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Building a Sustainable Assisted Transportation Service: A Collaborative Approach

Introducing the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta (ATNA)

August 2018

With support from:



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A Collaborative Approach

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Prepared by

Rosalie Gelderman, Project Coordinator, projects@seniorscouncil.net

Sheila Hallett, Executive Director, executivedirector@seniorscouncil.net

For more information about this project, contact

Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council

#255 Bonnie Doon Shopping Centre

8330 - 82 Avenue

Edmonton, AB T6C 4E3

780-423-5635

www.seniorscouncil.net/about-escc

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I. Executive Summary

Keeping seniors mobile is a recognized need across Alberta. The provincial *Aging Population Policy Framework* calls all sectors to work together to ensure that Albertans have “access to safe, affordable, appropriate and accessible transportation options during their senior years.” Yet gaps persist. Inability to access appropriate transportation poses a significant barrier to aging in place and increases seniors’ risk of isolation and reduced quality of life.

The Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) has been exploring how best to build a sustainable Assisted Transportation Service (ATS). As recommended in the *Transportation Toolkit* released by the Medically At-Risk Driver Centre (MARD) in 2016, our approach has focused on promoting community engagement and fostering collaborations and partnerships.

Early in the project, ESCC contracted a community engagement coordinator to interview stakeholders that provide, rely on or advocate for assisted transportation for seniors. Those interviews, together with other studies and conversations, point to significant issues both for mobility challenged seniors and for providers of assisted transportation: lack of core funding, gaps between cost and some seniors’ ability to pay, regulations and practices that impact affordability and sustainability and a tendency by policymakers and senior serving organizations to put low priority on ensuring seniors’ access to appropriate transportation.

Interviewees’ willing participation opened the door to questions about existing and potential opportunities to use collaboration as a way to build capacity in transportation service delivery. Their responses informed the development of a new community of practice for the sector, the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta (ATNA). Developed in partnership with MARD, the network piloted in Edmonton as part of this project with the intent of expanding to the rest of the province later. As envisioned, the network will provide resources, foster collaboration and build capacity to meet the growing demand for sustainable assisted transportation services.

A key component of the community of practice will be a website hosting resources such as research findings, grant opportunities and practical tools. As the public interface of the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta, the website will encourage excellence in service development and delivery across Alberta.

Already, this new community of practice is proving its worth. A May 2018 event entitled *Keeping Seniors Mobile* brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to respond to transit route changes that will make travel more difficult for Edmonton’s mobility challenged seniors. The insights offered through animated table discussions will be brought forward to municipal and official leaders with the common goal of keeping seniors mobile.

This project has expanded our knowledge of the issues surrounding assisted transportation services in and around Edmonton and laid the groundwork for a community of practice to collaboratively address those issues.

A. Lessons Learned

From interviews and conversations with service providers and stakeholders, we offer the following lessons learned regarding assisted transportation for seniors in Edmonton.

Assistance needed. Mass transit solutions are not enough to meet the needs of those who require assisted transportation.

Lack of core funding. The lack of dedicated operational funding is compromising the sustainability of assisted transportation services and putting Alberta's most vulnerable, mobility challenged seniors at greater risk of isolation and poor quality of life.

Capacity capped. Demand for ATS is outstripping capacity, yet few existing providers see a way to expand under current conditions.

Priority shift overdue. Given its vital importance, transportation deserves focus alongside health care, housing and other basic needs in priorities and budgets.

Licensing questions. Clarification is needed regarding licence requirements for ATS providers and volunteer drivers.

Subsidies for seniors. Many low-income seniors cannot pay even a modest fee for rides. Additional transportation benefits would help close the gap between cost and ability to pay.

Potential partners. Providers of housing and other services for seniors are uniquely positioned to assess seniors' transportation needs and serve as hubs for information, referral and access to subsidies.

Collaboration requires support. Collaborating takes significant time and effort. ATS providers cannot afford to participate in a collaboration unless there is facilitative support and there is incentive to collaborate.

B. Promising Practices

Progress made in Edmonton's assisted transportation environment during this project suggests promising practices for the future.

Value of collaboration. Working more closely together holds promise as a way to share best practices and to address systemic issues that are limiting ATS capacity.

Involvement required. Sustaining the new community of practice, the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta, will require ongoing support and effort by a cross section of stakeholders.

Support for operations. Collaborative approaches can expand the number of seniors receiving assisted transportation. By committing to collaboration, Edmonton's largest not for profit assisted transportation provider received 3-year project funding that significantly expanded its capacity and extended its reach.

User subsidies. For low-income seniors, having a subsidy to help pay for assisted rides makes a big difference in quality of life. For example, transportation subsidies enabled low-income newcomer seniors to book Drive Happiness rides to English learning classes and other activities at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, decreasing their social isolation.

Engagement. Interviews conducted by our community engagement coordinator with a broad range of stakeholders reinforced the importance of being intentional about engaging closely with the sector and basing next steps on the insights gleaned.

