

Social Isolation and Transportation Needs Among Older Adults

Literature and Data Review

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Introduction

Northwest Community Action contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a literature review and data scan of information about the social isolation and transportation needs among older adults in four rural counties--Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, and Roseau. The work is funded in part by the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council, which offers grants to help communities become better places for all Minnesotans to grow older.

This summary is the first phase of work completed for Northwest Community Action, and will inform primary data collection, analysis, and reporting that will be completed in the second phase of the study.

The information in this summary is reported in the following six sections.

- Rural livability
- Social isolation and older adults
- Transportation needs of older adults
- Efforts to address social isolation and transportation needs of older adults in Minnesota
- Efforts to address social isolation and transportation needs of older adults outside Minnesota
- Data tables with county-level data about demographics and characteristics, social isolation, technology, and health care use and access

Rural livability

The concept of rural livability is a useful framework for understanding the needs of older adults in Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, and Roseau counties in northwest Minnesota. Rural livability is one part of the overall livable communities framework developed and promoted by AARP, and is widely used to support communities to accommodate people of all ages, including older adults.

AARP defines a livable community as “one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and offers supportive community features and services. ... The resources enhance personal independence, allow residents to remain in their homes and communities as they age, and foster residents’ engagement in the community’s civic, economic, and social life.” (AARP. (2020, May). Policy book 2019–2020.

The 8 Domains of Livability

AARP. (2016). *The 8 domains of livability*. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2016/8-domains-of-livability-introduction.html>

AARP is at the leading edge of efforts to promote livable communities and has developed a framework that can be used by communities in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities to develop built and social environments that support community residents of all ages. The eight domains include outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, social participation, respect and social inclusion, work and civic engagement, communications and information, and community and health services.

While all interconnected, several of these domains are specifically related to the issues being explored by Northwest Community Action, as illustrated by the following quotations:

- **Transportation.** “Driving shouldn’t be the only way to get around...Public transport options can range from the large-scale to the small” (Slide #2).
- **Social participation.** “Regardless of a person’s age, loneliness is often as debilitating a health condition as having a chronic illness or disease. Sadness and isolation can be combated by having opportunities to socialize and the availability of accessible, affordable and fun social activities” (Slide #4).
- **Communication and information.** “We now communicate in ways few could have imagined a decade ago. Age-friendly communities recognize that information needs to be shared through a variety of methods since not everyone is tech-savvy, and not everyone has a smartphone or home-based access to the internet” (Slide #7).
- **Community and health services.** “At some point, every person of every age gets hurt, becomes ill or simply needs some help. While it’s important that assistance and care be available nearby, it’s essential that residents are able to access and afford the services required” (Slide #8).

Focusing on Rural Livability

Walljasper, J. (2019, March). *Focusing on rural livability*. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2019/rural-livability-focus-group.html>

Relevant key themes that emerged from a focus group with community leaders and AARP staff at the AARP Livable Communities National Conference included:

- “Health care in rural communities requires partnerships with rural health associations and care providers to ensure adequate coverage” (Theme #2)
- “A range of transportation choices are available in most rural communities, but they could be enhanced through better coordination, communication and expansion” (Theme #3)
- “Broadband wireless internet is a critical need in rural communities, and may be the means for leveling the playing field of opportunity” (Theme #6)

Rural Livability Workshop Report

Stanton, M. (2020). *Rural livability workshop report*. AARP. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/rural-livability-workshop-report-download.html>

This report is based on a 2019 national AARP gathering on rural livability. One notable key statistic is that:

- “3 in 10 adults age 45 or older in rural areas lack companionship, feel left out and consider themselves to be too isolated” (p. 8)

Examples of two initiatives are described below. Key takeaways related to transportation, high-speed internet, health care access, and connections (referenced in the AARP 8 Domains of Livability) include the following:

- “It can be difficult if not impossible for nondrivers in rural areas to get where they need or want to go. Rural transit services and choices can be improved through better coordination and communication and through expansion, including ride-sharing” (p. 31).
- “Look at all the organizations in a community—from faith-based groups to businesses to regional transportation authorities—as potential sources of transportation solutions and services” (p. 31).
- “Rural communities that have high-speed internet can support telemedicine services, robotics-related work, collaborative care modes and other innovative medical solutions” (p. 41).
- “Telemedicine can save lives, especially in remote regions and towns without direct access to emergency or specialty medical care” (p. 41).
- “Reliable, affordable high-speed internet service can help older adults avoid isolation and remain independent as they age by enabling them to use services such as online banking and shopping” (p. 41).

Toolkit: State Strategies to Support Older Adults Aging in Place in Rural Areas

Kaye, N., & Long, K. (2019, September 12). *Toolkit: State strategies to support older adults aging in place in rural areas*. National Academy for State Health Policy. https://www.nashp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-Strategies-to-Support-Older-Adults-Aging-in-Place-in-Rural-Areas_9_13_2019-1.pdf

This toolkit examines state initiatives to help older adults age in place through workforce and training development, facilitating access to services in rural areas, and addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH).

- Building the workforce includes strengthening nursing facility staff skills and multi-sector partnerships for health work force planning (p. 4)
- Increasing services includes mobile adult day health services, provider incentives and rural home health rates, and legislation to support telehealth, telemedicine, and telemonitoring (p. 10)
- Addressing SDOH includes technology platforms that manage referrals, community health teams, volunteer drivers, and leveraging transportation funding and ride-share companies (p.14)

Social isolation and older adults

Social isolation

The impact of social isolation on older adults' health and well-being is serious. In fact, "social isolation significantly [increases] a person's risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity" (CDC. (2021). *Loneliness and social isolation linked to serious health conditions*. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>). Many factors can contribute to social isolation, including living alone due to the loss of family members, illness and disability, availability of community assets, and opportunities for connections.

While many agencies and community organizations offer programs and events for older adults, specifically to address the need for connections and the concerns about social isolation, the existence of these opportunities does not automatically guarantee access.

2021 Home and Community Preferences Survey

AARP. (2022, September). *2021 Home and Community Preferences Survey*.

https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/liv-com/2021/2021-home-community-preferences-chartbook.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00479.001.pdf

The Home and Community Preferences Survey was a national AARP project that asked adults age 18 and older about their perspectives on home and community, community features and services, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents affirmed that they place a high value on community engagement, citing such activities as "opportunities for residents to serve on councils or committees; gather and discuss community issues; share their knowledge, history, and expertise across generations; and having venues to socialize and pursue hobbies and interests that are accessible to people with varied physical abilities" (p. 5).

