

Community Mobility Injustices: Promoting alternative transportation policies

Jan Polgar, Lynn Shaw, Lindsay Gibson, Jill Jacobson, Rhysa Leyshon
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

Introduction: Engaging the voices and expertise of seniors who navigate alternative ways to get to places they need and want to go, after losing or giving up their driver's license, is essential to defining transportation problems and informing community alternative and public transportation policies.

Objectives: The aims of this presentation are to share perspectives of seniors on their need, use and access to alternative transportation and discuss the implications of these perspectives to provision of alternative transportation in the community.

Methods: The findings from a review of public transportation resources of an urban area and a qualitative study on alternative transportation and community mobility needs of seniors were used to inform recommendations for changes to an urban area's public and alternative transportation service provision. A critical social theory perspective was used to identify structural barriers and enablers to alternative transportation and change strategies.

Results: Three overarching themes were identified from focus group data: personal experience affecting use of alternative transportation, infrastructure barriers/enablers and strategies. Changing abilities of seniors, such as vision, strength and endurance, pose challenges to using affordable, community transportation. Infrastructure issues of access to information on alternative transportation services, timing and design of buses, location of bus stops, and the training of personnel to assist seniors when using alternative transportation were described. Policies and strategies for alternative transportation that meets community mobility needs of seniors were identified on the personal, community (e.g., urban planning) and macro-environmental (e.g. integrated regional/provincial transportation plans) levels.

Conclusion: The development of inclusive policies for public transportation and community mobility for seniors is indicated to enable participation in daily, social and civic occupations. The absence of such policies results in occupational deprivation when older adults cannot perform occupations due to lack of accessible transportation.

Contribution to practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

Application of fundamental concepts of occupational therapy to issues concerning seniors' access to and use of alternative and public transportation can lead to the development of inclusive policies. This paper demonstrates the expansion of the occupational role to service provision at the community level through participation on city accessibility and planning committees.