ADDRESSING THE TRANSPORTATION NEEDS OF VETERANS IN ARIZONA

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Introduction and Key Findings

In August 2020, the authors of this paper initiated a community-action project called Veteran Transportation Matters. The goal was to gather information directly from veterans regarding their needs and experiences with transportation in Arizona. The project included: (a) a survey of veterans’ needs, (b) follow-up interviews with veterans, and (c) focus groups with veterans and key stakeholders. The project was a year-long partnership between:

- The Arizona Department of Veterans’ Services  
  https://dvs.az.gov/
- Arizona’s Be Connected Program  
  http://connectveterans.org/
- The American Coalition for Military Families  
  https://arizonacoalition.org/
- The University of Arizona, College of Education  
  https://coe.arizona.edu/

This paper reports the findings of the project. Ultimately, we hope the information presented in this paper will educate and motivate collaborative efforts across the state to address the unmet transportation needs of veterans living in Arizona.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Half (51.2%) of the veterans surveyed had encountered one or more transportation barriers in the last year. The most common barriers were minor repairs to vehicles (24.9%) and a lack of available public transportation (23.7%). Veterans reported experiencing the barriers daily/weekly (30.8%), monthly (33.0%), and yearly (36.2%).

2. Half (52.9%) of the veterans surveyed reported they would benefit from more assistance with transportation to medical appointments. These veterans traveled weekly, monthly, and every other month to VA Medical Centers (65.2%), Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (56.3%), and non-VA medical clinics and providers (60.2%).
3. One-third (34.5%) of the veterans had trouble getting to destinations. Medical appointments were mentioned most often, followed by visiting family and friends and then the grocery store. Examples of medical destinations included dialysis, chemotherapy, colonoscopies, and behavioral health.

- **Background and Methods**

Reliable transportation impacts the lives of military veterans to access healthcare and to participate in society. The ability to travel outside the home allows opportunities for independence, health, and wellness for the 500,000 service members, veterans, and their families in Arizona. Unfortunately, research has found that unmet transportation needs are associated with more rescheduled or missed appointments, delayed care, and missed or delayed medication use, contributing to poorer management of chronic illness and health outcomes. In some cases this can lead to despair which could result in suicidal ideations or even death by suicide.

With this in mind, the **Veteran Transportation Matters** project investigated the transportation demands and activities (in terms of both actual behavior and unmet needs) of veterans living in Arizona. Focused on the ease and difficulty of reaching desired destinations, an online survey was developed through conversations with veterans and regional transportation providers. Items asked demographic and attitude questions as well as actual and desired but untaken trips.

The survey was disseminated across Arizona’s 15 counties (99 cities and towns and 22 American Indian tribes) through federal, state, and local government offices, veteran organizations and groups, and private and non-profit organizations. Recruitment occurred through listings as well as flyers posted in rural churches, foodbanks, and VFWs. Postcards were sent directly to veterans living in rural areas. The Be Connected support line assisted veterans to complete the survey over the phone. A total of 2,033 veterans participated in the survey.

Of the veterans who completed the survey, 15 opted to participate in an in-depth follow-up interview. The interviews were transcribed into text, and using constant-comparative analysis, responses were analyzed through an inductive line of inquiry where patterns of ideas were then clustered around common factors into more general themes. An independent consultant confirmed the accuracy of the themes.
Finally, focus groups were conducted with veterans and stakeholders from across the state of Arizona. The focus groups included 38 veterans and stakeholders from federal, state, and local government offices, veteran organizations and groups, and private and non-profit organizations. During the focus groups, preliminary data from the survey were shared and discussed. In this paper, we summarize the findings from the survey, interviews, and focus groups.