Social Isolation and Loneliness: Insights from Rural Clinical Providers and Other Experts

Temple, K. M. (2019, July 10). *Social isolation and loneliness: Insights from rural clinical providers and other experts*. Rural Health Information Hub. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/rural-monitor/social-isolation>

This article focuses on the complexities of rural social isolation and loneliness through the perspectives of several key experts, and suggests a possible intervention.

Of particular relevance to the work of NWCA, a clinical provider in rural Minnesota discussed social isolation in the context of transportation, geography, and weather. According to the provider, winter weather can keep people indoors and limit important connections (Rural Troubles, para. 5).

Broadband internet and reliable technology can facilitate connections to others through regular communication, as well as provide remote access to health care and additional technologies that support health and well-being. A provider had the following to say:

Despite the increased funding for internet capacity, many rural patients still haven't been able to afford that technology in their homes. It should be recognized that not having internet services prevents people from communication the way the rest of modern society is communicating. (Rural Troubles, para. 10)

An expert on rural social isolation and loneliness described an intervention to address social isolation and loneliness:

1. “Use a systems approach to collaborate with multiple organizations – including medical and social organizations throughout a community – to work together to address the issues.
2. Create a core group of navigators to work with older adults ensuring an initial – and ongoing – connection in which support services match their individual needs.
3. Create a public relations campaign to awaken the broader community to the multiple issues associated with social isolation” (Interventions and Solutions, para. 2).

Transportation needs of older adults

Transportation

The literature is clear about the foundational need for reliable and accessible transportation for people who do not drive to get where they need and want to go, as well as reliable and accessible technology, such as broadband access, that provides an alternative to in-person gatherings. This is true for social events, as well as for medical care, both of which may alleviate isolation.

AAA National Survey Report

USAgIng. (2020). *AAA National Survey Report*. <https://www.usaging.org//Files/AAA-Survey-Report-new-identity-508.pdf>

This report disseminates findings from the 2019 National Survey of Area Agencies on Aging and discusses key issues that Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) address in providing services and supports to older adults. In addition to housing that meets the needs of older adults, the report also highlighted the essential need for transportation and ways to address social isolation. The authors described the importance of transportation in the following way:

The availability of accessible transportation is...central to the ability of all individuals to live independently and to participate fully in the community. ... Many regions of the country provide limited transportation alternatives, leaving adults stranded without a way to access services and fully participate in their communities once they cease driving (p. 5).

Facilitators and Barriers to the Implementation of Community-Based Transportation Services for Older Adults: Evidence from Six Case Studies

Hosford, K., Pitman, B., & Winters, M. (2024, March). Facilitators and barriers to the implementation of community-based transportation services for older adults: Evidence from six case studies. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 24, 101062. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198224000484>

The authors reviewed six community-based transportation programs to examine facilitators and barriers to services for older adults. Types of transportation programs included in the assessment were a wheelchair accessible service, on-demand transit, volunteer driver service, semi-fixed route shuttle, door-to-door service, and curb-to-curb service. While from Canada, many of the findings may be applicable to the United States.

Researchers found that the implementation of transportation services can be hampered by challenges in recruiting drivers and obtaining funding. On the other hand, implementation can be facilitated by services that are adapted to the needs of the older adults using community-based transportation, as well as strong partnerships with other organizations and across sectors.

Frustration Builds as Some Rural Minnesotans Struggle to Get to Medical Appointments

Van Berkel, J. (2024, March 9). Frustration builds as some rural Minnesotans struggle to get to medical appointments. *Star Tribune*. <https://www.startribune.com/frustration-builds-as-some-rural-minnesotans-struggle-to-get-to-medical-appointments/600349712/>

This article from the Star Tribune newspaper highlights struggles faced by rural Minnesotans due to a system of nonemergency medical transportation that is unable to meet demand (para. 4) in spite of a “federal law that requires states to provide Medicaid recipients with transportation if they need it” (para. 6). Key issues in rural communities include the great distances people must travel, low reimbursement rates for providers, and staffing shortages. One provider called out a lack of a “consistent service model” (para. 11) in the more rural parts of the state as a key issue.

The Future of Rural Transportation and Mobility for Older Adults

Broderick, A. (2018, April). *The future of rural transportation and mobility for older adults*. Grantmakers In Aging. <https://www.giaging.org/system/files/documents/2023-12/The%20Future%20of%20Rural%20Transportation%20on%20Mobility%20for%20Older%20Adults.pdf>

This report focuses on how technological innovation in transportation solutions can affect the transformation of mobility for older adults in rural communities.

Key themes within the context of philanthropy and industry considerations include:

- “There is a lack of awareness among the technology community of older adults’ rural transportation needs, and among rural communities of the opportunities afforded by technology” (p.23).
- “Understanding the transportation solution for older adults in rural communities requires first identifying what is important to the individual user and assessing local resources and partners to meet those needs” (p.23).
- “The greater the options in modes available and that an individual has available to address their personal travel needs, the greater the potential resiliency of the community transportation network” (p.23).
- “A recommended approach is to first leverage the resources, supports and infrastructures that already exist within communities before introducing a new solution to an old problem” (p.23).
- “Successful strategies are built on community-wide coalitions that have a shared goal, can pool resources, and have the ability to assess the transportation issue from different perspectives” (p.23).
- “Access to transportation not only impacts health status but also quality of life due to the ability for older adults to engage and participate fully in community life” (p.23).

Improving Mobility for Rural Older Adults: A Program Review

Wotring, B., Antin, J. (2020, August 7). *Improving mobility for rural older adults: A Program review*. National Surface Transportation Safety Center for Excellence. <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstreams/8f146d33-6587-4adf-a0dd-290d45a2b99d/download>

The authors capture the myriad difficulties facing rural areas in providing transportation:

Many rural areas suffer from a lack of transportation options simply because they are rural. Options such as public transit, ride-sharing, or local shuttle services do not exist at satisfactory levels in rural communities because they lack the needed population to support them. Further complicating matters, a small population base means fewer taxpayers, resulting in less funding, leaving rural localities at a clear disadvantage with respect to receiving infrastructural improvements to facilitate mobility. Taken together, this means that rural communities face a challenge in finding or developing transportation options that are both feasible and sustainable (p.1).

The authors also point out that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, addressing the needs for transportation among older adults in rural communities must consider the characteristics of each community and the unique needs of residents, while also building on the existing infrastructure and assets in those communities (p. 48).

