



NORTHERN VIRGINIA VETERANS ASSOCIATION

VETERAN TRANSPORTATION WHITE PAPER

CHALLENGE & CALL TO ACTION



The Northern Virginia Veterans Association Who We Are

NOVA Veteran's Quality of Life Cycle®
One point of entry for local services, resources,
personal support, follow-up and care.



NOVA Veterans is a 501c3 organization dedicated to improving the lives and wellbeing of veterans in northern Virginia and surrounding regions. Our mission is more critical than ever due to the most susceptible and at-risk population of veterans we serve. Our target veteran population is identified as the most vulnerable: the elderly, those who are living in poverty, those with mental and emotional health challenges, and the disabled. We understand that veterans' social determinants of health also have an impact on how they are able to access and receive services. We aim to create equity in access and receipt of services by bridging and aligning the veteran's many needs with the appropriate services and organizations.

Because our specific population of veterans have multiple challenges we provide personal comprehensive support so they are able to equally access and receive the many resources available. NOVA Veterans Association is the bridge to access services not otherwise attainable.

Northern Virginia Veterans Association's Process for Success

We employ a comprehensive case management system coupled with a network of known and vetted partners to develop a customized course of action and wellness plan for each veteran and/or that veteran's caregiver/spouse. We first holistically assess each veteran's most pressing needs and then focus on follow-on issues to ensure comprehensive services, wrap-around support and continuity of care is accomplished. Meeting veteran's urgent needs followed by action steps for continuous improvement in their overall quality of life is our goal.

Our Support Services protocol includes:

1. Performing a comprehensive holistic intake to determine extent and priority of needs
2. Researching potential services/resources that align with specific veteran needs and demographics
3. Filling out online provider service requests and direct coordination between providers and veteran
4. Ensuring services are rendered and veteran receives appropriate timely care and support
5. Following up with veteran/caregiver to confirm all needs are met to improve their quality of life

NOVA Veterans Association's service is unique when compared with a referral or navigation service. It requires professionals who are trained in client case management and HIPAA/privacy-compliant data management tools in order to personally and effectively support our veterans. It is essential to understand the necessity of our personal case management and advocacy service as the aging and underserved veteran population needs increase and without this service go unmet.

VETERAN TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGE & CALL TO ACTION

Executive Summary

Challenge Statement: The lack of transportation services for veterans to and from medical appointments at both Veteran Administration (VA) and civilian hospitals and clinics detrimentally affect multiple stakeholders. For veterans seeking medical services and continuity of care, and for families and caregivers providing assistance, missed medical appointments heighten the anxiety and stress of those involved. The immediate negative effects of missed medical appointments on a veteran’s physical health and emotional well-being are significant and can be life-threatening. For clinicians, missed appointments increase the difficulty of providing direct healthcare services and sustaining follow-on continuity of care. Furthermore, as a result of missed appointments, hospitals and clinics face exorbitant financial cost increases; increases resulting from loss of systems efficiency due to cancellation and rescheduling of appointments and for additional general and emergency services that are required to treat the veteran in declining health.

**OUR VETERANS SHOULD HAVE
SAFE, RELIABLE AND
CONSISTENT TRANSPORTATION
TO NECESSARY APPOINTMENTS**

NOVA Veteran’s Quality of Life Cycle[®]
One point of entry for local services, resources,
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The Northern Virginia Veterans Association (NOVA Veterans) is the bridging nonprofit that provides our vulnerable veterans (elderly, disabled, low income, underserved) personal and direct access to healthcare services. NOVA Veteran’s holistic services include coordinating veteran transportation needs with local transportation organizations. However, transportation organizations/programs are unable to provide the required services, thereby producing a debilitating gap in veterans’ continuity of care and the consequential failure of aligned needs and services. This failure inevitably creates excessive costs for both the veteran and the overall healthcare system.