Promotion. The community engagement coordinator spearheaded valuable efforts that increased awareness about assisted transportation services in general, and about Drive Happiness in particular. Both driver recruitment and requests for service rose as a result.

The Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta and its website hold promise to support service providers and stakeholders all over the province, thus benefitting seniors who need help moving from place to place. That said, the future of this new community of practice, and of the assisted transportation services it supports, depends on concerted effort by governments, funders and the senior serving sector to address lessons learned and extend the life of promising practices. With sustained networking, collaborating and partnering, we can ensure safe, affordable, appropriate and accessible assisted transportation options for all Alberta seniors.

II. Introduction

Keeping seniors mobile is a recognized need all across Alberta. The provincial *Aging Population Policy Framework* calls all sectors to work together to ensure that Albertans have “access to safe, affordable, appropriate and accessible transportation options during their senior years.” Yet more than one-third of Alberta seniors who cannot drive have unmet transportation needs, according to research by the Medically At-Risk Driver Centre (MARD) at the University of Alberta. Many seniors need not only transportation door-to-door but door-through-door assistance to ensure they reach their intended destinations and return home safely. They require enhanced service.

Without appropriate transportation options, seniors are less able to age in place. What’s more, their lack of transportation mobility puts them at risk of increased isolation and decreased quality of life. Knowing that, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) set out to create a Centre of Excellence to explore how best to build a sustainable Assisted Transportation Service (ATS) network. Learnings from this project hold promise to help communities all across the province better meet the transportation needs of Alberta’s growing population of seniors.

III. Fostering Collaboration & Partnerships

As shown on the following page, various providers offer assisted transportation to Edmonton seniors, at a range of prices. Yet significant gaps persist. Our goal in launching this project was to work with providers and others toward a sustainable network able to offer all seniors access to transportation that fits their needs. We tapped into existing expertise through MARD at the University of Alberta and, in partnership with MARD, began drawing other stakeholders into a community of practice that will eventually extend across the province. From the first, a key driver behind our collaborative approach was recognition that all stakeholders have a piece in this puzzle: providers, users, organizations and governments.

“Fostering collaboration, developing partnerships and promoting community engagement plays a crucial role in building a sustainable transportation service.”

MARD Transportation Toolkit

A. Partnership with MARD

Established in 2008, the University of Alberta’s Medically At-Risk Driver Centre (MARD) has become a valuable source of research and pilot studies exploring ways to meet the transportation needs of Albertans who cannot drive, including seniors.

ESCC has worked with MARD over the years to organize roundtables, challenge myths surrounding insurance requirements for volunteer drivers and distribute mobility guides. We also subcontracted MARD in 2014 to provide an in-depth analysis of ride-sharing software

Metro Edmonton Assisted Transportation Service (ATS) Providers

Organization or Business	Not for Profit	Free or Subsidized	For Profit	ATS only	ATS Plus +	# of Agency Vehicles	Wheelchair accessible	Use Volunteers
AHS Volunteer Services	√	√		√				√
Bayshore Health *			√		√			
Care for a Ride \$			√	√		25		
Comfort Keepers *			√		√			
Companions and More			√		√			
Compassion Network			√		√			
Corrine's Companions			√		√			
Cross Cancer Society	√	√		√				√
Driving Miss Daisy Downtown/Westend *\$			√	√		4	√	
Driving Miss Daisy North Edmonton *\$			√	√		6		
Driving Miss Daisy South/Leduc*\$			√	√		1	√	
Driving Miss Daisy Fort Saskatchewan *\$			√	√		1		
Driving Miss Daisy Sherwood Park Strathcona County *			√	√		2	√	
Drive Happiness	√	√		√				√
For the Love of Seniors			√		√	1		
Helping Hands Personal Assistants			√		√			
Home Instead *			√		√			
Neighbour Link Parkland	√	√			√			√
Opening Doors Supportive Services			√		√	1		
Operation Friendship Seniors Society	√	√			√	2		
Rehab and Retreat			√		√			
Retire at Home *			√		√			
Royal Wagon			√				√	
Saint Elizabeth Well Beyond Care	√				√			
Senior Home Care by Angels			√		√	1	√	
St. Albert Seniors Association	√	√			√			√
Society of Seniors Caring About Seniors	√	√		√	√			√
Wheels in Motion			√		√	1		

+ ATS Plus: Indicate either Medical and Personal Service Companies that offer transportation within a basket of services to clients or Non-Profit Organizations that offer more than transportation.

* Indicates companies who are either part of a franchise or non-local (could be national or international)

\$ Indicates companies that have entered contracts (e.g. AHS, School Boards or Senior Retirement Communities/Housing Facilities)

options available to organizations providing assisted transportation to seniors and others in need of the service.