Provider Perspectives on Six Strategies to Overcome the Barriers to Older Adult Use of Alternative Transportation Services: Evidence from Seven Communities

Brown, J., Duncan, M., Horner, M., Bond, M., & Wood, J. (2018, June). Provider perspectives on six strategies to overcome the barriers to older adult use of alternative transportation services: Evidence from seven communities. *Case Studies on Transport Policy*, 6(2), 237-245.

The authors completed case studies with transportation providers to gain a better understanding of the barriers that prevent older adults from using transportation other than their own cars, and the strategies they have used to overcome these barriers.

The four primary barriers they described include the following:

1. Many older adults prefer to drive their own cars. Cars are perceived as more convenient—they provide independence and older adults may have had negative experiences with unreliable or time-consuming transportation services (p. 237).
2. “Alternative transportation services may be unavailable or inaccessible to older adults, due to their absence from a given geographic area, the distance of stops to homes, the locations of routes, the distance of goods and services to homes, and or the hours of service operation” (p. 238).
3. Problems with mobility may make it more difficult for older adults to use transportation that requires additional physical effort to access (p. 238).
4. Cognitive impairment may make it more difficult for older adults to track schedules and fares, or access transit stops (p. 238).

Among the strategies identified by the authors for addressing the barriers are volunteer driver programs, including time-banking programs; travel training programs to familiarize older adults with the logistics of the service; customized door-through-door transportation for additional oversight and assistance; transportation service coordination with other programs; and individualized case management focused on a mobility plan (p. 238).

According to the authors, the strengths of these strategies include:

- “Collaborative by nature
- ‘People-focused’
- Supplement, rather than replace, public transit
- Flexible and adaptive to the needs of clients and the desires of funders” (p. 243).

Roadmap to Livability Transportation Workbook

AARP. (2018). *Roadmap to livability transportation workbook*. <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2018/Book-4-Roadmap-to-Livability-Transportation-051118lr.pdf>

While not specifically related to rural communities, AARP presents five principles for stakeholders and community leaders who are working to respond to residents’ transportation needs:

1. “Promote safe streets that are walkable, rollable, bikeable and drivable — and ensure convenient public transportation services
2. Promote affordable transportation options
3. Ensure that the transportation system is accessible
4. Promote healthy communities through sustainable transportation infrastructure
5. Foster coordinated transportation services and assets” (p. 7)

Transportation Equity for Older Adults

Fraade-Blanan, L., Best, R., & Shih, R. A. (2022, June). *Transportation equity for older adults*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA1600/PEA1615-1/RAND_PEA1615-1.pdf

This paper introduces a framework that can be used to assess inequity in transportation for older adults. Categories of questions suggested by the authors include:

- Individual and social factors, such as unmet needs, who is accommodated or excluded, and mode safety (pp. 8 and 9).
- Institutional factors, such as types of trips, what is involved for an older adult to get somewhere (p. 9).
- Environmental factors, such as overall resilience, conditions that could result in failing to meet needs or affecting access, who is involved in planning (pp. 10 and 11).

The authors also outline examples of solutions that can be implemented to address age-related inequity, including rideshare or for-hire transportation (e.g., Uber, Lyft) that can accommodate varied mobility capacities, public transit navigators, accessible automated vehicles, delivery services, and paratransit with door-to door assistance (pp. 12 and 15).

Efforts to address social isolation and transportation needs of older adults in Minnesota

2023 Innovations Showcase

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. (2023). *2023 Innovations Showcase*.
https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/3-25-NADTC-Innov-Showcase_508-1.pdf

This resource highlights winning transportation innovations submitted to a nationwide competition hosted by the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC). One submission is the Hop Scott program, which is operated in Scott County, Minnesota. It is highlighted as an example of an innovation that addresses both accessibility and equity in transportation.

The Hop Scott program is a volunteer-based transportation service offering food delivery, citizen transport for non-emergency health needs, and transportation to medical appointments and preschool screenings for the Latino population in Scott County (p. 12). The program is funded by a Live Well at Home grant and includes two accessible vans, which are essential for older adults and people with disabilities who wish to remain in their homes (p. 12).

Age-Friendly Minnesota Community Grants

Minnesota Department of Human Services. (2023, June 14). *Age-Friendly Minnesota Community Grants have been awarded to organizations across the state to help Minnesota become a better place to grow older*.
https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/AFMN-community-grant-awards-announcement_tcm1053-581284.pdf

In early summer 2023, the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council released the names of organizations that received Community Grants funding. The “proposed projects are intended to make Minnesota a better place to grow older” (p. 1). Aside from the names and descriptions, further details about the funded projects’ impacts or outcomes are not available. The following projects address transportation and social isolation:

1. AGE-FRIENDLY MINNESOTA COUNCIL COMMUNITY GRANTS - 2023

| MN Region | Program | Description | Page |
|-----------|---|---|------|
| Central | Tri-County Action Program | “Efforts, including a needs assessment, to expand a volunteer driver program that supports rural, low-income older adults.” | 1 |
| Northeast | ISD 0001, dba Aitkin Public Schools | “Support efforts to make public school ‘maker's spaces’ (labs for woodworking, welding, engine work, embroidery, etc.) open and available to community members as opportunity for creative work and social connection .” | 3 |
| | Itasca County Family YMCA | “As part of a broader project to create opportunities for physical activity and social connection , support purchase and installation of equipment for an outdoor fitness circuit that community members of all ages can access at no cost.” | 3 |
| Northwest | ISD 2342, dba West Central Area School District | “Expand and strengthen programs and opportunities for older adults, including through connections with high school students.” | 4 |
| | Living at Home of the Park Rapids Area | “Efforts to increase collaboration between partners to develop coordinated calendars and communications to help connect older adults to social activities .” | 4 |

| MN Region | Program | Description | Page |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---|------|
| Southwest | Generations Home Care Services | “Funds will support purchase of a wheelchair accessible vehicle to allow this grantee to expand its transportation services to clients who use wheelchairs.” | 5 |
| | The YMCA of Worthington, MN | “Support for inter-generational social engagement efforts in this increasingly diverse community.” | 5 |
| Tribal Nation | Upper Sioux Community | ”Support purchase of a wheelchair accessible van to provide transportation to Upper Sioux Community's older members in southwest Minnesota.” | 6 |

AGE to age-Rural Livability Workshop Report

Stanton, M. (2020). *Rural Livability Workshop Report*. AARP. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/rural-livability-workshop-report-download.html>

<https://northlandfdn.org/programs-supports/age-to-age/>

This report is summarized in more detail in the *Information about rural livability* section. It is included here with an example of an initiative operating in Minnesota.