2016 study estimated the marginal cost for no-shows for all clinics in the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) in Houston Texas was \$28.66 million in 2008 (Kheirkhah, 2016). 2017 study estimated that missed appointments cost the U.S. Healthcare system \$150 billion each year (Gier, 2017).

Introduction

This report outlines current veteran transportation deficiencies in the Northern Virginia region including Stafford, Fredericksburg, Culpeper, Orange, Fauquier and Loudoun Counties. It suggests ways to improve upon services and create new innovative programs that meet the diverse and complex needs of underserved veterans. By researching and identifying transportation organizations and understanding their gaps in service, our community is better equipped to collaborate and create a practical solution. A viable transportation solution will reduce the number of missed medical appointments and significantly improve overall veteran health and well-being.

PANDEMIC HAS EXACERBATED TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES & VOLUNTEER-STAFFED PROGRAMS ARE SHUT DOWN

Veteran JoAnne arrives at her community hospital via ambulance. Unfortunately, getting home after receiving care was an unpredicted challenge. A senior official at a local hospital treating veterans shared that the hospital did not have resources to arrange transportation home for veterans who lacked the means to arrange their own transport. The official noted that it was against the rules to ask staff to drive the veteran home; however, no provision is made to support veterans or local hospitals with these cases (on-going limitations to reliable transportation).

Transportation services for veterans to their medical appointments is difficult to arrange for numerous reasons, including transportation organizations' prohibitively high costs, not accepting insurance, not serving veterans of all ages and not serving those with disabilities. In addition, most transportation programs will not provide same day or next day services, they require a one to two-week advance reservation, most have limited service hours and time restraints for each trip, and more (See Appx 1). These limiting criteria are on-going and have been compounded during the COVID-19 pandemic as organizations change their procedures in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and state mandates.

FACTORS THAT PREVENT RELIABLE SAFE TRANSPORTATION

- High cost of transportation or insurance not accepted
- Complicated application process
- No immediate services / weekend service
- Age restrictions 50 to 65 years of age and older
- Limited geographic region, limited hrs, limited duration
- Limited number of trips in a time period
- Only drop offs at transportation stations/stops
- Serving only ambulatory veterans
- Drivers not allowed on military installations
- Lyft/Uber not experienced with veteran-specific needs


Authors: Angela H. McConnell, Ph.D. & Rachel Andriosky, MS

Contributors: Melissa Dargis, MS, Caroline Kirk, and the Northern Virginia Regional Commission

Volunteer-staffed programs have stopped providing any services and some have closed due to lack of funding. The factors listed are only some examples of the challenges faced when scheduling transportation services for veterans. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these limitations. Due to the pandemic, programs have lost funding and transportation services have completely halted. Rides to routine medical visits were canceled because more urgent rides had been prioritized. As of September 2020, previously canceled VA appointments are being rescheduled, however VA transportation services are still not operating.

Projected Outcomes

For as long as transportation services remain inaccessible to Virginia's most vulnerable veterans, their overall health, well-being, and continuity of care may continue to decline. The 2017 US Census reports out of 199,049 veterans living in our 10-county service area, 62,471 of these veterans are categorized to be within our vulnerable veteran population with 4,688 (2.4%) in poverty, 31,431 (15.8%) disabled, and 26,352 (13.2%) age 75+. These are the veterans who urgently need our support and services. Transportation services for veterans to their medical appointment locations would decrease the number of missed appointments and may increase the veteran's willingness to schedule routine and follow-up appointments; thereby improving whole-person health and well-being. Not only would veterans experience less stress and anxiety in finding a way to get to their appointments, but a positive interaction with their driver could help improve feelings of loneliness and isolation; another component of well-being we cannot overlook.



