

Innovation in Transportation Services for Older Adults Aging in Place

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Background

Nearly 100 percent of Canadians aged 65 and older prefer aging in place.¹ Universal design, a key approach in planning, focuses on keeping older adults safe and independent while aging at home. Transportation plays a crucial role in supporting physical design by allowing older adults to easily access essential services within their communities.

This study examines improving transportation services for older adults who wish to age in place in Ontario. We are exploring ways to enhance these services, especially considering COVID-19 challenges, with a key focus on using technology for smoother delivery of services. Through interviews with transportation professionals, our goal is to emphasize the importance of these services in helping older adults stay connected to their communities and age successfully at home.

Methods

Methodology

This research used a qualitative approach to explore innovative transportation services for older adults aging in place, aiming to address service delivery gaps. Qualitative research allows for in-depth understanding and identification (DeCarlo, 2018), revealing common problems and needs.

Data Collection

Six professionals from Ontario who were knowledgeable about transportation for older adults participated in semi-structured virtual interviews. Participants were recruited via email using purposive sampling. An interview guide with open-ended questions ensured detailed discussions.

Data Analysis

Raw Transcripts were anonymized for confidentiality. Coding and categorization occurred in Nvivo software. Thematic analysis identified new and original themes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher completed the TCPS2 certificate and Sheridan Research Ethical Board forms before beginning the research. Informed consent was obtained from participants, ensuring their agreement to ethical standards. Virtual interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams and recorded using Otter AI. Secured data management practices were employed throughout the research process. Participants formally acknowledged their consent by signing the required documentation.

Key Findings

Organizational Support for Older Adults' Transportation

The individuals interviewed agreed that the transportation services provided by their organization were more supportive and accommodating for older adults and people with disabilities than traditional public transportation.

“We offer affordable door-to-door transportation services for seniors 55 Plus and adults with disabilities, travelling to and from medical appointments, adult day programs, grocery shopping, group outings, and social requests. Basically, wherever you need to go, if we have a driver, we will try and take you.” -P4 Client Services of Transportation Services.

Innovative Solutions in Response to COVID-19

Link Bus Pilot: Connecting First Nations communities to Peterborough, this rural transportation pilot funded by the Ministry of Transportation serves as a transit hub, with stops at Trent University for enhanced connectivity.

Community Bus On-Demand: A smaller bus designed for neighbourhoods, the Community bus provides on-demand services, offering a potential post-pandemic solution for rural areas, especially during COVID-19.

Continuation Services with Cab Integration: Bridging the gap between bus stops and homes, this service ensures a seamless journey by providing cab rides from the bus stop to passengers' doorsteps.

Tech Upgrades for Improved Transportation Services

Automated Phone Call Before Arrival	An automated pre-arrival phone call informs clients of their approaching arrival
Real-Time Tracking and Route Optimization	Utilizing GPS and real-time tracking to optimize transportation routes based on live traffic data.
Tablet Integration for Real-Time Tracking	Tablets integrated into vehicles provide real-time tracking, enabling clients to monitor their ride's location and estimated arrival time.
Online Booking and Automated Systems	Online booking and automated communication streamline the process, facilitating seamless bookings, cancellations, and notifications.
Automatic Calling System for Client Convenience	Introduction of an automatic calling system for online bookings, cancellations, and alerts streamlines communication and enhances client convenience. Providing automatic updates.

Discussion

Discussions on planning and aging and the traditional focus on physical design to aging in place are shifting towards prioritizing service delivery and comprehensive measures of community well-being.² We understand how crucial it is for older adults to connect with resources, especially with more people choosing to age in place. The results highlight the need to build a community that understands and supports older adults by examining how organizations, technology, and communities can work together.

This study provides valuable recommendations for both transportation providers and policymakers. The aim is to enhance transportation for older adults currently and in the future, creating a system that allows them to remain in their homes while feeling connected and supported in their communities.

Recommendations for Transportation Services

Enhanced Accessibility and Training:

- Provide more accessible vehicles and comprehensive training for drivers to better assist passengers with mobility and cognitive impairments.

Resource Allocation for Improved Schedules:

- Allocate resources to improve transportation schedules, offering more flexibility to drivers and creating a customer-friendly service that reduces stress for drivers and passengers.

Stronger Partnership for Priority Transit:

- Foster collaboration between regional and local transit services, with a focus on prioritizing passengers with mobility challenges, ensuring inclusivity in conventional transit systems.

Elimination of Transfer Fees:

- Remove transfer fees to enhance affordability and accessibility, particularly benefiting travellers moving across different municipalities.

References

¹ Almost 100 percent of older Canadians surveyed plan to live independently in their own homes, but is this even possible? (2020, October 13). National Institute on Ageing. <https://www.niageing.ca/commentary-posts/2020/9/22/almost-100-per-cent-of-older-canadians-surveyed-plan-to-live-independently-in-their-own-homes-but-is-this-even-possible>

² Warner, M. E., Homsy, G. C., & Morken, L. J. (2017). Planning for aging in place: Stimulating a market and government response. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 37(1), 29–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X16642824>