Operating in the rural, northeastern area of Minnesota, *AGE to age* is an initiative that promotes intergenerational connections, intended to reduce isolation and improve well-being of community members of all ages. The initiative is funded by the Northland Foundation and includes programming in seven counties (Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, St. Louis) and three Tribal nations (Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa). With community input, participants design activities and programs that meet their unique, local needs. “Within the tribal nations..., AGE to age programs have focused on Native American culture and traditions such as blanket making, rice harvesting, beading and learning to speak Ojibwe” (p. 10).

Consolidated Rural Transit – Paul Bunyan Transit, MN

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. (2020, October 28). *Consolidated rural transit – Paul Bunyan Transit*. <https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/PaulBunyanRoseauCtyCoordinationSurveyFinalAccessible-1.pdf>

This case study discusses Paul Bunyan Transit (PBT), a regional transit agency in operation since 1999. It operates across Beltrami County and the city of Bemidji, Lake of the Woods County and the city of Baudette, and Roseau County and the cities of Roseau and Warroad. All regular routes operate with accessible vehicles, so individuals with disabilities and older adults are able to utilize these services (p. 1). The support of the Minnesota Department of Transportation has been cited as important to the success of the system (p. 4).

The rural transit plans include the following overall goals:

- “Improve coordination of services to meet transportation needs”
- “Increase ridership/usage across the network”
- “Ensure fiscal responsibility as a transit funding agency”
- “Anticipate and plan for future funding levels to achieve service expansion”
- “Articulate and communicate a vision for the transit system and the benefits it provides to the community” (p. 4)

MaaS in Minnesota: Developing a Regional Trip Planning Platform

Shared Use Mobility Center. (2023, July 25). *MaaS in Minnesota: Developing a regional trip planning platform*. <https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/casestudy/maas-in-minnesota-developing-a-regional-trip-planning-platform/>

This article offers an overview of a pilot regional trip planning platform used in southern and western Minnesota, implemented by the Minnesota Department of Transportation with federal funding. This pilot was developed to provide technical assistance and address barriers that consistently exist in rural communities, and included “nearly twenty transit agencies and various technology vendors, including the Transit app, to create a regional trip planning platform that supports fixed-route transit, flexible transit, and paratransit, ridesharing, and micromobility across a swath of communities” (Introduction, para. 2).

The overall framework is called Mobility as a Service (MaaS). Key objectives of the framework are:

- “Promote cooperation between transit agencies in southern and western Minnesota;
- Establish a uniform level of data infrastructure among smaller and medium-sized mobility providers;
- Create a sustainable framework for open-source data sharing between transit agencies, private mobility providers, and customers across southern and western Minnesota; and
- Improve the quality of shared mobility and public transit, moving southern and western Minnesota closer toward a culture of MaaS” (Introduction, para. 3).

Measuring the Economic Benefits of Rural and Small Urban Transit Services in Greater Minnesota

Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Research and Innovation. (2020, April). *Measuring the economic benefits of rural and small urban transit services in greater Minnesota*. <https://mdl.mndot.gov/items/202010TS>

The Minnesota Department of Transportation completed case studies of six transit providers in greater Minnesota, in order to determine the economic benefits for their local communities (p. 1). Providers included Paul Bunyan Transit, Trailblazer Transit, Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit (SMART), Timber Trails Public Transit, Minnesota River Valley Transit–City of St. Peter, and St. Cloud Metro Bus.

While not specifically related to older adults, the report makes a strong case for the importance of public transit systems in rural communities. The key finding was “the benefits of public transit services are consistently greater than the cost. On average, for every \$1 spent on public transit services, the return to the community served is at least \$1.50, and in some cases as much as \$4.20” (p. 2).

Newtrax Senior Community Services

<https://www.newtrax.org/senior-community-services>

While not specific to rural communities, Newtrax is an example of an innovative transportation service in East Metro St. Paul communities. It is a nonprofit collaborative that was originally developed to provide critical transportation services to people with disabilities. The services have been expanded for other community members, including older adults who do not drive or have access to other transportation services. Services provided include the following:

- Coordinated, scheduled outings in wheelchair accessible buses for residents of senior residential communities (Senior Community Services page)
- Bus circulars with route loops with scheduled stops that include a wide variety of locations, such as restaurants, shopping, groceries, pharmacies, health care, fitness services, public libraries, and community centers (Community Transportation Loops page)

Rural Community Transit Strategies: Building on, Expanding, and Enhancing Existing Assets and Programs

Fisher, T., Vogel, M., Khani, A., & Burga, F. (2023, February). *Rural community transit strategies: Building on, expanding, and enhancing existing assets and programs*. Minnesota Department of Transportation. <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/255021/2023-08.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

In partnership with the city of Wabasha, this project created a rural community transit system (RCTS) that could be adapted for similar communities. Specifically, the research team sought to answer whether a “shared, mobility services approach to rural transit transportation in Greater Minnesota [could] meet the unmet needs of rural residents, with more efficiency, and with greater positive impacts on the local economy than current transit practices and services” (Exec. Summary, para. 1).

The following main themes identified by researchers are particularly relevant to the work of NWCA. Important characteristics of a replicable mobility system include:

- “Responds to small rural town’s character” (Exec. Summary, para. 5)
- “Strengthens community life” by including all residents and fostering connections (Exec. Summary, para. 5)
- “Uses and builds on existing assets” such as city infrastructure, residents, and current transportation services (Exec. Summary, para. 5)
- “Expands service” via schedule of operations and geography (Exec. Summary, para. 5)
- “Impacts public policy...to redefine rural transit as a mobility system with a choice of menu items [and] recognize rural transit as important civic infrastructure” (Exec. Summary, para. 5)
- “Creates partnerships” among local municipal agencies, government agencies, community organizations, and businesses (Exec. Summary, para. 5)

Transit for Healthcare: Volunteer Drivers in Aging Rural Minnesota

Oachs, W. (2020, September). *Transit for healthcare: Volunteer drivers in aging rural Minnesota*. Center for Rural Policy & Development. <https://www.ruralmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Volunteer-drivers-print-1.pdf>

This article discusses the current state of volunteer driver programs in greater Minnesota, and highlights the dwindling number of volunteer drivers. This is cause for concern, according to the author, due to the fact that demand is expected to continue to grow as the population of older adults increases. The majority of passengers who use volunteer driver services are older adults and people with disabilities; the majority of volunteers are also older adults (p. 4).

