



Highlights of [GAO-04-971](#), a report to the Chairman, Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate

# TRANSPORTATION-DISADVANTAGED SENIORS

## Efforts to Enhance Senior Mobility Could Benefit from Additional Guidance and Information

### Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. population is aging, and access to transportation, via automobile or other modes, is critical to helping individuals remain independent as they age. Various federal programs provide funding for transportation services for “transportation-disadvantaged” seniors—those who cannot drive or have limited their driving and who have an income constraint, disability, or medical condition that limits their ability to travel. For those transportation-disadvantaged seniors, GAO was asked to identify (1) federal programs that address their mobility issues, (2) the extent to which these programs meet their mobility needs, (3) program practices that enhance their mobility and the cost-effectiveness of service delivery, and (4) obstacles to addressing their mobility needs and strategies for overcoming those obstacles.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that HHS’s Administration on Aging take several actions to improve guidance and information on transportation-disadvantaged seniors’ mobility, including developing guidance on assessing mobility needs and publicizing available information on alternative transportation services and on practices service providers can implement to enhance senior mobility.

HHS agreed with the findings and recommendations in this report.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-971](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-971).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or [siggerudk@gao.gov](mailto:siggerudk@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

Five federal departments—including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—administer 15 programs that are key to addressing the mobility issues of transportation-disadvantaged seniors. These programs help make transportation available, affordable, and accessible to seniors, such as by providing transit passes or reimbursement for mileage.

National data indicate that some types of needs are not being met, including those for trips (1) to multiple destinations or for purposes that involve carrying packages; (2) to life-enhancing activities, such as cultural events; and (3) in rural and suburban areas. However, there are limited data available to assess the extent of unmet needs. HHS’s Administration on Aging is required by law to provide guidance to states on how to assess seniors’ need for services, but officials said the administration has not done so because it has focused on providing other types of guidance. As a result, the local agencies on aging we interviewed—which are ultimately responsible for performing such needs assessments—used inconsistent methods to assess seniors’ mobility needs. The Administration on Aging plans to conduct an evaluation of one of its major programs and thus has an opportunity to improve its understanding of seniors’ needs and provide guidance to local agencies on performing needs assessments.

Local transportation service providers have implemented a variety of practices—including increasing service efficiency, improving customer service, and leveraging available funds—that enhance mobility and the cost-effective delivery of services. Federal programs provide funding and some technical assistance for these practices, but several service providers we interviewed said that the implementation of such practices was impeded by limited federal guidance and information on successful practices.

Senior mobility experts and stakeholders identified several obstacles to addressing transportation-disadvantaged seniors’ mobility needs, potential strategies that federal and other government entities can consider taking to better meet these needs, and trade-offs associated with those strategies.

**Obstacles, Strategies, and Trade-offs Associated with Meeting Transportation-Disadvantaged Seniors’ Mobility Needs, as Identified by Experts and Stakeholders**

Obstacles	Strategies	Trade-offs
Seniors are not sufficiently encouraged to plan for driving alternatives	Facilitate a gradual transition from driver to nondriver	Can increase demand for services and, therefore, increase costs
Government policies do not always address seniors’ varied needs	Improve alternatives and include seniors in transportation-planning process	Can be expensive and time-consuming
Funding constraints limit local agencies’ ability to address needs	Increase funding and funding flexibility and improve coordination	Takes funds away from other uses, flexibility can decrease accountability, and coordination requires sustained effort

Source: GAO.