

Considering the Ideal Role for NEMT in Addressing SDOH

MTAC (<https://mtaccoalition.org/>) was formed in 2017 to educate federal and state policymakers about the benefits of non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) and the need for policies that support continued access to transportation. Founded by the leading brokers of NEMT, **LogistiCare Solutions, LLC**, **MTM, Inc.**, and **Southeastrans, Inc.**, the coalition has quickly gained support and its current membership numbers +25 organizations including leading patient, provider, and health plan organizations.

Background

The growing focus on the social determinants of health (SDOH) within healthcare is driving more attention toward the role of transportation to both medical and non-medical sites. Since 2016, several studies have highlighted the important role of transportation in healthcare. Despite this growing body of research, there is limited research on transportation's role in supporting access to non-medical sites (e.g., grocery stores, fitness centers, social services) and on how improved non-emergency transportation improves people's health. If transportation services to non-medical sites are to mature into a commonly available service to address SDOH, Medicare and Medicaid will be important vehicles for transforming the greater US health care landscape.

Summary of Research

In collaboration with a senior actuary from Wakely Consulting Group and Krisda H. Chaiyachati, MD, MPH, MSHP at the University of Pennsylvania, assessed (1) the value of non-emergency transportation for vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries, and (2) the variety of non-medical sites that Medicaid and Medicare health plans and providers serve with non-emergency transportation. The study's Medicare claims analysis documents non-emergency transportation correlating with helpful member behaviors and outcomes, such as increased primary care usage and generic drug utilization. MTAC also surveyed 91 health plans and providers to find that non-medical transportation is occurring in both Medicare Advantage and Medicaid.

Key Research Findings

- **Transportation Correlates with Helpful Member Behavior.** Transportation use is positively correlated with an average 1.5 times more primary care physician visits than for nonutilizers and higher generic drug utilization. Both of these behaviors are associated with appropriate and cost-effective healthcare.
- **Morbidity of Transportation Users.** Transportation utilizers tend to be sicker than nonutilizers. The average risk score of transportation utilizers is 1.97 vs. 1.35 for nonutilizers, based on the most recent complete risk adjustment coding year.
- **Presence of Non-Medical Transportation.** Non-Medical transportation is occurring in both Medicare Advantage and Medicaid but there is no single "consensus" destination served by a large majority of responding organizations.
- **Non-Medical Transportation in Medicare.** Permissible sites for Medicare Advantage plans trend toward destinations with an obvious correlation with physical health (grocery stores, fitness centers).
- **Non-Medical Transportation in Medicaid.** Medicaid destinations are more likely to include social services and vocational destinations.

This study provides new evidence that non-emergency transportation helps vulnerable people navigate access important services more successfully and that many payers and providers are choosing to offer non-medical transportation in the Medicaid and Medicare programs in order to better address social determinants of health.