Key factors that are influencing the discrepancy between the availability of volunteers and the demand for rides include:

- Low rates for mileage reimbursement for volunteer drivers, as well as the punitive effect of reimbursement on total Social Security income (pp. 5-6)
- Inconsistent reimbursement rules for miles driven by volunteers without a passenger, which is amplified in rural communities due to greater travel distances (p. 7)
- Rate increases for auto insurance liability coverage for volunteer drivers (p. 7)
- A preference for regional transit systems (vs. county-based transit) that permit crossing county lines and allow for mileage reimbursement (p. 8)

Key solutions suggested by the author include efforts to actively recruit volunteers, as well as revisions to a variety of tax code and reimbursement rate policies (pp. 10-11).

Tribal Transportation: Issues and Successful Models

National RTAP. (2006, updated March 2022). *Tribal transportation: Issues and successful models*. https://n94067.eos-intl.net/elibsql16_N94067_Documents/Resource%20Share%20Files/Tribal%20Transportation-%20Issues%20and%20Successful%20Models%20.pdf

This article discusses the importance of transportation within Tribal communities, as well as the role transportation coordination plays in creating systems between Tribal and non-Tribal transportation services that are efficient, affordable, and accessible. Examples of initiatives within Tribal nations outside Minnesota are included in Table 2.

Big Woods Transit, which is run by the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, is described in the article as an example of a successful program. It is a local bus service that operates in Nett Lake, Orr, Cook, Vermillion, and Virginia, Minnesota, and provides door-to-door transportation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to emerging needs, the transit system expanded to deliver food boxes to community members and purchased accessible mini-vans for non-emergency medical transportation (pp. 7-8).

Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Rural Transportation

Rural Health Information Hub. (2023). *Tri-Valley Opportunity Council rural transportation*.

<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/project-examples/488>

Beginning in 2002, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council implemented a coordinated public transportation and volunteer driver system that served eight counties in northwest Minnesota. The transportation system, Tri-Valley Heartland Express, provides public transportation in accessible buses and curbside service (Services offered, point #1). Rural Transportation Collaborative coordinates volunteer drivers for medical appointments and other person needs (Services offered, point #3).

The Tri-Valley Opportunity Council identified three key challenges:

- “Keeping transportation affordable for riders, but remaining financially viable
- Sparse resources in a dispersed population means covering a large geographic area with a minimal number of vans/buses, few personnel, and small budgets
- Lack of available funds for transportation programs in northern Minnesota is a barrier for the sustainability of a rural transit program” (Challenges, 3 points).

Efforts to address social isolation and transportation needs of older adults outside Minnesota

An Active Roadmap: Best Practices in Rural Mobility

Smart Growth America. (2023, July 27). *An active roadmap: Best practices in rural mobility*.

https://smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SGA-Rural-Transportation-Field-Scan_Final_7.27.pdf

This report discusses a range of topics related to rural transportation needs in American rural communities, along with case studies from across the country. The authors suggest that strengthening rural communities through increased population numbers and well-managed development are critical, although neither is a one-size-fit-all venture. Key recommendations include:

- Attract new and returning residents, including young families and retirees, with strong job and educational opportunities, and local amenities (p. 22)
- “Invest in rural broadband internet [to provide] opportunities for remote work and increased access to critical educational and health services for residents” (p. 22)
- Update municipal policies and zoning regulations to allow for improved infrastructure, revitalized downtowns, and development that contributes to community and residents’ needs and wishes (p. 22)

Blind Spot: Mobility and Aging in Rural America

Grantmakers in Aging. (August 2020). *Blind spot: Mobility and aging in rural America*.

https://www.giaging.org/system/files/documents/2023-12/Blind_Spot_MAG_Rural_Mobility_report_08022020-FINAL.pdf

Published by Age Friendly Arizona, this report provides a summary overview of mobility challenges faced by older adults in rural communities, and describes the Rural Transportation Incubator initiative. The authors note that many funders avoid investing in transportation because they mistakenly assume that transportation is covered by government funding (p. 3), or that “transportation is too big, too expensive, or too cumbersome” (p. 3). Instead, the authors suggest that funders would do well “to stop thinking about how mobility programs operate and focus instead on the outcomes they can empower” (p. 4), since transportation can be viewed as a means for addressing many of the issues related to successful aging (p. 4). Forming partnerships can be essential for developing innovative funding sources and contributing to overall sustainability (p. 4).

Responding to a need for alternative programs, Age Friendly Arizona’s Rural Transportation Incubator is an innovative multi-partner approach to addressing the mobility needs of older adults in multiple rural Arizona communities. Key examples include dial-a-ride as an alternative to fixed route service (p. 18), volunteer drivers (p. 20), and joint community partnerships to expand reach (p. 22).

Recommendations relevant for the efforts of NWCA, offered by rural nonprofit leaders and funders at a conference, include:

1. Use a data-driven approach to describe communities for funders and planning purposes (p. 24).
2. Build a diverse group of funders and partners—such as for-profit organizations, health care entities, community agencies and government agencies—in order to maximize potential impact (p. 25).

3. Even small scale efforts can end up making a big difference (p. 27).
4. Broaden the scope of efforts by directing funding to staff; including additional data such as ROI evaluations, qualitative data, and outcomes or impact findings; and engaging in outreach efforts (p. 28).

NADTC Best Practices Compendium

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. (2021, September 23). *NADTC best practices Compendium*. https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/NADTC-BPCompendium_508.pdf

This report is a compilation of lessons learned from innovative transportation demonstration projects that were funded by the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. The section on rural transportation includes information about 1) crossing jurisdictional boundaries, 2) covering distances, 3) using volunteers, 4) assisting people with chronic health conditions, 5) and key lessons learned. Descriptions for some programs are also included in Table 2.

