



Increasing Community Mobility for Older Adults: Village membership matters!



Through transportation services and education, Villages support community mobility, social connection, and healthy aging for older adults.

Why are transportation options important for older adults?

Being able to get around in the community is important for the health and well-being of older adults. When community mobility is hindered by a lack of transportation options, older adults can experience challenges such as increased social isolation¹ and a higher risk of hospital readmissions.² Widely available and accessible transportation options are important for:

SOCIAL CONNECTION

Older adults who have access to reliable and accessible transportation are less likely to be isolated from their friends, making it less likely they will experience feelings of loneliness compared to those who do not have access to transportation.³

“ We meet at the ... Metro to travel together to go on field trips to museums. It makes it easier to join the group and get back with ease. Anyone who needs a ride to the Metro can ask for it.”
- 2024 SURVEY RESPONDENT

HEALTHY AGING

When older adults have access to a variety of transportation options, they are more likely to experience positive health outcomes.⁴ In fact, Medicare Advantage beneficiaries who had reliable transportation experienced lower rates of avoidable hospital stays and 30-day hospital readmissions compared to those without reliable transportation.⁵

“ [After I was released from the hospital, my Village] found a volunteer to drive me to a follow-up medical appointment and then help me shop for groceries afterwards.”
- 2024 SURVEY RESPONDENT

Older adults who live in urban areas, like Washington DC, have access to a variety of transportation options, including the WMATA Metrorail (Metro) and buses, rideshare or taxi services, paratransit and MetroAccess, and independent modes, such as driving, walking, biking, or using scooters.

Approximately every two years, from 2018 to 2024, Villages in DC surveyed their members as part of a multi-Village member survey (2018, 2021, 2022, 2024). Survey questions differ each year, though all four surveys included questions about transportation. Unless otherwise specified, data and quotes in this document come from those member surveys.

What evidence-informed strategies support mobility for urban adults as they age?

The following transportation programs and services have been shown to support mobility for older adults as they age, particularly if they find that their preferred or usual mode of transportation no longer works for them.

- ★ Door-to-door ride services which help older adults keep appointments for preventive and follow-up care.⁶
- ★ Transportation services for older adults, including those with mobility restrictions.⁷
- ★ Safe driver training for older adults who are still driving.⁸
- ★ Planning ahead for driving cessation or changes in mobility, including identifying other acceptable modes of transportation.⁹
- ★ Sidewalk safety initiatives to increase walkability and reduce pedestrian injuries.^{10,11}

One indicator of an age-friendly city¹² is the accessibility of public transportation and/or the availability of door-to-door services, which provide individuals with assistance between the vehicle and the door of their home or their destination. Compared to curb-to-curb services, which, similar to a regular taxi, are limited to pick-up and drop-off at the curb or driveway,¹³ door-to-door services can be particularly helpful for older adults.

How can and do Villages support the transportation needs of the older adults in their communities?

Villages are neighborhood-based, non-profit organizations created by and for older adults that offer activities, companionship, practical support, and volunteer opportunities. In Washington DC, there are thirteen Villages, each representing a defined geographic area or neighborhood. While the 13 Villages in Washington DC operate independently and have different structures and membership sizes, all 13 Villages offer transportation support to their members.

- ★ In 2022, nearly one-quarter of Village members (24%) reported that they benefited from transportation support provided by their Village. *2022 Member Survey, (n=702)*
- ★ In fiscal year 2024, the 13 DC Villages provided 7,441 one-way rides to members.¹⁴

Most DC Villages have a **volunteer driver program** through which members can request rides for medical appointments, errands, and/or social outings. Anecdotally Villages report that both the volunteer drivers and their passengers experience increased social connection through the act of sharing a ride together, in addition to the social and wellness benefits at the destination.

- ★ While most members reported using independent modes of transportation, a significant portion got a ride from a volunteer driver at least some of the time.
- ★ Even volunteer drivers or members who generally travel independently reported requesting a ride, (e.g., for medical appointments that require a ride home).
- ★ Members valued the personal assistance that comes with a ride provided by a volunteer driver.
- ★ Those who used mobility support devices were statistically more likely to receive a ride from a volunteer driver than those who did not use mobility support.

“**Mobility is important. But for grocery shopping or carrying packages, getting assistance with them ... is also important.**”
- 2018 SURVEY RESPONDENT



“ **[My Village helps me get to social events or activities] all the time. Without the Village, I couldn’t attend events...**”
- 2024 SURVEY RESPONDENT

Some DC Villages provide assistance with **exploring new transportation options**, including training on unfamiliar modes of transportation, help with signing up for District transportation programs (e.g., MetroAccess, Senior SmarTrip), and/or support with using smart phone-based ride-share services.