### Veterans Surveyed

The 2,033 veterans who completed the survey were 83.2% men and 15.7% women. Three-quarters (80.4%) were White, two-thirds (68.7%) were 65 or older, and half (46.6%) reported household incomes of $50,000 or less. Two-thirds (65.3%) reported a disability; the majority (84.2%) were service connected, and half (51.8%) had a disability rating of 70% or higher. The veterans primarily had served in the Army (45.3%), Air Force (26.1%) and Navy (20.7%). Over half (57.8%) of the veterans served in the Vietnam War with many serving in multiple eras including the Cold War (24.8%), Gulf War (23.4%), Peacetime (20.9%), and Iraq/Afghanistan (17.9%).
Household Income
- $25K or less (20.3%)  
- $26 - 50K (33.0%)  
- $51-75K (22.2%)  
- $76-100K (12.1%)  
- $101K or higher (12.3%)

Disability Rating
- 10-20% (21.2%)  
- 30-40% (14.2%)  
- 50-60% (13.0%)  
- 70-80% (16.8%)  
- 90-100% (35.0%)

Military Branch
- Army (43.5%)  
- Air Force (26.1%)  
- Navy (20.7%)  
- Marines (13.4%)  
- Coast Guard (1.0%)

Eras Served
- Vietnam War (57.8%)  
- Cold War (24.8%)  
- Gulf War (23.4%)  
- Peacetime (20.9%)  
- Iraq/Afghanistan (17.9%)  
- Korean War (4.4%)
**Regions and Communities**

The veterans lived in communities across Arizona, including all 15 counties and 320 of the 368 active ZIP codes. County and ZIP were consolidated into the six Council of Governments (COG) that manage transportation in Arizona:

- MAG - Maricopa Council on Governments (https://www.azmag.gov/)
- PAG - Pima Association of Governments (https://pagregion.com/)
- SEAGO - Southeastern Arizona Governments Organization (https://www.seago.org/about-seago-cogs)
- CAG - Central Arizona Government (http://www.cagaz.org/)
- WACOG - Western Arizona Council on Governments (https://www.wacog.com/mobility-transit/)

**Regions**

- MAG (31.2%)
- PAG (30.0%)
- SEAGO (10.3%)
- NACOG (10.2%)
- CAAG (9.5%)
- WACOG (8.6%)

**Community**

- Urban (50,000 people or more) (39.4%)
- Suburban (20,000-50,000 people) (35.7%)
- Rural 20,000 or fewer people) (23.9%)
- Native American Reservation (3.0%)
Transportation Used

The veterans were asked about community transportation used in the last year.

- One third (37.8%) of the veterans reporting using community transportation. Uber and Lyft (19.1%) were the most common, followed by city bus (9.6%). Under the category of “other,” help from family, friends and neighbors was frequent, followed by DAV and OWL. Some veterans reported that nothing was available in their area and they relied on walking and biking.

- The following factors were considered most to least important when choosing transportation: (1) convenience (e.g., proximity and effort), (2) reliability (e.g., consistent and quick turnaround), (3) cost (e.g., money and time), and (4) accessibility (e.g., ease of use and wheelchair accessible). Under the category of “other,” veterans wrote in preference for their own vehicle as well as factors such as availability, eligibility, safety, distance, parking, and weather.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transportation Used</th>
<th>Choice Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uber/Lyft (19.1%)</td>
<td>Convenience (69.9%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Bus (9.6%)</td>
<td>Reliability (58.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taxi (6.3%)</td>
<td>Cost (55.8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dial-A-Ride (3.9%)</td>
<td>Accessibility (23.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercity Bus (3.9%)</td>
<td>Other (6.8%)</td>
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<td>Other (14.1%)</td>
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“Other” Transportation Used

- Family, friends, neighbors, and caretakers (7.9%)
- Regional services such as DAV, OWL, Mountain Lift, Navajo Van, Sun Van, Veyo as well as emergency vehicles such as ambulances (4.0%)
- Streetcar and light rail train (1.1%)
- Nothing available in the area and rely on walking and biking (1.1%)

“Other” Choice Factors

- Preference for own vehicle (2.2%)
- Safety concerns (1.6%)
- Availability in the area where the veteran lived (0.7%)
- Eligibility through the VA and what would be reimbursed (0.6%)
- Distance, weather, traffic, parking, and time of day (0.9%)
- Unspecified other (1.0%)
Unmet Transportation Needs

The veterans were asked about barriers and unmet transportation needs.

