



## "TELLING THEIR STORIES": DOCUMENTING THE TRUE IMPACT OF TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS ON HEALTH

Transportation is a crucial part of daily life. Access to transportation impacts people's ability to go to work, attend school, spend time with family and friends, and access health care and other services. Therefore, transportation is one of the most impactful social determinants of health,<sup>1</sup> referred to as a "mega determinant."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, health centers and their patients have reported transportation as a significant barrier to care. Transportation barriers can result in missed appointments, delayed medical care, and increased stress levels. Notably, 5.8 million Americans delayed medical care because they did not have transportation, underscoring the pressing need to address transportation barriers.<sup>3</sup>

For a decade, Health Outreach Partners (HOP) has been highlighting the intersection of health and transportation by documenting innovative transportation solutions, researching the impact of transportation barriers and missed appointments, providing resources including a Transportation QI toolkit, and presenting workshops and webinars with subject matter experts. While HOP's efforts have focused primarily on the broader impact of transportation, an essential piece has been missing from these conversations: the voices of patients, their families and caregivers, and transportation coordinators and advocates. In order to solve transportation barriers and advance health equity, the voices and perspectives of those most impacted by transportation barriers need to be heard. Their experiences and input will help those who provide care better understand the extent of challenges faced by their patients and families. By hearing their voices, health centers can provide care that is responsive and empathetic to the needs of their patients and communities.

[1] Definition of Social Determinants of Health from the World Health Organization: The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems. The SDH have an important influence on health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. In countries at all levels of income, health and illness follow a social gradient: the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health.

[2] "Why Transportation Equity is Health Equity." Healthy King County Coalition. 16 February 2023. <https://youtu.be/OzLuCi-r9dg>

[3] Wolfe MK, McDonald NC, Holmes GM. Transportation Barriers to Health Care in the United States: Findings From the National Health Interview Survey, 1997-2017. *Am J Public Health.* 2020 Jun;110(6):815-822. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2020.305579. Epub 2020 Apr 16. PMID: 32298170; PMCID: PMC7204444.

## Who are "Telling Their Stories"

The purpose of this resource is to highlight the stories of those who experience transportation barriers when seeking care. Rather than solely focusing on data or reports, HOP hopes to increase awareness of the real life effects that transportation barriers can have on patients' quality of life and health outcomes.

However, when HOP first planned to tell the stories of patients' transportation barriers, we originally were focused on the rider. Through our interviews, we realized that there are many more people involved than just the rider. This includes family members, caregivers, transportation coordinators, drivers/transit operators, advocates, and many more. Therefore, we wanted to highlight their stories to give a fuller picture of the true impact of transportation barriers when seeking care. Acknowledging and incorporating each of these perspectives can prove to be pivotal in identifying effective transportation solutions. For this reason, HOP has not only looked to share experiences from the patient riders themselves, but others involved in connecting individuals to care along the way.



## About the Interviews

Starting in June 2022, HOP recruited participants for this resource by reaching out to health centers, HOP staff and Board of Directors, and marketing on various platforms. HOP conducted 1-hour interviews in either English or Spanish via phone calls, Zoom, or WhatsApp. Questions asked consisted of the process and perceived difficulty of getting to their medical appointments, what resources and strategies they used, and what they needed and would like to see change in the future. The majority of those interviewed are either current health center patients or have a relationship with a health center through employment or family. They represent a diverse array of backgrounds and identities, including those living with a disability, older adults, immigrants, and come from different geographic contexts.

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