- ★ In 2021, 18% of survey respondents indicated that transportation support was one of the top three most valuable Village services. Those who responded in this way were statistically more likely to live alone and/or use mobility support. *2021 Member Survey, (n=640)*
- ★ In 2022, 22% of survey respondents reported that they had used a new transportation option because of their Village. *2022 Member Survey, (n=755)*

“ **If I am attending a social event, I use Metro Access [or] taxis. For shopping, I use the Village to help. The Village has been exceptional with this service!**”
- 2024 SURVEY RESPONDENT

And some DC Villages offer **education for drivers** who want to learn new skills as they age (e.g., the AARP Safe Driver training).

- ★ In 2022, more than one-third of respondents (37%), indicated that they were interested in taking a Safe Driver education class for older adults. *2022 Member Survey, (n=677)*

“ **This is an important program for every member.**”
- 2017 SAFE DRIVER TRAINING PARTICIPANT AT CAPITOL HILL VILLAGE

Together, the DC Villages also **advocate** for improved safety, accessibility, and availability of transportation options to the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and other transportation providers.

- ★ In 2022, 71% of respondents indicated that they were interested in working to make sidewalks safer for older adults. *2022 Member Survey, (n=682)*
- ★ This interest sparked a member-led advocacy group that reports sidewalk hazards to DDOT and testifies before City Council on the importance of funding sidewalk safety efforts and an increased budget for repairing the District’s sidewalks.

What are opportunities for further exploration and research?

The positive impact of transportation options on the mobility, social connection, and wellness of older adults is well documented. Less understood is the extent of cost savings for older adults who receive transportation support from their Village. Research to explore these savings would ideally extend beyond the cost of the ride or the trip itself and would quantify the reduced healthcare costs attributed to transportation. These cost savings might be related to increased social connection and/or ability to attend preventive and follow-up healthcare appointments made possible by reliable transportation. With such knowledge in hand, Villages would be better able to advocate for increased transportation access and affordability in their communities.

The volunteer driver program is one of the most popular service offerings among DC's Villages. As volunteer drivers age, they often become less comfortable driving others and/or begin to transition away from driving. It might be interesting to explore, through further research, recruitment strategies that are effective in addressing short-term needs as well as in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the volunteer driver program. To support recruitment efforts and use of this service, Villages may want to explore additional benefits associated with participating in the program as a driver or a passenger, particularly those benefits related to social connection and relationship building. It may be powerful to share stories from both volunteer drivers and their passengers.



Villages offer a community-driven solution for increasing community mobility for older adults because they:

- ★ **Provide rides** with a volunteer driver
- ★ Help members **identify and safely use** various means of transportation
- ★ Educate others about the need for **safe and accessible** transportation options

¹ Lamanna, M., et al. (2020). *The Association between Public Transportation and Social Isolation in Older Adults: A Scoping Review of the Literature*. *Canadian journal on aging = La revue canadienne du vieillissement*, 39(3), 393–405. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980819000345>

² Schultz, B. E., et al. (2022). *Scoping review: Social support impacts hospital readmission rates*. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 31(19–20), 2691–2705. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16143>

³ Hand, C., et al. (2017). *Understanding Social Isolation Among Urban Aging Adults: Informing Occupation-Based Approaches*. *OTJR : occupation, participation and health*, 37(4), 188–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1539449217727119>

⁴ Tian, H., & Chen, J. (2022). *Study on Life Satisfaction of the Elderly Based on Healthy Aging*. *Journal of healthcare engineering*, 2022, 8343452. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8343452>

⁵ Canterbury, M., et al. (2022). *Association Between Self-reported Health-Related Social Needs and Acute Care Utilization Among Older Adults Enrolled in Medicare Advantage*. *JAMA health forum*, 3(7), e221874. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2022.1874>

⁶ Bayne, A., et al. (2021). *Barriers and facilitators of older adults' use of ride share services*. *Journal of transport & health*, 21, 101055. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2021.101055>

⁷ Department of Aging and Community Living. (n.d.). *Transportation*. <https://dacl.dc.gov/service/transportation>

⁸ Sangrar, R., et al. (2019). *Older driver training programs: A systematic review of evidence aimed at improving behind-the-wheel performance*. *Journal of safety research*, 71, 295–313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2019.09.022>

⁹ Lamanna, M., et al. (2020)

¹⁰ Population Reference Bureau. (2017, February). *How Neighborhoods Affect the Health and Well-Being of Older Americans*. <https://www.prb.org/resources/how-neighborhoods-affect-the-health-and-well-being-of-older-americans/>

¹¹ District Department of Transportation. (n.d.). *Engineering for Safety*. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://visionzero.dc.gov/pages/engineering>

¹² World Health Organization. (2015) *Measuring the Age-Friendliness of Cities: A guide to using core indicators*. https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/203830/9789241509695_eng.pdf?sequence=1

¹³ Federal Transit Authority. *Family of Transportation Services*. (2007) Available at: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/resources/166/fts-brochure.pdf>

¹⁴ Data from quarterly reporting to the DC Villages Collaborative.

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