

Cameron Delaney

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Transportation and Health: Access, Barriers, and Community Needs

Transportation is often thought of as how you get to and from your destination, but less thought is given to the difficulties associated with a lack of access to it. This is a short overview of how transportation is related to community health issues, and why it is one of our priorities in Healthy Quaboag's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)!

Why Transportation Matters for Health

Transit provides people with access to goods and services that we use and rely on in our everyday lives. Getting groceries, making it to work, or going to a doctor's appointment are privileges many take for granted due to how manageable they are to handle with a car – but what about those who don't own cars? When you have things to do, unfamiliarity with services like bus routes and alternative options can lead to missed appointments, showing up late to work, or not getting this week's groceries. When preventative care appointments are missed, it can cause health conditions to worsen and make daily life more difficult.

Local Barriers in Rural Massachusetts

Living in rural Massachusetts can compound these barriers. Many services are spread out, and limited access to grocery stores has led to more than 1 in 10 residents in the Quaboag Hills Region (QHR) being food insecure, and similar circumstances with healthcare have led to many towns in the region being designated as high chronic disease prevalence areas. Winters come with additional difficulties, as slippery driveways and roads make it difficult for elderly and disabled people to reach alternative mobility options. Most of the region isn't even served by bus routes, as the QHR sits between the transit agencies of Pioneer Valley and Franklin County, depriving many of reliable, fixed-route services

Existing Resources

Despite this, there are still options available to residents in the QHR. There are several demand-responsive microtransit agencies that operate within the 18 towns. Groups like the [Quaboag Connector](#) and Council on Aging services offer curb-to-curb service, bringing you right to your destination. If those options aren't ideal, websites like [Mass Ride Match](#) and [Mass Mobility](#) can help residents connect with resources that work for them.

Current Transportation Gaps

There are still gaps that need to be addressed to better serve resident's needs. While the Quaboag Connector offers safe, reliable service that brings you to your destination, you must schedule an appointment in advance. That means that if there is an emergency, you would have to look elsewhere. The Connector also can't go past the curb of your property, so if you have a long driveway that is dangerous in the winter, the vans cannot meet you at the door and help you in. Additionally, because the various services in the QHR operate independently of one another, that leads to difficulties with finding the right information or even a lack of awareness of existing services all together – a gap that websites like Mass Mobility and 413Cares are trying to close.

Conclusion

Leaving these gaps in transportation will make it increasingly difficult over time for people to meet their needs and will result in a decrease in community health. The CHIP program is a community driven plan that serves local needs by responding to the feedback of those who need improved resources and incorporating it as one of the four priority focuses will allow more people to make their medical appointments, get their groceries, and show up to work on time. For more information on how to get involved, visit our website at healthyquaboag.org and sign up for our newsletter for recent information and developments in the community!