

Rides to Wellness

Mobility for All

FINAL REPORT



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Flint Mass Transportation Authority

Project Title: MTA Rides to Wellness – Breaking Transportation Barriers- Coordinated Health and Wellness Transportation For All

Location: Michigan

Status 8/2/2022: Project ongoing

Partners: Flint MTA Mobility Managers, Valley Area Agency on Aging, Genesee Health System, state/local Departments of Health & Human Services, Greater Flint Health Coalition, McLaren Hospital and Outpatient Substance Abuse Services, Genesee County Department of Veterans Services, Community Foundation of Greater Flint, American Cancer Society, PACE, Genesee Hurley Cancer Institute, many individual medical facilities and dialysis centers

Project Description:

The Flint Mass Transportation Authority (MTA) received \$545,696 to support Breaking Transportation Barriers-Coordinated Health and Wellness Transportation for All, a pilot project to improve coordination and increase access to highly responsive, on-demand non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) with a primary focus on both Veterans and individuals with substance use disorders. The program builds on MTA's nationally recognized Rides to Wellness program.

Project Background:

In 2016, MTA Flint was one of 19 organizations who received funding through the FTA's Rides to Wellness pilot project. Through extensive planning and research, several key areas of need were identified in Genesee County as opportunities to improve transportation through this demonstration grant. The results of the Rides to Wellness pilot were incredibly successful. The project allowed MTA to begin providing health and wellness transportation for the transportation-disadvantaged in Genesee County. It funded the development of a new, agile software dispatching system, started a travel training program, and allowed MTA to begin exploring mobility management activities throughout the agency.

Through a partnership with Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), MTA was able to leverage the Rides to Wellness grant and receive funding from MDHHS to provide 81,188 on-demand, same day rides to low-income residents of Genesee County for medical appointments, doctors' visits and trips to full-service grocery stores.

Another key aspect of the Rides to Wellness project was the growth of the relationship between MTA and the PACE (Program for All-Inclusive Care) project. Through the time of the pilot, MTA was the only public transportation system in the Country that provided transportation for the CMS-funded PACE project. Through this partnership, MTA provided



door-through-door transportation for PACE participants to get to and from their Center. In total, over 30,000 rides have been provided to PACE participants.

Despite the success of the pilot project, it uncovered additional gaps in service, unmet needs in the community, and the need for increased coordination. While MTA was serving some seniors through the VAAA and PACE program, there were many seniors and persons with disabilities who were not connected to a program and did not have access to NEMT transportation. MTA conducted stakeholder meetings with its Local Advisory Council, senior centers, and assisted living facilities and heard consistent themes throughout the process - seniors need convenient, reliable on-demand transportation.

One woman in a senior living community shared she was spending \$260.00 per month for a private NEMT provider to take her to her weekly doctor's appointment. Another shared that he felt so helpless because his daughter was having to take off work almost every week to drive him to the doctors. He said he could not use a ride-hailing service or cab because he needed someone to help him to and from the vehicle, but MTA's Rides to Wellness service would be a perfect solution. Unfortunately, due to a limited number of vehicles and drivers, the pilot project was at capacity and MTA hesitated to expand service to this wider pool of passengers because it did not want to sacrifice quality.

Mobility for All was designed to continue allowing MTA to build upon lessons learned during the Rides to Wellness pilot and begin to address the unmet needs still faced by seniors and others, including veterans and individuals needing substance abuse and mental health services.



Figure 1 ADA Accessible Rides to Wellness Vehicle

Key Partnerships

Partnerships are critical to the success of MTA Rides to Wellness- Breaking Transportation Barriers-Coordinated Health and Wellness Transportation for All program. As of August 2022, MTA had 25 active partner organizations. Nine are hospitals and their related facilities (i.e.

Genesys Hurley Cancer Institute). All of the partner organizations serve older adults as well as other vulnerable individuals, with dialysis center clients and veterans being the largest groups of passengers served.



Figure 2 Rides to Wellness Vehicle at Hurley Medical Center

Implementation

The Breaking Transportation Barriers-Coordinated Health and Wellness for All project successfully increased access to highly responsive, on-demand health and wellness public transportation for veterans, persons needing substance abuse treatment/mental health services, seniors and person with disabilities and created partnerships with hospitals by utilizing mobility management and innovative technology to create a seamless, coordinated system of health and wellness transportation.

Elements of Mobility for All

Mobility Management

With Mobility for All funding, a Mobility Navigator was hired to coordinate transportation services and provide referrals to other community agencies when a need was identified. For example, if a senior patient at a hospital needs a ride home after discharge, the mobility navigator will arrange for the ride, but will also provide a referral to the patient to the Valley Area Agency on Aging or the PACE program so the patient, if eligible, can receive ongoing, coordinated transportation services after their hospital stay.

The Mobility Navigator responsible for the hospital and substance abuse partnerships works closely with hospital and substance abuse/mental health staff to identify potential passengers, and also address any unusual or out of the ordinary needs a patient might have, such as a long-distance trip to another hospital facility. It was originally planned that Mobility Navigators would

be located in office space near discharge planners, however, with the development of the online scheduling technology, the need to have them on-site diminished.