Among the resources available from MARD is a *Transportation Toolkit* specifically for implementing alternate transportation for Alberta seniors. That toolkit strongly recommends building on local strengths, relationships and resources through collaboration and partnership. True to that approach, MARD leaders met regularly with ESCC staff throughout this project and played key roles in guiding its progress.

For more about MARD, see www.ualberta.ca/medically-at-risk-driver-centre.

Toward a five-A approach. MARD uses the 5 A's senior friendly transportation developed by the Beverly Foundation: Availability, Acceptability, Accessibility, Adaptability and Affordability.

Research finds gaps in transportation services

An assessment of transportation needs conducted by MARD in 2017 highlights the importance of alternate transportation services as well as gaps in services. In addition to a provincial report, MARD analyzed and reported on findings for each of the five AHS zones. Among non-driving seniors surveyed in the Edmonton AHS zone, almost two-thirds have used alternate transportation services, 38% have unmet transportation needs and one-third feel isolated from others sometimes or all the time.

In interviews conducted for this project, reasons seniors gave for not getting out as much as they would like or need include cost and the fact that their adult children are often too busy to serve as drivers. Seniors said they are reluctant to ask for rides in some cases, not wanting to burden family, friends or neighbours. They've been described as the silent generation: won't ask, don't complain. Seniors accustomed to using private vehicles said they rarely, if ever, use public transit. They are intimidated to start learning the transit system at this point in their life, afraid of missing transfers or getting lost. Edmonton's Disabled Adult Transit Service (DATS) offers a low-cost solution, but frail seniors tend not to use it, citing wait times, circuitous routes and scheduling issues.

Many seniors are not aware of all the transportation options available to them. Those who do know may not be able to afford the cost or may be reluctant to pay the cost. Even those who can afford to pay cannot reliably find evening and weekend options that provide assistance door-through-door. Icy sidewalks also prevent seniors from venturing out in winter.

B. Role of the Community Engagement Coordinator

Recognizing the importance of hearing directly from those most invested, in March 2017 we contracted a community engagement coordinator, Teresa Cowan, to interview individuals and organizations that provide, rely on or advocate for assisted transportation for seniors.

Teresa already knew the sector well. She had worked first as a volunteer coordinator and later as marketing and partnerships coordinator with Drive Happiness, an Edmonton-based not-for-profit that uses volunteer drivers to provide low-cost, door-through-door, assisted transportation to mobility challenged seniors who cannot afford other options. That experience served her well in this new position. In turn, she could bring her expanded knowledge of Edmonton's various assisted transportation service providers to Drive Happiness, opening opportunities for collaboration.

Interviews conducted by the community engagement coordinator and by ESCC staff proved crucial to understanding the Edmonton context. Interviewees offered important insights into challenges seniors face in accessing services. They also identified barriers that limit ATS providers from growing, and policies and practices that impact the affordability and sustainability of assisted transportation.

Interviewees' willingness to participate and interest in this work opened the door to questions that probed existing and potential opportunities for collaboration in transportation service delivery. Learnings from these conversations informed next steps.

C. Evolution of Plans for a Centre of Excellence

Connecting drivers with the seniors needing transportation takes hard work behind the scenes. Over the years, several groups have taken root in Edmonton to do exactly that, each with its own territory, focus and way of doing things – and each scrambling for the funds needed to keep going. Even before this project began, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council and the City of Edmonton gathered organizations offering rides to low income seniors around a common table to explore ways of working more closely together in hope of serving everyone better.

In the end some service providers chose not to partner, but a provider that came to be named Drive Happiness did continue working collaboratively in hope of expanding its ability to offer low-cost, volunteer-driven transportation for seniors. Financial support from Age Friendly Edmonton, the City of Edmonton, FCSS, the Province of Alberta and the Stollery Foundation made it possible to hire a marketing company to create and market the brand, recruit and train new drivers and implement web-based ride-scheduling software, to name a few achievements. Since then, federal funding through New Horizons for the Pan Edmonton Group Addressing the Social Isolation Seniors (PEGASIS) has enabled the ride service to expand and provide subsidized

rides for people on very limited income. In 2017 alone, Drive Happiness provided nearly 14,000 rides to frail, mobility challenged, low income seniors. Importantly, these are seniors who otherwise would be more isolated and alone.

Initially, partners involved in this project hoped to help Drive Happiness become a Centre of Excellence for assisted transportation services. But as the project unfolded, that intent proved unworkable. The organization had a change in leadership mid-way through, and it became

Drive Happiness: Giving seniors a lift

When Chandrima Kapoor's husband of 46 years died a decade ago, she not only lost the love of her life; she lost her independence. "I didn't even realize it was something to lose," she says. "When my husband passed away, my family surrounded me with so much love. But they are so busy, my two sons, my wonderful daughters-in-law, with their own children. I don't drive, but I didn't want to add an extra load. I didn't want to sit back depressed, either, missing my husband. So I decided: I'm going out."

