

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation and Delaware's Aging Population

This policy brief by the Institute for Public Administration was prepared for the Delaware Transit Corporation, a division of the Delaware Department of Transportation that operates DART First State Transit. It examines the critical need for non-emergency medical transportation for Delaware's growing older adult population, which facilitates access to needed health services and the ability to age in community. The brief was prepared as part of the research process to update Delaware's 2020 Coordinated Public Transit—Human Services Transportation Plan.

DELAWARE'S AGING POPULATION IS RISING

Contributing to the population of the transportation-disadvantaged community is the growing older adult population in Delaware. Nationally, one in five adults will be aged 65 or older in the year 2020¹ and in Delaware that statistic is even more significant at one in four adults.² Figure 1 shows population projections for the older adult population through 2050 in Delaware by county. Additional demographic trends that contribute to this growth are discussed in the *Coordinated Public Transit—Human-Services Transportation Plan for Delaware*.³ Affordable and accessible transportation is not only a critical component of good health but also of independence for older adults.⁴ Access to medical transportation is both important and a social determinant of health as discussed in *Access to Transportation as a Social Determinant of Health*. With more older adults choosing to age in place in their homes and communities, access to transportation to medical and other needed services is essential.

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NEED FOR MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION

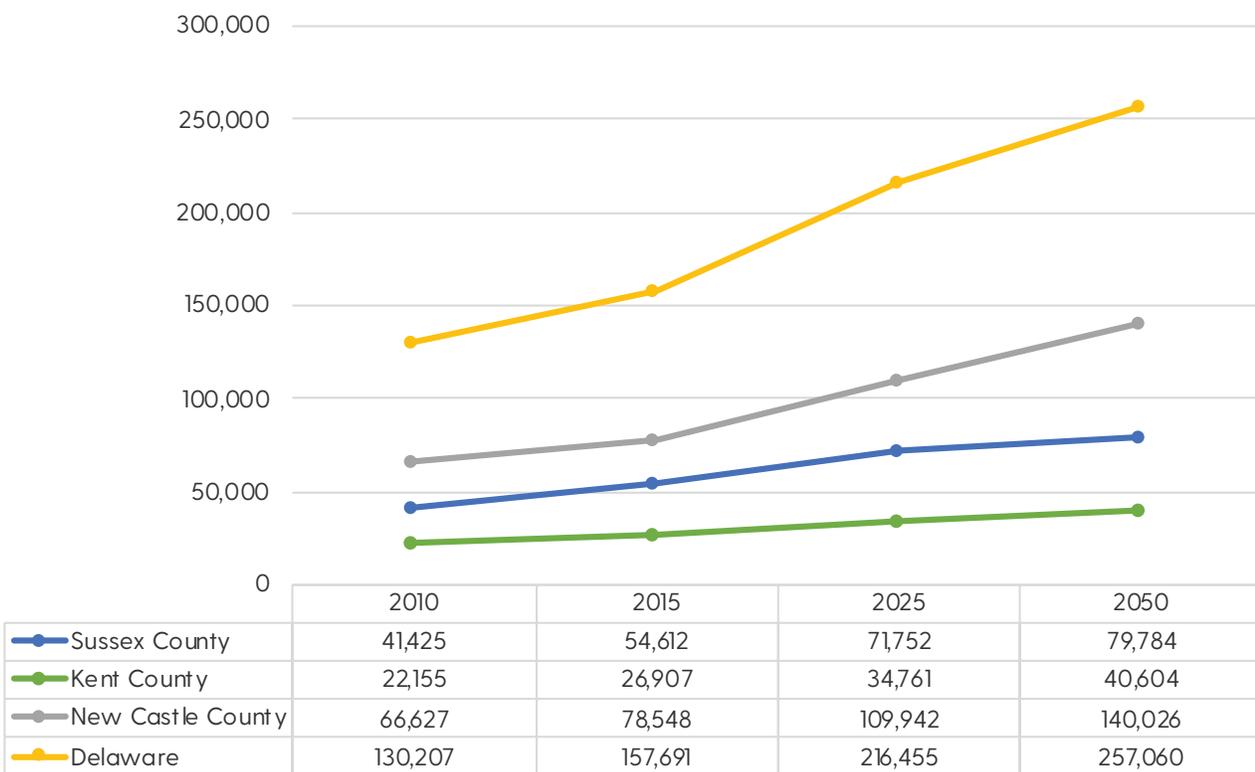
Lack of access to non-emergency medical transportation, as mentioned, can lead to poor and declining health. An older adult with poor and declining health is less likely to be able to age in the community in their home, and, as a result, be placed in a long-term care facility. From individuals living in senior communities and group homes to rural residents who are seeking to age-in-place, transportation options are essential as the number of seniors in Delaware—many of whom need transportation to maintain independence—increases. Annual population projections from the Delaware Population Consortium, shown in Figure 1, highlight an expected steady increase in Delaware’s older adult population over the next several years.

A lack of comprehensive transportation services creates barriers that negatively impact the lives of the increasingly large paratransit-dependent population.

People aged 65+ report a multitude of reasons for not driving a personal vehicle, including declining physical and cognitive health, safety concerns, limited or no access, and even personal preference. Nearly eight million American seniors over the age of 65 report that they do not drive.⁵ Despite the inability to use personal transportation, seniors still need to access necessary services such as health care. As a result, public transportation is the only option for many aging adults. For people with unique medical circumstances, non-emergency medical transportation can be critical to maintaining their health.

In Delaware, all fully eligible Medicaid beneficiaries, including older adult citizens living below the poverty line, can request transportation through the state’s contracted provider. There are barriers caused by the policies of the program, however.⁶ For example, a beneficiary must make their appointment for transportation no less than three days in advance of an appointment.⁷ If a patient is having an acute or urgent medical problem and is in need of a same-day or next-

Figure 1. Estimated Population of Adults 65 and Over



Source: Delaware Population Consortium

day appointment, then Medicaid transportation is not accessible for them.⁸

In addition, there are areas in Delaware that are severely underserved in terms of access to primary medical care.⁹ All of Kent and Sussex Counties are federally designated Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs), and a portion of New Castle County, including the Town of Middletown, is also designated as an MUA.¹⁰ The City of Wilmington and portions of eastern New Castle County are federally designated as Medically Underserved Populations (MUPs).¹¹ Older adults living in these designated areas can have even more limited access.

In summary, the older adult population in Delaware is rapidly growing. Attention must be paid to the transportation challenges of this population to enable healthy community-based aging.

END NOTES

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