The authors identified common themes they believe are important for communities or agencies to consider when developing and providing accessible transportation. Best practices and key learnings that may be particularly relevant for the NWCA service area include:

- Including multiple perspectives in the planning stages is key to building trust and buy-in (p. 5)
- Inclusive and broad partnerships may improve the ability to find viable solutions, as well as the likelihood that transportation initiatives will match the needs of communities (p. 5)
- Building relationships takes time, but solid partnerships and trust may contribute to long-term program sustainability and improve overall coordination (p. 6)

Promising Practices for Increasing Access to Transportation in Rural Communities

Bayne, A., Siegfried, A., Stauffer, P., & Knudson, A. (2018, April). *Promising practices for increasing access to transportation in rural communities*. The Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis. https://www.norc.org/PDFs/Walsh%20Center/Rural%20Evaluation%20Briefs/Rural%20Evaluation%20Brief_April2018.pdf

While not specifically focused on older adults, this issue brief provides a summary of important components for rural transportation program models, including those that:

- Increase access to transportation due to “long travel distances, low population density, and safety and infrastructure issues” (p. 1), with on-demand, ride-sharing, and volunteer driver models (p. 2).
- Provide alternative services that can reduce the need for transportation, such as mobile health clinics and telehealth programs (p. 3).
- Improve safety or infrastructure with consistent policies and requirements, appealing alternatives to vehicle transportation, equipment that supports access for people with disabilities, and updates to the built environment (pp. 3-4).
- Foster collaborative partnerships that can contribute to the “reach and efficiency of the program” (p. 4) with multiple funding sources and coordinated efforts (p. 5).
- Include access to more than health care services (p. 4).

- Use technology to support coordination and monitoring of transportation (p. 4).
- Collect data from all stakeholders to gauge program satisfaction and impact (p. 4).

Based on this project, staff at The Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis developed a toolkit with information on program models and other resources for communities planning to address rural transportation programs. The toolkit can be accessed at <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/transportation>

Rural Transportation Services

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. (2023, August 10). *Rural transportation services*.

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies/rural-transportation-services>

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps identified transportation as a strategy to address health by increasing individuals' mobility and access to health care. The agency also lists funding sources that may be available for rural transportation initiatives:

- Rural Area Formula Program Grants (Section 5311 grants) “program provides states and federally recognized Indian tribes to be used for capital, planning, and operating assistance for transportation services in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000” (Implementation Example 1; <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/formula-grants-rural-areas-fact-sheet-section-5311>).
- Rural Passenger Transportation Technical Assistance Program (RPTTAP) and the Tribal Passenger Transportation Technical Assistance Program (TPTTAP) “provide technical assistance to small communities to create and improve rural and tribal public transportation” (Implementation Example 2; <https://ctaa.org/rural-tribal-passenger-transportation-technical-assistance/>).
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs “offers Highly Rural Transportation Grants to state Veterans Service agencies to transport veterans living in highly rural areas (i.e., fewer than seven people per square mile) to U.S. VA health care facilities in eligible counties” (Implementation Example 3; https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/highly_rural_transportation_grants.asp).

Transportation Resources for Native American Elders You Should Know About

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. (2023, December 14). *Transportation resources for Native American elders you should know about*. <https://www.nadtc.org/news/blog/transportation-resources-for-native-american-elders-you-should-know-about/>

This article discusses data-backed evidence demonstrating the critical need for mobility options in Tribal communities, as well as the negative impact of the lack of access to essential and culturally relevant services and supports to Tribal elders' quality of life.

The article also highlights the Native Elder Service Locator, which is a tool that provides an interactive map for services, including transportation, for Tribal elders in each state. In Minnesota, there are six service centers—Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Grand Portage, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, and White Earth Reservation Tribal Council. <https://www.nrcnaa.org/service-locator?state=MN>

Additional examples of transportation models

Table 2 presents nine examples being implemented outside Minnesota. Table 3 presents five models implemented by Tribal nations. Information from the cited articles is also summarized in other sections of this report.

2. ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF TRANSPORTATION MODELS IMPLEMENTED OUTSIDE MINNESOTA

| Program name | Description | Article reference |
|---|---|---|
| RYDE Transit (Reach Your Destination Easily) | This is a low-cost service that provides door-to-door transportation to residents who live in 7 counties in south central Nebraska. | https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/rural-livability-workshop-report-download.html |
| Neighbors Driving Neighbors | This nonprofit with volunteer drivers serves five rural communities in Maine. | https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/rural-livability-workshop-report-download.html |
| Feonix-Mobility Rising | This organization works with community partners in rural communities to coordinate transportation for public transit, taxis, and volunteer drivers in real time to meet more immediate needs. | https://blog.aarp.org/thinking-policy/stranded-bridging-the-transportation-gap-for-rural-communities |
| Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BPRC) | The commission collaborated with local transportation providers across multiple jurisdictions to identify a central access point for older adults and individuals with disabilities who need rides to medical appointments. | https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/NADTC-BPCompendium_508.pdf |
| home52 Transportation | This model was launched in 2021 by the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio. Door-through-door and on-demand transportation are provided through a partnership with local hospitals and transportation providers. | https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/2023-innovations-showcase-2/ |
| EMBARK Well Senior Health & Wellness Transportation | This transportation program supports older adults and people with disabilities to remain in their homes. It assists them in accessing services tied to social determinants of health, including health, nutrition, and exercise programs. | https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/2023-innovations-showcase-2/ |
| Harris County RIDES | This coordinated transportation program provides specialized transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income populations across one county outside of urban Houston. The program supports people's independence and allows them to remain in their communities. | https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/2023-innovations-showcase-2/ |
| MET-Go! | This program is a small-scale, rural transit service in Virginia. It offers on-demand and same-day rides. With increased access to transportation, riders report that they are able to access medical care, but also other services and social connections. | https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/2023-innovations-showcase-2/ |
| Quaboag Connector | This program offers affordable, curb-to-curb transportation in 10 rural communities. It prioritizes older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income populations. | https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/2023-innovations-showcase-2/ |

3. ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF TRANSPORTATION MODELS IMPLEMENTED BY TRIBAL NATIONS

| Program name | Description | Article reference |
|--|--|---|
| Menominee Tribe (Wisconsin) | The Menominee Tribe coordinates its public transit system with other reservation service providers to enhance access to employment, health care, recreation, education, and public transit for the Menominee people. | https://irp.cdn-website.com/270961f6/files/uploaded/NRTAP%20Tribal%20Transportation%20Issues%20and%20Successful%20Models%20Tech%20Brief%20Published%20March%202022.pdf |
| Blackfeet Nation Transit | Elders and people with disabilities ride for free. Transportation is available both on-demand and by advanced booking. | https://irp.cdn-website.com/270961f6/files/uploaded/NRTAP%20Tribal%20Transportation%20Issues%20and%20Successful%20Models%20Tech%20Brief%20Published%20March%202022.pdf |
| Pueblo of Laguna Shaa'srk'a Transit Program | This program offers non-emergency medical transportation via accessible van for community-based health services. | https://irp.cdn-website.com/270961f6/files/uploaded/NRTAP%20Tribal%20Transportation%20Issues%20and%20Successful%20Models%20Tech%20Brief%20Published%20March%202022.pdf |
| Tribal Transportation Program of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation | Transportation is provided in the 11 counties of the reservation. | https://irp.cdn-website.com/270961f6/files/uploaded/NRTAP%20Tribal%20Transportation%20Issues%20and%20Successful%20Models%20Tech%20Brief%20Published%20March%202022.pdf |
| Capacity Builders, Inc (CBI) | CBI connects elders and people with disabilities on the remote Navajo Reservation to multiple types of destinations. | https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/NADTC-BPCompendium_508.pdf |