Chandrima called Drive Happiness. Now she enjoys three rides a week to the library and senior centres for canasta, art and camaraderie, paying just a token fee. Along the way, she has come to know 15 drivers. "They fight to give me my rides, I think," she says, winking and laughing. "I'm going to be 87. I have wisdom. I was a teacher, I've written children's books. Sometimes when they're not happy, I try to calm them. Being content and happy, this is the secret to a good life."

One of Chandrima's drivers is Peter Salahub, a chef and long-haul truck driver who found his own days wanting after he hurt his back at age 63. "Sit 12 hours by yourself in a room and see what that's like," Peter says.

Volunteering for Drive Happiness put Peter behind the wheel again, with purpose. "My wife says: 'I've never seen a guy who changed his life as much as you did. You're excited to get up in the morning,'" he recounts. "I've gained 30 or 35 new friends."

Peter says Drive Happiness is about more than affordable rides. It offers hope. "One of my friends, she's 94. Every Wednesday, it's a ride to the church for dinner and cards. She looks so forward to this. Her daughter says to me: 'If it wasn't for you, Pete, my Mom would be sitting at home looking at the walls.'"

Chandrima echoes that experience. "I know what people say: 'Age is just a number.' But if I didn't get out to the library, to South East Edmonton Seniors Association, my mind would be on that number. Now I have so much more to look forward to than just this number."

obvious that it was unrealistic to expect a small staff to provide sectoral leadership in addition to its central task of providing service to seniors. Attention turned to developing a multi-party community of practice in partnership with MARD.

*“It’s just a wonderful service.
I feel less worried about losing my licence since my experience with them.”
Drive Happiness client*

D. Developing a Community of Practice

Discussions within the sector commenced in April 2017 on creating a community of practice regarding assisted transportation for seniors, an idea broached by MARD at a previous Alberta-wide Grey Matters Conference. Those discussions resulted in the birth of a community of practice entitled the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta (ATNA).

Developed in partnership with MARD, the community of practice began in Edmonton as part of this project with intent to expand across Alberta, building capacity to meet the growing demand for sustainable assisted transportation services.

Early on, MARD and ESCC agreed on a vision, mission and initial action plan that envisioned a community where *all older adults are mobile*. The mission for the community of practice is as follows:

“Support and sustain a network of transportation providers and stakeholders to collaborate and leverage collective resources to:

- 1. Assist providers with timely and convenient access to relevant information*
- 2. Enable faster progress toward meeting critical transportation challenges/needs”*

A map of existing and potential stakeholders was created by ESCC and MARD based on years of extensive joint involvement in the issue of assisted transportation. The map serves as a reminder to engage the broad range of players that have a stake in this issue (see Appendix 2):

- **Users.** Existing and potential non-drivers, senior drivers, persons with disabilities, caregivers
- **Providers.** Existing and potential not for profit and for profits offering assisted transportation, including family and friends, public transit, religious organizations, housing agencies, Drive Happiness, Canadian Cancer Society, NeighbourLink, Operation Friendship Seniors Society
- **Organizations.** Senior-serving sector - housing, centres and associations; health agencies; religious/spiritual centres; potential funders

- Governments. Municipal and provincial leaders and staff (traffic safety, Transportation, Seniors & Housing), seniors advocate, regional bodies (such as Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), AB Assoc. of Municipal Districts & Counties (AAMDC))

Questions were prepared for interviews, and the community engagement coordinator reached out to more than 75 stakeholders who provide, rely on or advocate for assisted transportation for seniors. Sixty-six of the stakeholders agreed to be interviewed in person or by telephone.

Informed by those interviews as well as other research, MARD and ESCC began work on a website. A key component of the community of practice, the site is targeted to serve ATS providers as well as people and communities wanting to implement or augment an assisted transportation service. The site will offer resources on getting started, operations and sustainability, including research findings, available grants and practical tools. It will also showcase successful providers in hope of inspiring other communities and organizations. See Appendix for an overview of website content.

The draft website underwent review in April 2018 by a focus group of stakeholders identified through previous interviews. Their comments on the website's content, aesthetics and navigability have been used to "fine-tune" the website. Their input also resulted in a decision to remove the word "senior" from the name of the network, which was initially titled the Senior Assisted Transportation Network, due to negative connotations associated with the term "senior".

The ATNA website is set to launch at Alberta's annual Grey Matters conference in September 2018. There and elsewhere, the site will be used to introduce the ATS community of practice, make people aware of its mission and vision and invite members to join.

ESCC has also updated its *Volunteer Driver Program Tool Kit for Assisted Transportation*. Originally completed in 2011, the toolkit is online at [www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Assisted Transportation Volunteer Driver Program Toolkit.pdf](http://www.seniorscouncil.net/uploads/files/Assisted_Transportation_Volunteer_Driver_Program_Toolkit.pdf). Some hard copies are also available by request.