- One-third (34.5%) of the veterans had trouble getting to one or more destinations. Medical appointments were mentioned most often, followed by visiting family and friends and then the grocery store. Under the category of “other,” veterans wrote in medical destinations such as dialysis, chemotherapy, colonoscopies, and behavioral health.

- Half (51.2%) of the veterans encountered one or more barriers. Lack of public transportation (23.7%) and minor repairs to vehicles (24.9%) were the most common. Under the category of “other,” participants wrote in no car or available services in the area, disability, health, cost, weather, road conditions, and parking. Veterans experienced these barriers daily/weekly (30.8%), monthly (33.0%), and yearly (36.2%).

**Destinations**

- Medical appointments (27.5%)
- Family/Friends (15.5%)
- Grocery Store (13.9%)
- Recreation (12.6%)
- Work (4.2%)
- Other (3.1%)

**Barriers**

- Weekly (30.8%)
- Monthly (33.0%)
- Yearly (36.2%)
- Lack of Public Transportation (23.7%)
- Minor Repairs to Vehicle (24.9%)
- Major Repairs to Vehicle (18.2%)
- Share a Family Vehicle (13.6%)
- Other (9.5%)

“Other” Destinations

- Specific medical appointments such as dialysis, chemotherapy, colonoscopies, mental health, and substance abuse (1.3%)
- Bank, post office, pet store, and other shopping (1.1%)
- Church, library, volunteering, and socializing (0.7%)

“Other” Barriers

- No services available and relied on family (2.8%)
- Disability and health barriers such as needing an accessible van (2.1%)
- Limited travel due to coronavirus (2.0%)
- Costs such as fuel (1.3%)
- Weather, traffic, road conditions, and limited parking (1.3%)
• **VA Medical Centers**

Half (52.9%) of the veterans surveyed responded that they would benefit from more assistance with transportation to medical appointments. These veterans were then asked about their medical travel in the last year, beginning with VA Medical Centers.

- The veterans surveyed were traveling to the Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System in Tucson (54.1%), Phoenix VA Healthcare System in Phoenix (36.1%), and Northern Arizona VA Healthcare System in Prescott (9.8%).

- One-third (32.2%) of the veterans traveled 50 miles or more; most of these veterans were traveling to the VA Medical Centers in Prescott and Tucson.

- Two-thirds (65.2%) of the veterans traveled to a VA Medical Center every three months or more with one-third (30.8%) traveling weekly/monthly.

- Three-quarters (72.5%) of the veterans used their own car, and a quarter (26.2%) used a family car. Community transportation used added up to 29.4% with Uber/Lyft (8.2%) and city buses (6.8%) most frequent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 miles or more</td>
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<td>25-50 miles</td>
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<td>5-10 miles</td>
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<td>5 miles or less</td>
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![Distance and Frequency Chart]

- **Distance**
  - 50 miles or more (32.2%)
  - 25-50 miles (22.8%)
  - 10-25 miles (28.6%)
  - 5-10 miles (13.2%)
  - 5 miles or less (3.3%)

- **Frequency**
  - Once a year (15.0%)
  - Every 6 months (19.9%)
  - Every 2-3 months (34.1%)
  - Once a month (20.8%)
  - Once a week or more (10.3%)
Transportation Used

- Own Car (72.5%)
- Family Car (26.2%)
- Uber/Lyft (8.2%)
- Bus (6.8%)
- Taxi (3.3%)
- Dial-a-ride (4.9%)
- Other (6.2%)

“Other” Transportation Used
- Regional services such as DAV, OWL, Mountain Lift, Navajo Van, Sun Van, Veyo (and 3.1%).
- Family and friends (2.1%)
- Nothing available and rely on walking, biking, (0.9)
- Light rail and streetcar (0.1%)
**Community-Based Outpatient Clinics**

The veterans who reported that they would benefit from assistance were asked about their travel to VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCS) in the last year.

