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# TRANSPORTATION TO LITTLE RIVERS HEALTH CLINIC IN WELLS RIVER, VERMONT

ANUPAMA BALASUBRAMANIAN / JULY-AUGUST 2023

DR. FAY HOMAN



# PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

- Transportation access to healthcare appointments in rural areas can often mean **traveling great distances** in between one's place of residence and location of the health service (Arcury et al., 2005)
- There is **limited research** on specific challenges in transportation and accessing rural health services (Henning-Smith et al., 2017)
- Specifically, there is no information currently distributed to patients at Little Rivers Health Care (LRHC) in Wells River directing them to transportation-related resources
  - Wells River is a village in the town of Newbury in Orange County, Vermont, United States
  - Wells Rivers ' population was **431 people** at the 2020 census, with **24.2%** of residents living in poverty (Wells River, Vermont, 2021)
  - It is classified as a rural area per the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes (USDA ERS - Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes, 2019)
- This project relates to the **Social Determinants of Health** and **Medical Practice Transformation** AHEC Core Topic Areas

# PUBLIC HEALTH COST AND CONSIDERATIONS

- According to a Harvard Business Review article, missed appointments—often related to being unable to find transportation to an appointment—can lead to an annual cost to the healthcare system of over \$150 billion (John Sviokla, 2010)
- An estimated 3.6 million people a year in the United States skip necessary health visits because they either do not own or operate a vehicle, or cannot afford public/private transportation (Thomas & Wedel, 2014)
- Skipping necessary care due to lack of transportation can lead to unneeded emergency department utilization, expensive hospitalization, and avoidable surgery (Thomas & Wedel, 2014)

# COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

- Kim Russell, SASH Coordinator Orange East, RuralEdge
  - “If patients are taking public transportation, they don’t always have a driver so they still cannot get to their appointments. In other cases, they live too far out.”
  - “Transportation agencies are short-staffed and there are not a lot of volunteers.”
- Ashleen Buchanan, Program and Grants Coordinator, Little Rivers Health Care
  - “Public transportation is challenging because there are not good places for people to wait [for a bus] -- especially when it gets really cold, which happens here.”
  - “A lot of patients have multiple appointments at our clinic. One patient might be seen for medication assisted therapy, bring their child in for a well-child check, have separate medical visits, and come in to receive WIC food baskets.”
  - “A lot of patients don’t have a vehicle at all, others don’t have a vehicle that works.”

# INTERVENTION AND METHODOLOGY

- Vital Communities, Go! Vermont & Advance Transit have previously collaborated to create a guide for patients in the Upper Valley (encompasses regions of both Vermont and New Hampshire that are the core population LRHC Wells River serves)
- This flyer can be distributed on the walls of the clinic, and other copies can be printed for patients to take with them after their appointments
- Additionally, I created a second infographic (right) that specifically covers Medicaid's ride transportation system
- This infographic can similarly be printed and/or distributed to patients in Orange or other counties

## Transportation in the Upper Valley

BUS | CARPOOL | VANPOOL | TAXI | DIAL-A-RIDE & MORE

### TRANSIT/COMMUTER BUS

**ADVANCE TRANSIT**  
FREE weekday bus around Hartford, Wilder, White River Junction, Norwich, Lebanon, West Lebanon, Hanover, Enfield & Canaan.  
advancetransit.com or 802-295-1824

**STAGECOACH**  
Commuter, circulator, and shopping trips in Orange and Northern Windsor Counties, including commuter routes on I-89 and I-91 to Hartford, Lebanon & Hanover.  
stagecoach-rides.org or 802-728-3773

**Sullivan County Transportation**  
Sullivan County Transportation (part of Southwestern Community Services) operates weekday buses in Claremont, Newport & Charlestown.  
scshelps.org/transportation.htm or 603-542-9609

**REAL-TIME** bus info & trip planner  
advance transit.com  
Available on the App Store and Google Play

**The Current**  
Connecticut River Transit/"The Current" operates the I-91 commuter route weekdays from Bellows Falls to White River Junction, Lebanon & Hanover.  
crtransit.org or 802-460-7433

All commuter buses are equipped with bike racks.  
Plan your bus trip at [google.transit.com!](http://google.transit.com)

### do you know about EMERGENCY RIDE HOME?

If you carpool, vanpool, take the bus, bike, or walk to work, **EMERGENCY RIDE HOME** reimburses the cost of a cab or rental vehicle (including Zipcar) if an emergency arises and you need to get home, to the park & ride, to the hospital, or to your child's school or daycare.

