Yakutat, where a retired ambulance has been repurposed to provide wheelchair-accessible transportation, highlight local ingenuity in addressing transportation needs.
3. **Tribal and Organizational Programs:** Programs like the Kenaitze Indian Tribe's transportation service and Anchorage's Anchor-Rides offer models for successful senior-specific transportation solutions, providing essential services like door-to-door rides and help with errands.
4. **Patient Travel Programs:** The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's program has successfully coordinated numerous trips for medical purposes, demonstrating effective organizational response to the mobility needs of seniors.

Moving Forward

1. **Enhanced Coordination:** There is a need for greater collaboration among state agencies, tribal organizations, local governments, and non-profits to create integrated and sustainable transportation solutions.
2. **Culturally Sensitive Strategies:** Developing transportation solutions that respect and incorporate cultural preferences and needs is vital, especially in areas with significant Alaska Native populations.
3. **Balancing Independence and Support:** Efforts must consider the balance between promoting seniors' independence and providing necessary support to ensure they have safe and reliable access to transportation.
4. **Adaptive and Flexible Solutions:** Recognizing the diverse and unique needs of Alaska's senior population, solutions must be adaptable and tailored to fit different geographic and demographic realities.