- Three-quarters (74.3%) of the veterans were traveling 25 miles or less to a CBOC, which was significantly closer than the VA Medical Centers.

- Half (56.2%) of the veterans were traveling to a CBOC every three months or more frequently, which was slightly less than to the VA Medical Centers.

- Three quarters (77.7%) of the veterans used their own car, and a quarter (38.6%) used a family vehicle. Community transportation used added up to only 16.6%, with Uber/Lyft (5.3%) and other (3.6%) such as being reliant on family and friends being most frequent.
**Non-VA Medical Clinics**

Finally, veterans who reported that they would benefit from assistance were also asked about their travel to non-VA medical clinics and providers in the last year.

- Three-quarters (73.7%) traveled 25 miles or less to a non-VA clinic, which was similar to the distance to CBOCs.

- Almost two-thirds (61.2%) were traveling to a non-VA clinic every three months or more, similar to the CBOCs and VA Medical Centers.

- Three quarters (77.3%) of the veterans used their own car, and one quarter (28.6%) used a family car, similar to the CBOCs and VA Medical Centers. Community transportation used added up to 21.5%.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 miles or more</td>
<td>Once a year (18.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-50 miles</td>
<td>Every 6 months (20.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-25 miles</td>
<td>Every 2-3 months (30.4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10 miles</td>
<td>Once a month (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 miles or less</td>
<td>Once a week or more (11.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transportation Used**

- Own Car (77.3%)
- Family vehicle (28.6%)
- Uber/Lyft (6.1%)
- Bus (5.5%)
- Taxi (3.2%)
- Dial-a-ride (3.1%)
- Other (3.6%)

**“Other” Transportation Used**

- Family and friends including neighbors and caretakers (1.7%)
- Regional services such as Mountain Lift, Navajo Van, Sun Van, Veyo as well as emergency vehicles such as ambulances (1.1%).
- Nothing available and rely on walking, biking (0.6)
- Light rail and streetcar (0.2%)
Open-Ended Survey Responses

The survey ended with an open question that asked participants: “Is there anything you would like to share that you feel would be helpful to the VA meeting your transportation needs?” A total of 377 comments were analyzed and eventually coded into the themes listed below (see Appendix A for the veteran comments).

1. **Theme #1 – Appreciative of Current Services** – 11.2% of the comments expressed gratitude and appreciation for the transportation services provided to military veterans in Arizona. Comments thanked the VA and support services such as Be Connected, DAV, Paratransit, and Mount Lift.

2. **Theme #2 – Improve Communication and Outreach** – 13.9% of the comments wanted more information, communication, and outreach regarding transportation options, including informational videos and transportation liaisons as well as more direct communication and assistance with scheduling and reimbursement.

3. **Theme #3 – Concern about Medical Transportation** – 13.4% of the comments voiced concern about the lack of transportation for medical procedures, especially when sedation was required. Procedures had been postponed and older veterans worried about their future ability to drive to medical appointments.

4. **Theme #4 – General Recommendations for Transportation** – 12.6% of the comments offered general suggestions to make transportation more reliable and convenient, including door-to-door service, quicker planning, and shorter wait times. The following were additional themes under theme #4:

   o **4a. Address Regional Transportation Gaps** – 14.2% of the comments identified a general lack of transportation in suburban and rural areas, especially in Northern Arizona and the Navajo Nation.

   o **4b. Cover More Costs and Expenses** – 13.7% of the comments involved strategies to cover transportation costs such as gas cards, travel vouchers, contracts with Uber/Lyft, and expanded eligibility.

   o **4c. Increase Availability of Providers and Parking** – 11.2% of the comments called for better availability of providers and ride options, including partnerships with Uber and Lyft, and more available
parking.