New Hampshire residents working within Advance Transit's New Hampshire service area qualify for the Upper Valley TMA's Emergency Ride Home program. The benefit offers reimbursement up to \$50 per trip (maximum six times per year).

If you live OR work in Vermont, register with Go! Vermont at [connectingcommuters.org](http://connectingcommuters.org) to qualify for the Guaranteed Ride Home program. The benefit offers reimbursement up to \$70 per trip (maximum six times per year).

Download the Reimbursement Form at [vitalcommunities.org/erh](http://vitalcommunities.org/erh)

vital COMMUNITIES Transportation

This guide is a collaboration of Vital Communities, Go! Vermont & Advance Transit

## Medicaid Transportation

Having trouble getting to your healthcare appointments, and have Medicaid insurance?

- 1. Confirm no other options are available:**
  - No public transportation
  - Unregistered or uninsured vehicle
  - No licensed driver available
  - Car does not run or is unavailable
  - No one available to drive
- 2. Meet requirements**

The appointment must be for a Medicaid-covered service, with a Medicaid-covered provider.
- 3. Plan ahead**

You must ask for the ride at least two days before your appointment. If you are traveling more than 60 miles away, Medicaid needs your doctor to fill out a prior authorization form.
- 4. Appealing a denial**

If your request for transportation was denied, you can appeal. To appeal, call Member Services at 1-800-250-8427 within 90 days of the date of denial.

Transportation Contacts

Orange & Windsor Counties: Tri-Valley Transit  
802-728-3773

Scan the barcode to find other counties.

# RESULTS

- Both graphics (the one that previously existed and the one that I created) will be placed in the waiting room, around bulletin boards, in patient rooms, and at the checkout window
- Providers at LRHC had a positive response to these two graphics, and agreed that these are resources that can be more widely distributed to patients
  - Providers were hopeful that these resources would also be well-received and easily interpreted by patients
  - They noted that while the first infographic is specific to their county, the second is more broadly applicable and the bar code at the bottom ensures that patients who live in different counties can also access the right resource for them
- These tools can supplement the ones that care coordinators front-desk staff, and others at LRHC share with patients as they schedule their appointments

# EVALUATION AND LIMITATIONS

- Measuring effectiveness of the project
  - Keep track of the number of printouts that are left in each patient room or other location, and note how many of these are actually picked up by patients
  - Note any changes in rate of no-show appointments after distribution of the graphics
  - Interview patients about specific challenges they face when it comes to transportation and assess what they would find helpful in these graphics/would find helpful moving forward
  - Conduct similar interviews with LRHC staff and providers
- Limitations
  - The self-made graphic includes a QR code that links to a website; some patients may lack access to a device that allows them to pull up this website on their own
  - Varying degrees of digital literacy may impact the degree to which these graphics are clearly understood
  - Even if awareness about resources increases, utilization may not necessarily (due to other unforeseen barriers)



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERVENTIONS

- Involve providers in provider-education sessions with representatives from various transportation agencies
- Work with staff at LRHC to evaluate the effect of this project and make necessary adjustments
- The graphic could be converted or supplemented with other newer forms of media (e.g. an app in the App Store, video-style presentation of information)
- Similar graphics or interventions should be implemented throughout different counties in the state as Orange County is only one of many rural areas in Vermont
- Resources should be continually updated as new requirements for utilization of resources or means of transportation emerge

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