Two transportation case studies related to technology

Innovation Brings New Transportation Option to Rural America

Lynott, J. (2017, August 1). *Innovation brings new transportation option to rural America*. AARP Blogs. <https://blog.aarp.org/livable-communities/rural-rideshare>

This blog entry features Liberty, a Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) program launched in 2016 in Nebraska, Ohio, and South Dakota. The company connects riders to drivers in rural areas through a mobile app. Customers can also schedule rides through a call center. Liberty uses mobility managers who directly communicate with customers and build partnerships in the community. According to the blog, Liberty “engages local partners to identify a community’s transportation gaps and then works to fill them” (para. 4).

Modernizing Demand-Responsive Transportation for the Age of New Mobility

Lynott, J. (2020, December). *Modernizing demand-responsive transportation for the age of new mobility*. AARP Public Policy Institute. <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/12/modernizing-demand-responsive-transportation.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00121.001.pdf>

This technical report explains the importance of *demand-responsive* transportation services (e.g., dial-a-ride, ride sharing, and other options without set schedules or routes) for offering personalized transportation to people who do not drive and are without access to public transportation. A lack of updated technology, particularly in rural areas, has further limited residents' ability to arrange transportation to meet their needs (p. 1). The author suggests that technology be expanded to include transactional data specification (TDS) formats to facilitate individuals' abilities to schedule or coordinate their own transportation via phones or computers, and explained TDS in the following way:

Transportation providers that adopt the common data format provided by the TDS can seamlessly transfer and share data about requested trips within a network of providers, automate the task of assigning service and vehicles, and improve service coordination. Some data exchange is already taking place via other methods—but with limitations and challenges. The TDS makes interoperating easier, reduces complexity, lowers the cost of the process, and improves service to travelers (p.2).

Among several case studies presented is one example from Minnesota:

- **Greater Minnesota MaaS Ecosystem.** The Office of Transit and Active Transportation at the Minnesota Department of Transportation received federal funding in 2020 to develop a regional MaaS platform as a pilot proof-of-concept for a potential statewide system. The TDS will likely undergird data sharing within this new platform. (Note: This pilot is also described in the article *MaaS in Minnesota: Developing a regional trip planning platform* on page 13 of this report.)

To facilitate adoption of TDS, the author recommends strengthening multi- and cross-sector efforts among stakeholders with information about the technology, updated implementation requirements and federal regulations, and sufficient funding streams (p. 3).

Data tables

The following data tables include data on basic demographics, and older adult social isolation and transportation from various state and federal data sources, for Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, and Roseau counties.

The data are organized into four categories, with the following sources:

- **Demographics and characteristics** - U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS)
- **Social isolation metrics and proxy metrics** - National Social Life, Health & Aging Project (NSHAP)
- **Technology metrics** - ACS
- **Health care access and use** – NSHAP, ACS, Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings, HRSA Area Health Resource File, and County Health Rankings (UW Population Health Institute)

Particularly useful for the purposes of the NWCA work are the compiled results from the National Social Life, Health & Aging Project and interactive maps with data tables. The National Institute on Aging launched its National Social Life, Health & Aging Project (NSHAP) to better understand the ways in which social connections influence healthy aging (<https://www.norc.org/research/projects/national-social-life-health-and-aging-project.html>). A partnership between NORC at the University of Chicago, AARP Foundation, and United Health Foundation developed an interactive mapping tool for the dissemination of results based on variables defined by the project to reflect measures of social isolation, as well as proxy measures related to measures of social isolation and well-being. The interactive maps for national-, state-, and county-level geographies are located at <https://connect2affect.org/map/>

Demographics and characteristics

4. DEMOGRAPHICS AND CHARACTERISTICS FOR ADULTS AGE 65+, 4 COUNTIES

| | County | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|
| | Kittson | Lake of the Woods | Marshall | Roseau |
| Total population (all ages) | 4,207 | 3,763 | 9,040 | 15,331 |
| Number of adults 65+ | 1,101 | 951 | 2,003 | 2,788 |
| Percentage of adults 65+ | 26% | 25% | 22% | 18% |
| Median age (total population) | 48 years | 51 years | 43 years | 42 years |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 46% | 50% | 48% | 49% |
| Female | 54% | 50% | 53% | 51% |
| Race/ethnicity | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 95% | 96% | 98% | 97% |
| African American/Black | <1% | <1% | 0% | 0% |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | <1% | 0% | <1% | 1% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 1% | 0% | <1% | 1% |
| Two or more races | 5% | 3% | <1% | 1% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 3% | 2% | 1% | <1% |

4. DEMOGRAPHICS AND CHARACTERISTICS FOR ADULTS AGE 65+, 4 COUNTIES (CONTINUED)

| Marital status | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Married | 52% | 63% | 64% | 59% |
| Never married | 16% | 3% | 6% | 6% |
| Widowed | 23% | 21% | 23% | 20% |
| Divorced/Separated | 9% | 13% | 8% | 15% |
| Median household income (total population) | \$66,000 | \$61,667 | \$69,396 | \$70,122 |
| In poverty ^a | 20% | 9% | 8% | 9% |
| No vehicle available for household (total population) | 4% | 3% | 4% | 5% |

Notes: All data from U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2018-2022), unless otherwise noted. Retrieved from <https://www.mncompass.org/>

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

^a Poverty statistics follow standards specified by the Office of Management and Budget in Statistical Policy Directives. The Census Bureau uses standard income thresholds, based on family size and composition, to determine poverty levels. For 2022, the poverty threshold for one person age 65+ living alone was \$14,040; for two people in one household, with one person age 65+ and no children under age 18 was \$17,710.

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>

Social isolation metrics and proxy metrics

The National Social Life, Health & Aging Project pulled data from the American Community Survey related to poverty level, household composition, marital status, disability status; and developed composite measures related to social isolation and health, which reflect personal behavior, community characteristics, and availability of opportunities for engagement.