- **4d. Address Accessibility and Safety** – 9.8% of the comments pointed to a lack of accessibility as well as safety concerns. Rather than creating something new, veterans requested more accessible and safe options.

- **Interview Follow-up Comments**

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 15 veterans. During the follow-up interviews, three dominant perspectives emerged related to themes #2, #3, and #4 from the open-ended survey comments. These themes involved improved communication and outreach, importance of transportation for medical appointments, and the need for more reliable and convenient transportation.

**Improve Communication and Outreach** – Similar to the open-ended survey comments, the fifteen veterans who participated in the interviews noted the need for more communication and outreach as evident in the following comments:

✔ “You have to have some type of publicity campaign to make sure that the word goes out to everybody so that they know that (transportation) is available for people… reach out to libraries and food banks in the area and ask them to post flyers for the services available to them.”

✔ “It’s not a resource issue. It is more of an education thing about how good the services really are and maybe more detailed explanations about what is available and what you know they really provide.”

✔ “My friends would use transportation more if there was more of an explanation of how easy it is, available it is, etc.”

✔ “Create a flyer that has the transportation assistance information on it…. disseminate it to the local libraries, you know the cottonwood library and chamber library, the Sedona library, and just have them post a flyer on their board… post the flyer at the local libraries.”

✔ “Maybe brochures. The brochures could give more details, show examples, and encourage people to call and have somebody explain it to them. Maybe some people don't know it's there or have stereotypes but may use it if they knew how it might work and if they had more information. If more people really understood how it worked, they might avail themselves of these hidden gems.”
“Well one thing you can do is you can come up with resources that veterans can use. And besides the local city transportation, individuals that would be willing to volunteer their time to travel from here to Prescott, or Phoenix, then the best way to disseminate that information out to veterans in need would be to go through organizations like Catholic Charities veteran services.”

“The new program the VA has begun to implement makes it easier for people who have a difficult time with travel because they will cover community-based medical under veteran’s VA benefits, but the program is still difficult to navigate.”

Transportation allows people to get better healthcare – the second theme that emerged across all fifteen interviews was the importance of transportation for health and wellness as evident in the following comments:

“I think it [transportation] allows people to get better health care in a timely fashion, and you know they can save money, less stress whatever things like that so it’s a service that helps people.”

“I think it [transportation] is important or you start skipping [medical] exams because it's not easy to get to them. It takes you down a road…”

“There are procedures I’ve never had done because I can't take three days off work… one day to get up there then have the procedure, and you got to come home the third day (because there was no immediate ride home).”

“You know the VA clinic in Tucson is very good, but it's an hour and 15 minutes away. As some people get older really, they can't drive for various reasons or their car might not be in good shape… so, it's really a lifeline to get health care from the VA that they can't get local.”

“I know individuals that will avoid showing up [to medical appointments] unless somebody they know will pick them up. They use the VFW to look for help and get transportation, instead of using the private companies or anything like that… the problem with most veterans is pride gets in the way of asking for help.”

“I would use public transportation for medical appointments if they were available, so I wouldn’t tie up my wife when she brings me to appointments. Typically, my eye doctor dilates my eyes, so I need a driver, so my wife has to
come with me and sit there…. A personal ride back home or wherever, that would be cool, so it doesn't tie up my wife.”

✔ “When I had cataract operations, because I couldn't drive back… the shuttle picked me up at my house and then there was a person that drove me back after the procedure, so it was it was very convenient… Without the option of having someone driving me there and taking me back, I might have delayed getting cataracts or maybe not even had it done at all.”

✔ “Being picked up for a medical appointment with my oxygen tank that I take with me wherever I go and that's really convenient.”

✔ “Homeless vets in Cottonwood and the surrounding area cannot afford to pay for transportation to medical appointments.”

✔ The only way I can get the VA to get my lab work is the damn bus right… I walk three quarters of a mile just to get to the bus and it takes about almost an hour if I need to go downtown… I have to walk a mile just buy groceries… I am 66 years old, emphysema, and have cancer.”

