

Rural Transportation Solutions

Information for this review came from the interactive Research Information on Independent Living (RIIL) database at www.GetRIIL.org, which contains re-

search summaries related to independent living with disabilities. A special effort has been made to include information that independent leaders in the field said they wanted, namely topics regarding accessible, affordable housing, effective advocacy for rural areas, effective transition from schools and nursing homes, accessible, affordable transportation, reaching underserved populations, policies that impede independent living, rural health care services, and Medicaid/Medicare regulations for durable equipment.

RIIL is a joint effort of the Research and Training Center on Independent Living at the University of Kansas and the Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) Program of TIRR.

Look up studies in:



www.GetRIIL.org

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Rural areas don't have sidewalks. Streets may not even be paved. Taxis are rare and expensive. Forget subways and commuter trains. Even rarer is on-demand transportation.

In rural America, vans (53%) or small buses (21%) with restricted operating times and destinations are the typical transportation mode for people with disabilities. Statistics show that half of these vehicles are past their life expectancies and 60% are not wheelchair accessible.

How can transportation be improved for people with disabilities in rural areas? For one, reverse the trend of federal funds being spent more on urban areas and advocate so that those who need it most will have equal access to transportation.

Agencies also can be encouraged and rewarded to share vehicles and coordinate services. In New Mexico, a center for independent living and community church shared an accessible van. Some areas of Michigan and Tennessee use shared school buses as public transportation.

Oklahomans for Independent Living worked with a local club and a foundation to buy a lift-equipped mini bus to transport people to non-medical emergencies. Then the organization applied for a 14-passenger, lift-equipped bus for curb-to-curb demand transportation from state departments.

Other solutions are to reimburse volunteer drivers with voucher programs or encourage transportation-on-demand small businesses.

Modifying vehicles is yet another option. Vans can be modified with funding assistance from Worker's Compensation,

For people wanting to get around in horse-driven carts, researchers at the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa, came up with one answer.

They devised a steel and wood frame cart with a fifth wheel attached to the front axle top to allow independent wheel rotation.

Ratchet straps attached the driver's wheelchair to a piece of angle iron on the cart floor. And, trailer tires kept the cart low, yet able to go over rough terrain.

Medicaid Waiver, Vocational Rehabilitation, and veterans' programs. Charitable and fraternal organizations also may help with funding. Loans, too, are available from banks and centers for independent living.

Many vehicle manufacturers also offer rebates and reimbursements for mobility adaptive equipment such as hand controls, wheelchair or scooter lifting devices, steering knobs, and additional hand grips. In some states, the vehicle sales tax may be waived if a physician recommends the adaptations to the vehicle.

Before choosing a vehicle dealer, inquire about the staff's knowledge regarding disability modifications. Ask about membership in the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association, the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists, or other vehicle conversion organizations. — *Cindy Higgins, The Research and Training Center on Independent Living, The University of Kansas. This project funded by National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation Research grant #H133A980048.*



Adaptive vehicle equipment can help avoid pain, preserve energy, and prevent future problems. It can preserve time and energy and help enhance as well as maintain both independence and quality of life.

