



EDMONTON  
SENIORS  
COORDINATING  
COUNCIL

# Closing the Gap

**Securing Senior's  
Assisted Transportation**

# Empowering Older Adults Through Assisted Transportation

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A 2019 Older Adults Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup> found that 79% of Edmontonians over 55 want to age in their own homes, in their own community. All of us benefit from older adults' contributions to the community as mentors, volunteers, caregivers and neighbours. Supports that allow older adults to age in community will become even more important as our 55+ population grows over the next several years.

Aging in community is only feasible if older adults have access to essential services, including appropriate transportation. If an older adult can no longer drive or maintain a personal vehicle, they need accessible and affordable transportation to pick up groceries, attend medical appointments and avoid health-threatening social isolation. Seniors' assisted transportation organizations acted as a lifeline during the pandemic for older adults who had few supports. They provided grocery delivery and ran errands to prevent clients from having to go out, which limited their risk of exposure to the virus.

Assisted transportation is one of the most pressing unmet needs for older adults in Edmonton. To ensure all older adults are included in Edmonton's vision for an age-friendly city, this issue needs to be a priority.

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1 City of Edmonton & ESCC (2019). 2019 Older Adults Needs Assessment Highlight Report. Retrieved from: <https://seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Older-Adults-Needs-Assessment-2019-Highlight-Report.pdf>



## **Unmet Need: Affordable Door- Through-Door Support**

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The addition of low-floor buses and other accessibility improvements to ETS have made a difference. Many older adults can use public transit, including specialized services like Edmonton's DATS (Disabled Adult Transit Service), to get where they need to go. However, even with a mobility device, some older adults facing health and mobility challenges aren't able to get to a bus stop and need more support than DATS can offer.

People who require "door-through-door" support – which includes not only home pickup but assistance in completing an appointment or errand - have few options for transportation. Private driving services offer a solution for those who can afford them, but the cost of these services is prohibitive for some of the most vulnerable, low-resource members of our older adult community.

**A lack of appropriate transportation puts older adults at serious risk. Particularly for those who need regular medical procedures to maintain their health, the inability to access medical and community services can be life-threatening.**

# Filling the Gap

## **Volunteer-Based Assisted Transportation**

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Right now, a small number of non-profit organizations provide affordable door-through-door transportation using volunteer drivers. In Edmonton, Drive Happiness serves approximately 800 low-income older adults – its volunteers drove 27,000 hours in 2019, a gift of time worth \$405,000 at minimum wage.

Volunteer-based organizations are masters of doing more with less. They stretch resources as far as possible and deliver services at exceptional value, but invariably there are some essential operating costs. Volunteer recruitment, screening, training and coordination, along with reimbursement of fuel expenses, are necessary to keep services like Drive Happiness running.

The need for these services already exceeds capacity. Subsidizing the cost of each ride also means that financial pressure increases with demand. Despite the clear and urgent need for affordable door-through-door support, there is currently no consistent funding mechanism for seniors' assisted transportation in Edmonton.







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Volunteer-based organizations have survived so far through a patchwork of grants and one-time infusions of government funding, often designated for a specific purpose rather than regular operations. These organizations also vigorously pursue fund development and corporate sponsorship opportunities, but despite these efforts, financial insecurity is threatening their operations.

**These organizations provide an essential service for vulnerable and at-risk older adults. They have survived so far by piecing together funding from scattered sources, but it is time to recognize the need for sustainable funding.**

# Investing in Assisted Transportation

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**For non-profit assisted transportation services to survive over the long-term, we need a reliable funding mechanism.**

Partial funding of non-profit organizations is by far the most efficient way to meet the assisted transportation needs of older adults with few resources. A small annual investment goes a long way – \$200,000 a year would allow Drive Happiness to keep serving the clients who rely on its program. This amount is less than half the annual value of the organization's volunteer hours.

In its new Draft City Plan, the City of Edmonton recognized the importance of supporting older adults. Ensuring access to services and amenities that enhance their quality of life is one of the City's specific goals, as is keeping housing and transportation costs below 35% of total household expenses. Funding for assisted transportation will be a critical part of including all of Edmonton's older adults in that vision, regardless of income.

Assisted transportation puts Edmonton's programs, services and amenities for older adults in reach of those who need them most. The need is clear, and we have a solution that works, but we need a small amount of ongoing investment to keep it working – we are calling on the City of Edmonton to help us meet this need, as a long-time partner in building an age-friendly city.





Drive Happiness serves  
approximately

**800 of**  
**Edmonton's**  
most vulnerable seniors.

# **Let's Solve This Together**

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## **Contact the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council**

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