Transportation should be reliable and convenient – the third theme that emerged from the interviews was that transportation should be reliable and convenient. While some veterans interviewed used their own car, all of the veterans were aware of the challenges of public transportation as evident in the following comments:

✔ “I don't know how timely it [public transportation]. If you need to be somewhere specific time, I'm not quite sure they would be able to get you there at the appointed time. So, if you were to use public transportation, you might be late.”

✔ “It's very inconvenient, you know, to plan out in advance… two weeks out, you know, depending on time, affordability, and availability… you know maybe 25% chance that they're not going to be on time…. we pretty much have to plan a week or two weeks in advance to do something or go to the grocery store or anything like that.”

✔ “I would like to see smaller [public] buses that run more frequently. Most of the buses are really pretty big… and I see the buses mostly empty running around midday, or in the evening. I see very few people when I took public transportation.”
“It isn’t to me personally worth the time to take the shuttle because you have to wait the whole day you know, and if you have a 15 minute or half-hour appointment... you’re stuck there for hours.”

“Would be nice to have something that was reliable. You know is gonna be there on time that you can plan accordingly.”

“I think they have to think small and personal because a lot of these people are either going to be you know in power wheelchairs or will have a really difficult time walking…. something has to be done more personally to help the veterans get around.”

“If public transportation could be open on Saturdays and Sundays so people that, you know, want to go grocery shopping, don’t have to fight with the people that are trying to get to medical appointments. That would give a little more for the people that like to do things in the morning.”

“One or two buses that come to the area, but you have to go to a certain place to pick up that bus and the schedule is not very advantageous I guess is the best way to put it.”

“I'm 200 miles away, it will take me three four hours to get there. People that don't want to drive long distances, you don't want to wait too much for an appointment. I've gone to a dermatologist and you might run to a podiatrist, which is like 40 miles away.”

Focus Groups

Finally, focus groups were conducted with veterans and stakeholders from across the State of Arizona. The focus groups included 38 veterans and stakeholders from federal, state, and local government offices, veteran organizations and groups, and private and non-profit organizations. During the focus groups, preliminary survey findings were shared and the following topics were discussed.

1. Focus group members were not surprised by the survey findings. Rather, they were already aware of regional gaps and the need for more convenient and reliable transportation options. One focus group member described that many veterans have to use multiple types of transportation to get to a single appointment. The example provided was a veteran living in a rural area, who
takes a taxi to an intercity bus station, then gets on a city bus, and finally walks to a specific destination.

2. The focus group members confirmed findings from the survey and interviews, especially around the need for more education and outreach. One suggestion was an annual event that brought together transportation providers and key stakeholders from the six Council of Governments (COG) to share information and resources. Another suggestion was to hire transportation navigators or liaisons that veterans from across the state could call for assistance.

3. The increasing popularity of Uber and Lyft were discussed as perhaps the most convenient and reliable transportation option. However, focus group members had reservations about the viability of Uber and Lyft for all veterans:
   a. Uber and Lyft drivers are less common in rural areas.
   b. Uber and Lyft have limited accessibility for disabilities.
   c. Use of smartphone apps may not be user friendly for older veterans.
   d. Contracts would need to be set up to streamline reimbursement.

4. The focus groups also discussed the possibility of expanding volunteer transportation programs such as DAV (https://www.dav.org/veterans/i-need-a-ride/) by addressing the following:
   a. Accommodating the needs of veterans with disabilities who use wheelchairs and other assistive technology.
   b. Hiring coordinators across the state because some positions are currently vacant, which has limited transportation in those areas.
   c. Evaluating the nature of the DAV volunteer driver pool because many drivers are older and may not be able to continue providing assistance in future years.