Innovative Infrastructure Technology

During the original Rides to Wellness pilot, funding was provided and utilized for the creation of a software dispatching system that allows for highly responsive, ride-hailing type on demand service. It also provided for the development of an online scheduling system and an app. While the online scheduling system and app were built, they had not been widely deployed to the public. Lack of staff training and targeted community outreach left the online system largely unused.

With the Mobility for All funding, the utilization of the online scheduling system improved dramatically. MTA was able to develop unique cloud-based portals for each partner organization. Partners can log on to their portal, enter the pertinent information, and a ride request is submitted immediately. Due to the software design that utilizes a dynamic routing system, ride requests are sent directly to the nearest available driver. The entire process takes under five minutes and has eliminated the need for hospital staff to sit on the phone trying to get through to a ride scheduler. The software records what specific department has requested the ride to assist the hospitals in keeping track of transportation expenses.

Vehicles

With the growth of Rides to Wellness through the addition of the Mobility for All funds, it was necessary to purchase additional vehicles. MTA was able to purchase six vehicles with Mobility for All funding to support the program.

Dialysis

MTA has long served dialysis patients through its paratransit program. But through the Mobility for All project, MTA made the decision to move dialysis passengers to Rides to Wellness. It also hired a Mobility Manager to be assigned as the point of contact with all 13 dialysis centers in Genesee County. This has significantly improved the service passengers receive and the logistics of providing the service on MTA's end. On-time performance in 2022 for dialysis patients was 94%, almost 20% higher than it had been before being moved to Rides to Wellness.

Performance Measures

MTA's Breaking Transportation Barriers-Coordinated Health and Wellness Transportation for All, using Mobility for All funding will increase access to care; improve health outcomes; and reduce healthcare costs as "big picture" outcomes. Measurable outputs for the Mobility for All project are as follows:

1. Total # of trips provided to Veterans to/from hospitals and/or the VA hospital and their related healthcare organizations was 9,348 – 130% of the Target 7,200. The Target was exceeded.
2. Total # of trips provided to passengers accessing substance abuse and/or mental health treatment was 5,492 – 102% of the Target 5,400. The Target was exceeded.
4. Procurement of 6 vehicles to support Rides to Wellness – Mobility for All programming. The Target was met.
5. Develop partnerships with two substance abuse treatment programs. The Target was met
6. One new Mobility Navigator was hired to assist with the expansion of the program. The Target was met.

Data and Outcomes

MTA reports that the project performed better than anticipated. During the course of the project, there were 9,348 trips to local hospitals, the VA hospital, or other healthcare providers for veterans. The target goal was 7,200 trips – it was exceeded by 2,148 trips, 130% of the original goal.

MTA also exceeded the number of trips for passengers accessing substance abuse and/or mental health treatment by 92 trips for a total of 5,492 trips. This was 102% of the original goal.

The project increased access to care, which presumably led to improved health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs – neither of which were measurable within the parameters of this project.

COVID-19



Figure 3 Covid Barrier in Vehicle

With the onset of the Coronavirus, Rides to Wellness faced new, unprecedented challenges. After several staff contracted the virus, the program made the difficult decision to temporarily suspend Rides to Wellness operations. Fortunately, as a result of the CARES act funds, staff continued to work from home and regularly communicate with employees and partner agencies. MTA maintenance staff began retrofitting Rides to Wellness vehicles by installing barriers between drivers and riders. PPE equipment was obtained to allow for masks, temperature checks upon operator arrival to pick up passengers, and installation of hand sanitizers in the vehicles.

Rides to Wellness began reopening its services on May 18, 2020 with all partner agencies able to use the services by June 1, 2020. Originally, Rides to Wellness had intended to use the Mobility for All money to connect with senior living facilities. With Covid, that became unrealistic to achieve. So, Rides to Wellness adjusted its plan, focusing on growing partnerships with Veteran's services and substance abuse treatment/mental health services, dialysis centers and chemotherapy treatment centers.



Figure 4 Rides to Wellness Vehicles and Drivers



Figure 5 Dr. Bobby Mukkumala administering Covid vaccine to MTA employee Andre Goulbourne, April 2021

Moving Forward/Sustainability

Rides to Wellness and the expansion of the program that was funded through the Mobility for All grant are now well-established and will operate for years to come. By diversifying its partnerships, charging a premium, but affordable fare, and modernizing the on-demand technology, Rides to Wellness has transformed health and wellness transportation in the Flint area. It will only continue to grow in the coming years.

Lessons Learned

Hopefully it will be a situation that never happens again in our lifetime, but Covid-19 was a striking lesson in how transportation must be prepared to respond to anything, at any time. As transit systems across the Country were shutting down, it became very apparent to us that Rides to Wellness had thousands of passengers who were counting on its rides to travel to life-saving treatments. Dialysis, chemotherapy, drug treatment services, and hospital discharges did not stop happening even during the worst days of Covid and MTA's service helped ensure we were ready to respond.