We envision this community of practice growing organically, encouraging excellence in service development and delivery. MARD will house and oversee the website; ESCC will continue to suggest resources and online learning topics and assist as needed or requested by MARD.

"Implementation of an alternate transportation for seniors (ATS) service most often requires that a community builds on existing strengths, relationships, and resources."

MARD Transportation Toolkit

IV. Promoting Community Engagement & Leadership

Alberta's senior population is projected to double over the next several decades. Assisted transportation providers are already struggling to stay afloat and meet demand; how will they cope when need escalates even more? Community engagement will be key.

As the MARD Transportation Toolkit points out, "Community engagement is about connecting at a personal level." It's about building trust and forging relationships. It's about opening the door to conversation, so that people and organizations pay attention when we point out the crucial role that transportation and assisted transportation in particular plays in ensuring every senior's quality of life. Ideally, that increased engagement will translate into action, so that the sector will gain an expanded array of advocates and leaders.

Throughout this project, the partners took deliberate steps to engage the community. In particular, we reached out to existing and potential stakeholders whose involvement and advocacy are crucial to building a transportation network that serves our expanding population of seniors well.

"Community engagement can be thought of as the process of building relationships with community members who are interested in working together with your organization as an ongoing partner... with the end goal of making the community a better place to live."

MARD Transportation Toolkit

A. Keeping Seniors Mobile Event

As our project unfolded, realization grew that recent efforts by the City of Edmonton to redesign the transit network have strong potential to impact seniors and increase demand for assisted transportation. The redesign puts priority on providing frequent bus service down main corridors while reducing service in many neighbourhoods. Where service continues, the maximum walking time between bus stops will double.

Recognizing that the system as redesigned will make it harder for some riders to use transit, Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) is seeking solutions to what is being called the "first kilometer/last kilometer" challenge. Ideally, that solution will include some sort of door-to-door service for those who require help in making connections with standard routes.

Seeing the potential for collaboration on this issue, ESCC and MARD invited stakeholders to a *Keeping Seniors Mobile* on May 9, 2018 to discuss challenges, suggest solutions and network. A diverse group attended, including transportation providers, seniors' advocates and government representatives in transportation. The ETS Director of Planning and Scheduling provided an overview of the proposed route and schedule changes; other municipal and provincial representatives, including municipal Vehicle for Hire and Disabled Adult Transit Service (DATS)

staff, came as well to answer questions. The event also included a brief presentation about ATNA and the upcoming website.

The room buzzed with animated table discussions and questions about policies that affect both seniors and assisted transportation providers. Comments related to DATS cited concerns about the application process, wait times, circuitous routes as other passengers are dropped off and inflexible booking policies. They said DATS is often considered a last resort for seniors who have medical conditions and few transportation options.

Another issue that emerged was the need for further clarification about licensing for volunteer drivers. Both the municipal Vehicle for Hire Bylaw and provincial regulations appear to expect volunteer drivers to have a Class 4 drivers licence, which complicates the already difficult task of recruiting enough volunteers to meet the demand for assisted transportation.

The *Keeping Seniors Mobile* event provided a unique opportunity to gather across agencies and departments with the common goal of keeping seniors mobile. ESCC will carry the concerns raised here and elsewhere to City Council's Executive Committee later this year during a planned review of DATS services. We envision more opportunities for purposeful engagement and leadership as the community of practice gains momentum.

B. Interviews: Who said What

Transportation providers and senior advocates were very happy to speak about issues related to assisted transportation not only at the networking event, but in interviews with the community engagement coordinator and others. Those conversations provided insights into challenges and barriers faced by both seniors and ATS providers, including policies and practices that impact affordability, sustainability and ability to grow the service. The insights will be incorporated into the concerns brought forward to municipal and provincial leaders.

Senior housing facility staff

Asked to reflect on the mobility challenges and opportunities experienced by their tenants, staff at senior housing facilities agreed assisted transportation is vital for healthy aging. Yet few ask the seniors entering their facilities how they access transportation.

Some staff said they expect their tenants to be self-sufficient and able to advocate for themselves in meeting their transportation needs. If that is not possible, family members are contacted or DATS is arranged for the tenant. Any transportation provided is typically confined to group outings and offered on a cost-recovery basis since there is no provision for transportation in facility budgets.

Staff noted that seniors would benefit from more up-to-date, easy-to-navigate transportation information. The unmet need is highest in the 80-plus age group, who may not know how to

use recent technology, including Google maps and new-style parking meters. Physical issues such as poor hearing or lack of cognition also make travel difficult; many seniors need help navigating and sorting through options at each step of the way. Another barrier is a general fear of trying, of going out of their comfort zone, which can also contribute to isolation.

Immigrant, refugee and newcomer seniors

Lack of transportation was named as a key issue in the *The Age of Wisdom: Giving Voice to Edmonton's Immigrant Seniors and Identifying their Needs*, a 2015 report funded by the collaborative Age Friendly Edmonton. The cost of transportation, the location of programs relative to public transportation stops and weather concerns were all raised as important factors by immigrant, refugee and newcomer (IRN) seniors.