5. Finally, the focus groups all called for more collaborative efforts like the Veteran Transportation Matters project. Additionally, there were comments regarding the need for more surveys on the barriers and unmet transportation needs of veterans, especially those living in rural areas and on reservations.
Appendix A: Open-Ended Survey Comments

Theme #1 – Appreciative of Current Services – 11.2% of the comments expressed gratitude and appreciation for the transportation provided to military veterans in Arizona. Comments thanked the VA and support services such as Be Connected, DAV, Paratransit, and Mount Lift.

- Continue to conduct such surveys as this on an annual basis to capture the changing transportation needs of military veterans in AZ especially in less populated areas of the state with fewer modes of available transportation.
- I appreciate this survey. Thanks.
- I DO appreciate the State of AZ taking an active interest in Veteran's well-being.
- I appreciate the Be Connected effort to provide volunteers to provide transportation for the veteran community on a case-by-case basis in Mohave County. Paid employees might be more dependable and easier to access.
- Despite the distance from the nearest VA facility, I am pleased to report that the VA staff are always polite, courteous and professional.
- Cordial, helpful aware of older patients needs.
- Transportation in Flagstaff has been pretty nice thanks to Mountain Lift.
- The VA has been very good regarding those of us living south of the border. It generally is a overnight trip either by private car or bus and shuttle from Nogales AZ. They arrange accommodations and I'm told pay mileage although I've never applied.
- The VA does a GREAT JOB FOR ME AND MOST OF MY FRIENDS.
- Public transportation system is very well adjusted to my medical transportation needs
- The on-call transportation was beyond excellent.
- The folks at Tucson VA Travel do an exceptional job of scheduling rides for us veterans.
- Have used or affiliated with Veterans Medical and Administrative services for over thirty years! Always there and available! Many thanks...
- Service has been excellent
- Continue serving-supporting Veterans.
- Continue having VA transportation available when I need it.
- I am grateful for and appreciative of all that you do for us.
- Mileage reimbursement program is great.
- It's good to know you are there if I need you.
- It has really been of great help. Cataract surgery needed someone to drive me. Covid 19 shots needed someone to drive me.
- I primarily use the Paratransit service which has been very much appreciated. They have been reliable, and the people are courteous and respectful.
- I am satisfied with the Kingman VA Clinic.
- Your service has been very good "DAV"
- VA transportation is GREAT, nice drivers and dependable.
- VA transit was good.
- VA does a very good job.
- Thanks for the excellent patient care and support.
- Thank you. Please support all our vets with innovation and dignity.
- Thank you VA for the Care I Receive
- Thank you for caring
- Thank you, and Be Connected!
- I live only 10 min. from the VA hospital in Tucson. I want the feds to stop privatizing the VA. We vets want care from our VA docs and nurses - it is high quality fast care. Thank you all
Theme #2 – Improve Communication and Outreach – 13.9% of the comments wanted more information, communication, and outreach regarding transportation options, including informational videos and transportation liaisons as well as more direct communication and assistance with scheduling and reimbursement.

