RESEARCH BRIEF

SAFE ROUTES TO AGE IN PLACE
AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

OBJECTIVES

- To identify challenges to accessing and utilizing alternative transportation options.
- To create new and adapt existing alternative transportation options.
- To test and evaluate the effectiveness of alternative transportation options to support the mobility needs of older residents and people with disabilities.

Background of the Problem

The number of older adults is steadily increasing in the US and across the globe. Aging is linked to an increased risk of disability. Disabilities that limit one or more major life activities such as seeing, hearing, walking, and motor skills impact a person’s ability to drive a car. Communities are racing to find mobility solutions that better connect people to places, through a variety of transportation modes. Low utilization of alternative transportation by older adults and people with disabilities may put them at risk for social isolation. Social isolation is associated with a variety of negative health outcomes. While communities are challenged to create affordable and accessible mobility options, there are widely held, inaccurate biases around older adults’ abilities to contribute to the development and improvement of alternative transportation options.

About this Study

The Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County (AFCFC) team at the The Ohio State University College of Social Work is using community-based participatory research strategies to engage older residents to develop, use, and evaluate alternative transportation options including walking, biking, fixed route busing, senior circulator, ride sharing, and transit training. Side by side, the AFCFC team and older residents are collecting data through mapping the built environment and daily points of interest using an electronic daily transportation diary app called "MyAmble" on tablets, walk audits, and focus groups. This data is being used to identify challenges with accessing and utilizing active transportation and generating ideas for how these challenges can be addressed supporting innovative mobility solutions for the future.
On average, older adults outlive their ability to drive by 7 years.

About the Researchers

This project is led by Holly Dabelko-Schoeny, MSW, PhD, Associate Professor at The Ohio State University College of Social Work and Director of Research at Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin Co. Holly conducts community-engaged research to support and improve the quality of life of older adults and family caregivers living in the community. Noelle Fields, LCSW, PhD, Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington is focused on applied, community-based research that aims to strengthen services and supports, including transportation access and affordability, for older adults and their family caregivers. Katie White, MSW, Director of Age-Friendly Communities, creates opportunities to engage older adults as co-creators in making community improvements that benefit individuals of all ages and abilities. Marisa Sheldon, MSW, LISW-S, Assistant Director, Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County, brings a mix of clinical and administrative experience with older adults and students with community connections to help build communities that work for all people. Ian Murphy, MPH, Research Associate at The Ohio State University College of Social Work, brings a public health perspective to solving community-based problems through the implementation of health promotion principles.

About the Research

Community-based participatory research approaches led by interdisciplinary teams employed through the age-friendly community network can lead to more equitable and effective strategies for transportation planning and utilization. Over 300 Franklin County older adults were involved in assessing, creating, and testing alternative transportation options through community meetings, focus groups, and walk audits. Working with the OSU team, 36 residents (N = 36) from Prairie Township, Westerville, and the Near East Side of Columbus engaged as co-investigators through data collection and review and the development of recommendations for community and governmental agencies.

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