A newcomer's pathway to Edmonton determines eligibility for financial assistance and health services. For example, IRN seniors who enter Canada on a Super Visa (which allows parents and grandparents to stay as long as two years per visit for up to 10 years) have access to very little and must depend entirely on their family for support. IRN seniors living in low-income families are particularly susceptible to social isolation. For them, subsidized rides are essential.

Since a high percentage of IRN seniors use public transit, the recently announced ETS Transit Strategy that requires riders to walk farther to catch a bus could present many problems in the IRN senior community. ETS would need to undertake a massive communication strategy just to help those with low English language knowledge understand the changes.

Senior-serving collaborators have made some inroads in working with Edmonton's ethno-cultural networks to address the transportation needs of IRN seniors. Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers recently began providing English language classes and other activities to immigrant seniors as a core partner in PEGASIS, a three-year collective impact project federally funded by New Horizons for Seniors. PEGASIS funds also enable Drive Happiness to offer subsidized rides to low-income, vulnerable seniors who would not otherwise be able to participate in the classes and activities. Drive Happiness drivers, riders and agency staff involved in the subsidized service all say they have experienced cultural and language barriers. Data and learnings from this cross-agency endeavor are being gathered to inform collective action plans and strategies.

Assisted Transportation System (ATS) providers

Capacity issues. With demand already outstripping capacity, existing assisted transportation providers were asked whether they have potential to offer more rides. Most said no; they are already too busy. Organizations that offer transportation to clients who already access their core services (whether directly or via a subcontractor) typically view ATS as too costly to expand

to non-clients. Few providers appear able to respond to a large increase in demand, although some would consider expanding, given consistent demand.

Of the organizations interviewed, fewer than six provide 400-plus rides a month and only one for-profit provides 3,000 to 4,000 rides a month. The remaining ATS providers give on average 40 rides a month. The biggest not for profit operator is Drive Happiness, which uses about 90 volunteer drivers to provide 1,500 rides a month.

Of all the providers interviewed who serve the general public, only five have the means to transport non-collapsible wheelchairs. One organization ended up selling a staffed wheelchair van due to insufficient demand.

Regulations. Some providers reported difficulty in finding consistent information about what municipal business licence is required to pursue an ATS business. Confusion also exists about whether volunteer drivers are required to have a Class 4 driver's licence. Both the provincial Traffic Safety Amendment Act (Bill 16, amended 2016) and the municipal Vehicle for Hire Bylaw (which aligns with provincial regulations) require Class 4 Driver Licence where the vehicle in use can be considered "for hire". Confusion enters when users pay for the trip, even though the driver is only getting reimbursed for expenses. Requiring a Class 4 license would hamper the recruitment of volunteer drivers and place unrealistic demands on volunteer based transportation services

"When we consulted with Alberta Transportation back in 2013, our seniors' transportation service was to be classified as a taxi service, and the regulation fell back to the city and their bylaws. At that time, there was no bylaw that addressed seniors assisted transportation, so we would have had to apply for a limousine permit. The costs associated with insuring/licensing a limousine operation and the minimum passenger charge required by the bylaw were too high. It was easier for us to scrap the service than to try to build a business from it."

For-profit provider of various senior services

Funding. A major challenge in sustaining a profitable transportation business is the reality that many seniors cannot pay the full cost. Drive Happiness reports that 30 to 35 per cent of its riders cannot even afford the \$10 they charge for a typical ride. The only ongoing financial assistance seniors can access for assisted transportation, the Senior Benefit Special Needs Grant, is available only to rural Albertans who travel long distances for limited medical appointments. The subsidy funding through PEGASIS is temporary and insufficient to cover the need.

The PEGASIS grant also allowed Drive Happiness to hire a full-time dispatcher, add a half-time volunteer coordinator and continue to subscribe to their web-based ride scheduling software. The PEGASIS project will end in March of 2019, jeopardizing Drive Happiness' ability to offer

subsidized rides and meet demand. Finding this money from other sources is time-consuming and difficult for a small organization whose staff members are all tasked with operations. Drive Happiness relies on a small municipal grant, bi-annual casino, membership dues, rider fees and any project funding or donations it can access.

Indeed, providers of assisted transportation have no access to core funding to sustain their operations. Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), which funds preventative social services, is not allowed to support ongoing transportation. Even though transportation is essential in preventing isolation, FCSS would never be able to meet the demand if that door were opened. No other funding body fills in the gap, and any available grants tend to be short term. Providers who have secured contracts with large institutions or seniors' facilities (e.g., Alberta Health Services, Christenson Homes) are provided a steady source of income.

Health care providers and senior serving organizations

Affordable transportation is recognized by many health care providers and senior serving organizations as vital to enabling seniors to access their services. Many of these stakeholders were interviewed as we explored how the sector can collaborate in meeting the need for transportation.