5. SOCIAL ISOLATION METRICS, 4 COUNTIES

| | County | | | |
|---|---------|-------------------|----------|--------|
| | Kittson | Lake of the Woods | Marshall | Roseau |
| Live alone (age 65+) | 8% | 9% | 7% | 6% |
| Have a disability ^a (age 65+) | 9% | 6% | 7% | 6% |
| Have independent living difficulty ^b (age 65+) | 2% | 3% | 3% | 2% |
| Have high loneliness scores ^c (age 50+) | 1% | 0% | 1% | 5% |
| Social engagement composite score [0-20] ^d (age 50+) | 8.3 | 8.5 | 8.8 | 8.8 |
| Social engagement domain score [1-4] ^e (age 50+) | 1.7 | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.9 |
| Social isolation risk score ^f (age 65+) | 89% | 53% | 49% | 22% |
| Membership associations per 10,000 people | 40.0 | 35.6 | 35.0 | 20.0 |

Source: National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project Survey (2015-2016). Retrieved from <https://connect2affect.org/map/>

^a **Disability status:** Determined according to existence of one or more difficulties with hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and/or independent living.

^b **Independent living difficulty:** Determined according to existence of difficulty doing errands alone (e.g., shopping or medical appointment) due to physical, mental, or emotional conditions.

^c **Loneliness score (population 50 and older):** Composite variable that combines how often population 50+ report feeling (1) a lack of companionship, (2) left out, (3) isolated. (Range = 0-6, with 6 as the highest score; and never/rarely=0, sometimes=1, often=2) A **high loneliness score**=total score greater than 2.

^d **Social engagement composite score (population 50 and older):** Composite variable that combines how often population reports (1) socializing with close friends and relatives, (2) participating in group activities, (3) volunteering, and (4) attending religious services. (Range = 0-20, with 20 being the most socially engaged; numbers are based on reported times per week)

^e **Social engagement domain score (population 50 and older):** Composite variable that combines population reports of social engagement in each domain once per month or more: 1) socializing with close friends & relatives, 2) participating in group activities, 3) volunteering, and 4) attending religious services. (Range=0-4, with 4 as the highest score and greatest number of diverse forms of regular social engagement; do not do this once per month=0, do this once per month or more=1)

^f **Social isolation risk score (population 65 and older):** Composite calculation based on mean scores for risk factors for social isolation in adults age 65+ from the ACS: poverty; living alone; divorced, separated or widowed; never married; disability; independent living difficulty. From the United Health Foundation Senior Report, 2019.

6. TECHNOLOGY METRICS FOR ADULTS AGE 65+, 4 COUNTIES

| | County | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------|-------------------|----------|--------|
| | Kittson | Lake of the Woods | Marshall | Roseau |
| Do <u>not</u> have internet | 16% | 22% | 7% | 13% |
| Do <u>not</u> have a computer | 32% | 33% | 38% | 33% |
| Have broadband connection | 50% | 43% | 51% | 52% |
| Have dial up internet | 3% | 1% | 5% | 2% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2015-2019). Retrieved from <https://connect2affect.org/map/>

7. COUNTY HEALTH CARE ACCESS AND USE, 4 COUNTIES

| | County | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| | Kittson | Lake of the Woods | Marshall | Roseau |
| Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) – areas with too few providers ^a | Primary care – <i>county and rural health clinic</i> Mental health – <i>county</i> Dental health – <i>county and rural health clinic</i> | Primary care – <i>county</i> Mental health – <i>county</i> Dental health – <i>low income population</i> | Primary care – <i>county and rural health clinic</i> Mental health – <i>county</i> Dental health – <i>county and rural health clinic</i> | Primary care – <i>county</i> Mental health – <i>county</i> |
| Medically Underserved Area (MUA) status – areas with a shortage of services ^b | Primary care | Primary care – low income | Primary care | Primary care |
| Ratio of total population to dentists ^c | 2,030:1 | 3,870:1 | 4,430:1 | 1,700:1 |
| Ratio of total population to primary care physicians ^c | Not available | 3,820:1 | 8,990:1 | 1,910:1 |
| Ratio of total population to other primary care providers (nurse practitioners, physician assistants, clinical nurse specialists) ^c | 1,350:1 | 970:1 | 1,480:1 | 1,530:1 |
| Inpatient beds per 100,000 population ^d | 1,740 | 1,459 | 213 | 749 |

^a Source: <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find> **HPSA**: Shortage designations are used to determine geographic areas, specific populations, and types of facilities with too few primary care, dental care, and mental health providers to meet the health care needs of residents. The information is used to aid in resource distribution.

^b Source: <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/mua-find> **MUA**: Underserved geographic and specific population designations determine shortages of primary care health services. The information is used to aid in resource distribution.

^c Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2024 County Health Rankings.

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/compare-counties?compareCounties=27069%2C27077%2C27089%2C27135&year=2024>

^d Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2015-2019). Retrieved from <https://connect2affect.org/map/>

Additional documents and reports

The following sources were reviewed, but not included in the summary of reports and documents. Literature and documentation provided by Northwest Community Action staff are also included in this section.

- AARP Livable Communities. (2020, February). *What Is a frontier community?* [https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/what-is-a-frontier-community.html#:~:text=Frontier%20counties%20\(marked%20in%20green,from%20population%20centers%20and%20services](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/what-is-a-frontier-community.html#:~:text=Frontier%20counties%20(marked%20in%20green,from%20population%20centers%20and%20services)
- Brown, J. R., Duncan, M., Horner, M. W., Bond, M., & Wood, J. (2018). Provider perspectives on six strategies to overcome the barriers to older adult use of alternative transportation services: Evidence from seven communities. *Case Studies on Transport Policy*, 6(2), 237-245. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2213624X17301803>
- CHI LakeWood Health. (2022, April). *Community health needs assessment*.
- Community Resource Connections. (n.d.). *Transportation services*. <https://www.crcinform.org/directory/categories/transportation>
- Kittson Healthcare. (2022). *2022 Community health needs assessment and implementation plan*.
- LifeCare Medical Center. (2022). *2022 Community Health Needs Assessment*.
- MinnesotaHelp.info. (n.d.). *Kittson County transportation services covered by Medicaid waivers (list)*. <https://www.minnesotahelp.info/SpecialTopics/MedicaidWaiverPrograms/Search?sm=All&q=Transportation&loc=&geo=®=&f=Area+Served+by+County%3dKittson+County&noredir=true>
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