Veterans 55 and older have the largest number of suicides 58.1%, and that number increases with age
VA National Suicide Report, 2005-2015

Other impacted stakeholders are healthcare providers and hospitals/clinics. Healthcare providers would be able to see their patients on a regular basis to provide care continuity and preventive care, and continue building their patient/provider relationship. With a shift to value-based care, patient-centeredness and patient satisfaction are increasingly at the forefront of care. Hospitals/clinics would

Veteran Arthur needed a ride to his hospital for a pre-surgical exam and his family member who was going to drive him cancelled a week prior. This left NOVA Veterans a short amount of time to search for and coordinate a ride, which was eventually accomplished but after a large effort and repeated requests for assistance from local transportation organizations. Arthur then needed a ride to the hospital for his surgery which was scheduled a few days after pre-op. No organization was able to support on short notice. A request went out to the general population from NOVA Veterans that resulted in a local medical transport company stepping up and providing a ride for free. When Arthur arrived for surgery they pushed his 0900 time back 4 hours. The transport driver waited all day not knowing when Arthur would be out of surgery and able to ride home. It was night fall when Arthur finally made it back home safe but exhausted. (ongoing multiple limitations to reliable transportation).



benefit on multiple fronts from veterans arriving and arriving on time to their medical appointments. Additionally, by removing the transportation barrier, veterans would more likely seek preventive medical attention instead of waiting until the ailment becomes an emergency resulting in ambulance transport to the hospital emergency room.

Solutions

NOVA Veterans Association seeks to establish a program, either independently or collaboratively, that has the capability to provide veterans safe, reliable, consistent and appropriate transportation services. They have worked with veterans and transportation organizations in Northern Virginia and surrounding areas to identify aspects of transportation services needed but not yet offered (reference Appendix 1 for gaps in services).

See below the transportation criteria required to accommodate veterans 'needs.

- Reliable and safe
- Affordable or free
- Responsive to same-day requests
- Appropriate for veteran's specific needs (e.g., impaired mobility, anxieties, spouse accompany)
- Structured to serve veterans of all ages
- Real-world geographic area of operations (covering areas outside of Northern Virginia and required trips to outlying clinics and VA hospitals)
- Increased operating times to meet unpredictable situations and after-hours appointments
- Ability to communicate with NOVA Veterans Association's Support Services to confirm veteran is picked up, arrived safely at destination, and returned home

Call to Action Options

1. Develop a Veteran Transportation Program within NOVA Veterans. Substantial funding would be required to support developing, operating and sustaining a transportation program. This would enable NOVA Veterans to coordinate safe, reliable transportation aligned with the veteran-specific needs, region of transit, time and day needed, and other factors. Creating a user-friendly transportation system available for local veterans in need.
2. Utilize an existing business transportation infrastructure and program, and expand their services to meet above listed needs. This requires collaboration and cooperation from nonprofit, for profit businesses, and/or government agencies (has been pursued from multiple angles with multiple businesses but has not been successfully accomplished to-date).
3. Support development of new veteran-specific programs by leveraging established transportation systems (e.g., Lyft/Uber or public transportation services such as Omni Ride Wheels to Wellness). These businesses currently have limiting service criteria discussed above.

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Veteran Joseph had a primary care check-up at Fort Belvoir and was not ambulatory and could not drive himself. Transportation pursuit was extremely frustrating; one company was too costly; another, outside company's area of operations; another, he was under the age restriction of 65+. Finally, a transport service was found that could meet Joseph's needs and get him to his on-base appointment. However, the driver could not wait or come back. Another driver was dispatched but was not cleared to get on base (ongoing multiple limitations to reliable transportation).

Concluding Remarks

Transportation services for veterans to their medical appointment locations have been increasingly difficult to obtain and have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, transportation services were extremely limited because organizations providing services had operating restrictions such as passenger's age, mobility and health of passenger, appointment times, and geographic area of operations. Veterans need and deserve to have easy access to reliable, affordable, consistent and safe transportation services to the locations of their medical and other necessary appointments. Let us come together as a community and create a transportation service we are proud to provide to those veterans who most desperately need it.



References

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