Alberta Health Services operates limited assisted transportation services for clients through Home Care, as does the Canadian Cancer Society of Alberta. Like Drive Happiness, both rely on volunteers and both face funding and staffing challenges to providing sustainable service. They shared those challenges in interviews.

We also attended the Geriatric Medicine Conference and a Nibble and Nosh event at the Alberta Association of Gerontology to raise the issue of assisted transportation with health care professionals and hear their perspectives.

We met with an Alzheimer Society of Alberta and NWT staff member, who shared experience and learnings from successful awareness and fundraising campaigns. They expressed willingness to train volunteer drivers on the topic of dementia, an example of a potential partnering initiative.

PEGASIS (which ESCC supports as a backbone organization) has established relationships with Alberta Health Services and with several researchers at Alberta universities, including Dr. Richard Lewanczuk, University of Alberta professor and senior medical director for community and rural primary care and chronic disease management. Dr. Lewanczuk strongly advocates investing more towards community-based social supports for seniors such as assisted rides, social programs and meal delivery.

Research by PEGASIS¹ of Drive Happiness, Edmonton's largest low-cost ATS for seniors, shows that 42% of riders report feeling lonely, compared to 24% of all Edmontonians 55-plus. These riders also report feeling tremendous support from Drive Happiness, thanks in large measure to the special attention of volunteers going out of their way to assist. Eighty per cent of riders report having practical support and help when needed and 88% say they regularly participate in meaningful activities. Those numbers reflect the positive impact of including transportation in the community-based supports championed by health care leaders.

"I've got all these places and appointments to go to and I never have to worry now.

It's wonderful."

Drive Happiness rider who fell several times when using the bus

V. Conclusion

This project has expanded our knowledge of the issues surrounding assisted transportation services in and around Edmonton and laid the groundwork for a community of practice to collaboratively address those issues. The Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta and its website will support service providers and stakeholders all over the province, thus benefitting seniors who need help moving from place to place.

From interviews and conversations with service providers and stakeholders, we offer the following lessons learned and promising practices regarding assisted transportation for seniors in Edmonton.

A. Lessons Learned

Assistance needed. The mass transit solutions funded by governments are not enough to meet the needs of those who require more specialized form(s) of assisted transportation.

Lack of core funding. The lack of a dedicated stream of operational funding for assisted transportation services is compromising their sustainability and thus putting Alberta's most vulnerable, mobility challenged seniors at greater risk of isolation and poor quality of life.

Capacity capped. Demand for ATS is outstripping capacity, yet few existing providers see a way to expand under current conditions.

Priority shift overdue. Given its vital importance in preventing and alleviating social isolation for mobility challenged seniors, transportation deserves focus alongside health care, housing and other basic needs as governments and senior serving agencies prioritize and budget.

¹ Data taken from Edmonton Population Survey, March 2017 compared with Drive Happiness member/riders to same date.

Licensing questions. There is a need for further clarification regarding licence requirements for ATS providers and volunteer drivers. The municipal Vehicle for Hire Bylaw, the provincial Traffic Safety Act and related regulations appear to require volunteer drivers to have a Class 4 drivers licence when the senior contributes to the cost of a ride. The requirements and cost of a Class 4 licence place unrealistic demands on volunteer-based ATS providers and can deter driver recruitment.

Subsidies for seniors. Many low-income seniors cannot pay even a modest fee for transportation. Providing assisted transportation benefits to low-income, mobility challenged seniors would be one way to help close the gap between cost and ability to pay.

Potential partners. Providers of housing and other services for seniors are uniquely positioned to include transportation assessment as part of their intake practice and to provide information and referrals for seniors who would benefit from assisted transportation. Senior recreation service providers could also include ATS subsidies for low-income seniors in their program planning and grant applications.

Collaboration requires support. Frontline ATS providers require support to collaborate, particularly under current conditions. For ATS providers to participate in a collaboration, there has to be an incentive, because partnering requires significant time and effort.

B. Promising Practices

Progress made in Edmonton's assisted transportation environment during this project suggests promising practices for the future.

Support for operations. Collaborative funding enabled Drive Happiness to build significant capacity by marketing its brand, hiring a dispatcher and volunteer coordinator and using ride scheduling software. As noted below, Drive Happiness and the seniors it serves also benefited in other ways as part of the fledgling community of practice.

Value of collaboration. Working more closely together holds promise as a way to share best practices and to address systemic issues that are limiting ATS capacity. Collaboration and partnering need sustained support, as these efforts require much time and effort.

User subsidies. For low-income seniors, having a subsidy to help pay for assisted rides makes a big difference in quality of life. Seniors who otherwise couldn't have afforded to attend English learning classes and other activities at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers have been able to do so, thanks to subsidies provided through PEGASIS. This involvement has decreased their social isolation.

