

Women & Transportation in Manitoba

Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS) informs, educates, promotes and gives voice to the needs for transportation options that enhance the quality of life for all Manitobans; that will allow them to participate in Age-Friendly communities.

As an organization we believe that access to transportation is pivotal to keeping older people healthy and actively engaged in their communities. Having appropriate transportation that meets older adults' needs allows older people to stay engaged in their communities in a variety of ways (e.g., employment, recreation, volunteering, etc.), as well as access important services (e.g., health care, shopping, banking, etc.). Community mobility is also essential for reducing the likelihood of social isolation. In our Province, most older people choose to age in place in their community, including in rural or remote communities. This can become problematic when the individual no longer drives or has never driven, which is a very common likelihood amongst older adult women aged 85+.

In 2009, it was reported that in Canada only 26% of women 85+ hold a driver's license compared to 67% of men aged 85+. Older women are typically more burdened with transportation issues once their partner or spouse passes away due to the loss of the primary driver and sometimes due to the loss of their primary pension income. Consequences of a loss of a driving spouse are that the individual can become socially isolated, because they are reliant on their family and friends, or that they are faced with the lack of affordable options in their community. It is imperative that we have a variety of accessible and affordable transportation options in place.

In our Province, these are some of the primary alternate modes of transportation, other than driving, and the challenges that we are currently experiencing.

Rural Accessible Transportation (Handi-vans): Accessible vans are an important transportation option for people with mobility challenges and to those who no longer drive. It allows eligible riders to work, attend medical appointments, participate in recreational activities, and pursue daily living activities such as banking and shopping. However, handi-van operational costs have steadily increased over the years and the demand is increasing as the population ages, yet the funding formula for rural handi-van has not changed in 29 years, since the Mobility Disadvantaged Program's (MDTP) inception in 1989. This means that communities are not receiving more funding, even though the costs and demand for rides have increased. The increasing cost differential is being born by communities and by riders, the majority of whom are on a fixed income. For example, an older person in Swan River can expect to pay \$600 for round trip transportation to a medical appointment in Winnipeg. Low income seniors cannot afford this.

Volunteer drivers: Volunteer drivers provide a vital transportation option for seniors who do not drive and do not have family or friends who can help. Volunteer drivers provide door

through door services that contribute to continued engagement in social and community life that is necessary for health, well-being, and quality of life. Throughout our Province, recruitment and retention of Volunteer Drivers has increasingly become more difficult and within the City of Winnipeg limits, Volunteer Drivers are often required to cover the cost of the criminal check which can cost over \$150. Although, non-profit organizations working with older adults sometimes cover the cost of criminal record checks, these organizations operate on very limited budgets. Paying for these costs puts them under even more financial pressure.

Ambulance Costs: Ambulances not only provide essential transportation services in getting to the hospital, but the emergency personnel also provide essential medical assessments /triage and treatment to ensure that immediate care can lessen the long-term consequences of a medical emergency (e.g., heart attack and stroke). In times of emergency, individuals need to know they can afford transportation that will connect them to medical services within a timely manner. In Manitoba, cost is a major barrier for older people, particularly older women who are more likely to live in poverty. Although costs have come down in recent years, there are still far too many who choose to not access emergency medical services at home, because they cannot afford to do so.

To conclude, we want to recognize that although transportation issues affect a lot of the older population as a whole, more challenges arise when it comes to supporting older people who are on fixed incomes or who live below the poverty line. As a country, we need to continue to recognize that income security for older people and especially women needs to be on the forefront of addressing issues with transportation, health, wellness and social isolation. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to report on the transportation needs for women and the older population in Manitoba, and we look forward to continuing to support Canada in becoming an Age Friendly Country.

Sincerely,

Samartha Rodeck

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