

Colorectal cancer screening is a proven method to reduce mortality with early detection. However, many patients struggle to access this care due to transportation barriers. While working with Crossroad Health Center, we found that even well-informed patients frequently missed appointments because of transportation difficulties. To address this, we propose providing free bus fare coupons for all patients with scheduled appointments, aiming to remove transportation barriers and promote equal healthcare access.

Data Analysis and Community Impact

Crossroad Health Center, located in Over-the-Rhine (OTR), Cincinnati, serves a disadvantaged population. OTR is racially diverse, with 44% White and 43.3% Black residents (Climate Equity Indicators Report, 2021). Of the 5,426 residents, 34.3% live in poverty, 36.3% receive SNAP benefits, and 14.5% lack health insurance (Climate Equity Indicators Report, 2021). Additionally, 57.8% of children in OTR live below the poverty line (City Health Dashboard, 2021).

Nationwide, transportation issues delayed medical care for an estimated 6 million people in 2017 (Wolfe et al., 2020). This issue worsens health outcomes by contributing to missed appointments, chronic illness complications, and reduced medication adherence. Transportation barriers disproportionately affect minority and low-income groups. Black patients are more likely than White patients to rely on public transportation for healthcare appointments (Labban et al., 2017), and people below the poverty line and Medicaid beneficiaries are more likely to report transportation barriers (Wolfe et al., 2020).

Policy Analysis and Recommendation

Cincinnati offers various transportation assistance programs, but these are often insufficient. Medicaid beneficiaries are theoretically eligible for non-emergency transportation services through the Hamilton County Job and Family Services department. However, the system has many limitations, including requiring patients to submit requests five days in advance and provide extensive documentation. Issues like late rides and long wait times often lead to missed appointments (WCPO, 2022).

The Fare Deal Program offers half-price Metro rides for seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. However, the application process requires physical paperwork and, in some cases, additional documentation, which limits accessibility for many.

To improve access, we propose allowing clinics to distribute free bus passes to patients with scheduled appointments. No additional documentation should be required, as healthcare providers can determine when transportation assistance is necessary.

Advocacy Strategy

We plan to present our proposal to peers and elected officials, using evidence and appeals to human compassion to show the potential impact on patients' lives. We aim to counter

misconceptions about transportation aid and demonstrate that effective systems lead to better health outcomes. By partnering with groups like MetroNow! and Medcats for Healthy Cities, we hope to implement the METROCARE (Metrobus for Equitable Transit and Reliable Opportunities to Care) plan within two years.

Citations

Labban M, Chen CR, Frego N, Nguyen DD, Lipsitz SR, Reich AJ, Rebbeck TR, Choueiri TK, Kibel AS, Iyer HS, Trinh QD. Disparities in Travel-Related Barriers to Accessing Health Care From the 2017 National Household Travel Survey. JAMA Netw Open. 2023 Jul 3;6(7):e2325291. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.25291. PMID: 37498602; PMCID: PMC10375305.

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.

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