Engagement. The ability to contract a community engagement coordinator to interview a broad range of stakeholders reinforced the importance of being intentional about engaging closely with the sector and basing next steps on the insights gleaned.

Avenues used to promote assisted transportation

The multiple approaches used to spread the word about assisted transportation in Edmonton include the following:

Trade shows, workshops and conferences. Both ESCC and Drive Happiness have hosted tables at Edmonton's annual Housing Forum, Health and Wellness Forum, Caring for the Caregiver Expo, AMA Senior Mobility Expo, Seniors Week fairs, Older Bolder Better™ Forum at Westend Seniors Activity Centre, Health and Wellness Fair at Northeast Edmonton Seniors Association, Strathcona Place 55+ Centre Trade Show and Blue Quill Seniors' Pancake Breakfast. These events, which often attract for-profit transportation and housing providers as well, provided valuable opportunities to engage with seniors and their adult children and hear their challenges in obtaining transportation.

Local media. Useful relationships have been established with 630 CHED, KISN, and K-97. Besides placing free and paid radio ads for Drive Happiness, the project's community engagement coordinator participated in radio interviews and on a *Talk to The Experts* about the need for assisted transportation. At the request of City of Edmonton's Councillor Knack, the coordinator was also interviewed by CTV about the risks of injury and isolation created by lack of transportation during Edmonton's icy sidewalk season. Newspaper and newsletter ads were also placed with community leagues, senior centres and Vue Weekly.

Video in theatres. The coordinator assisted Drive Happiness in creating and airing a video at Cineplex Theatres to promote the service and recruit volunteer drivers.

Print materials. Posters and/or brochures were placed in the Age Friendly Edmonton Transportation Hubs located in senior centres throughout Edmonton as well as in grocery stores, pharmacies, hospitals, medical offices and senior housing facilities. Public service announcements or ads were placed at Primary Care Networks, on Kijiji and in Indeed. Bridge Banners were also hung around the city.

All these efforts have been successful in recruiting drivers while also increasing requests for affordable assisted transportation. Although more seniors are being served, the challenge of meeting the demand for assisted transportation in Edmonton remains.

Promotion. The community engagement coordinator spearheaded valuable efforts that increased awareness about assisted transportation services in general, and about Drive Happiness in particular. The promotion used all forms of media (see box on previous page) to provide information on how the services can be both used and supported. Both driver recruitment and requests for service increased as a result.

Involvement required. Sustaining the new community of practice, the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta, will require ongoing support and effort by a cross section of stakeholders to build awareness and grow the website. Properly supported, ATNA holds promise as a key tool to encourage excellence in service development and delivery.

We envision continued networking, collaborating and partnering to find solutions that sustain safe, affordable, appropriate and accessible assisted transportation options for all Alberta seniors. That said, the future of the community of practice, and of the assisted transportation services it supports, depends on concerted effort by governments, funders, the senior serving sector and others to address lessons learned and extend the life of promising practices that we believe would further benefit seniors and everyone else who serves them.

VI. Appendix 1:

Website Map for the Assisted Transportation Network of Alberta

	RESOURCES					EVENTS
ATNA - What is ATNA? - Mission & Vision - Founders - Become a Member Senior Transportation Achievements Become a Member	Getting Started	Operations	Sustainability	Assisted Transportation Showcase	F A Q s	Featured Events
	Research & Reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 A's of Senior Friendly Transportation - Provincial Transportation Needs Assessments - Ride-Scheduling Software Report - Guide for Drivers of Seniors and Persons with Disabilities - Seniors Roundtable Report - Seniors Assisted Transportation Project Toolkits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MARD Transportation Toolkit - ESCC Volunteer Driver Program Toolkit - ESCC Volunteer Driver Program Management Resources Starting a Not-for-Profit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forming a Not-for-Profit - Registering as a Charity - Donations & In-Kind Giving - VSP Number - Serving Communities Internship Program Starting a For-Profit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starting a Business - Running a Business 	Licensing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Licenses - Driver's Licenses Risk Management & Insurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insurance Toolkit for the Voluntary Sector - IBC Information - Q&A on Automotive Liability Insurance - Contact Information Vehicles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Types of Vehicles - Vehicle Inspections - Safety Fitness Certificate - Operating Authority Certificate Driver Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resources for Screening New Drivers/Volunteers - Sample Documents (e.g., Interview Q's) - Background Checks - Driver Abstracts - Recruiting Drivers - Senior Sensitivity Training 	Fundraising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fundraising Tips - Available Grants - Writing Grants - Canada Helps - Giving Tuesday - Edmonton Funding Forum - Methods of Receiving Payment Marketing & Promoting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing & Tips & Strategies - Promotional Material/Print Providers - Listings - Canada Post Direct Mail - Seniors Events 	Drive Happiness		Events Calendar Contact Form ESCC Link Letter

VII. Appendix 2: Key Stakeholders Chart