- Would be great to know about other options for travel in case I may later need assistance or share the info with other veterans.
- I was approved for grant for a mobility van but have had no assistance with it. My quality of life has gone down to 45%. I don’t get out of my house at all.
- I would like to be more aware of the options I have for transportation. I didn’t know I had any options before answering this survey. There I have been many times I have driven myself to the VA and outside the VA medical appointments that I desperately needed help but was unaware of any other source than myself.
- Produce and make available to veterans an instructional information video on VA travel assistance options and programs, to be viewed by DVD or online (say on Youtube).
- For there to be a transportation liaison group at the VA so veterans can go ask questions about what is available. If they don’t have a smart device or phone period to have help setting up their rides.
- A program every week rotating days where someone can help veterans at the main VA sign up for Sun van and the bus but also for the VA to work with the Tucson city and sun van to get a discount rate and for this to be a benefit the VA will cover.
- VA could find and establish relationships with trusted car repair services/individuals, that are trustworthy and won’t scam Veterans, as well as offer a payment program or discounted service; also, provide classes on basic automobile repairs so that Vets can do routine maintenance on their own vehicles (saves time, money, and hassle)
- It would be helpful if it was promoted in ads like the Veteran Crisis Line.
- Share Shuttle travel times (departure and return) from clinics to main hospital via USPS.
- Posted information if and when the TUS Shuttle operates
- What options are available to what insurers and do veterans have priority over family members of veterans.
- Asked Doctor to be able to use VA van told to talk to people at front desk, they said talk to your doctor, in other words the old run around.
- Better communication regarding VA transportation resources available to nearby clinics.
- If I could call the show low, CBOC it could solve many of my questions and problems
- Provide a direct phone number to show low CBOC.
- Poor communication, some trips were missed.
- Phone lines are busy, slow to return calls
- Many veterans in my area do not use computers so getting information is hard
- Don’t get adequate help or concern every time I question it. No one ever follows up with you regarding it. Every time you go the VA should know and automatically pay you and send out confirmations to make sure your reimbursed for mileage.
- Mileage payment allowances take too long to receive.
- It would be really helpful if the VA were to get the travel claims software running. The VA eliminated the paper form entry process; BUT, the software and site do NOT WORK!
- Is there any way to file for travel pay without having to go to the hospital office?
- I have spent many hours attempting to get reimbursed for VA travel. The system is not user friendly. Had to use the patient advocate several times to get reimbursed.
- I do receive travel assistance, but cannot access the new system to apply for it online
- Fix the new beneficiary travel reimbursement application. It’s loaded with bugs that results in non-payment and creates undo stress on staff.
Theme #3 – Concern about Medical Transportation – 13.4% of the comments voiced concern about the lack of transportation for medical procedures, especially when sedation was required. Procedures had been postponed and older veterans worried about their future ability to drive to medical appointments.

- I have a necessary out-patient surgery necessary. They say someone must accompany me to, during and after the procedure. I'm alone with no friends close. VA could offer something like DAV that would wait during the procedure. As it is, I've delayed hoping for a resolution.
- Surgery, when a driver is required can't go because no family member available.
- VA assistance for transportation needs is important when it comes to surgeries and need a ride back to my house.
- I have a colonoscopy coming up but need medical assisted transportation to get home.
- Occasionally need ride to/from a facility for procedures that require pre-procedure sedation and/or post-procedure pain med which preclude driving. Difficult to find someone who is available to drive me to/from such appointments; sometimes requires frequent visits over a 2 wk period before I can drive again.
- I have had 3 operations in the past 12 months for cancer. I will be starting a 6-week radiation treatment therapy after my fourth surgery in June. I have no way to get to the place where I will be getting radiation.
- Lots of vets do not have a designated driver as required by medical procedures
- I live alone and driving my own vehicle after surgery not an option.
- I have dialysis three days a week. I am in Stage IV renal cell cancer.
- Arrangement for Veterans without disability to get to appointments requiring a driver who accompanies to check-in (i.e. colonoscopy, surgeries, etc.).
- Due to age I know that I'll not be able to continue driving much longer
- Now I can drive, but I hope it stays available as I age.
- COPD increasing so interested in 'future' provision of transportation to VA facilities.
- The times I go for scans at Phoenix hospital would be nice for VA transportation.
- I was just diagnosed with lung cancer and do not know how much longer I will be independent as I live alone.
- Need ride to therapy
- Recent heart surgery and dialysis
- Need transportation after hand surgery
- My wife is 78 and I am soon to be 87 so our driving may become limited
- My wife and I are both 86 years old and don't know how much longer we can drive.
- May need transportation in the future but I am now able to drive myself to appointments
- May need transportation help in the future (2-5 years)
- I'm fortunate that I don't have to rely on others to transport me for med appointments; but it could change tomorrow.
- I broke my leg 2 years ago and could not drive. I am not eligible for VA Transportation - a future concern. DAV Transportation took me to appointments, but without a disability rating I must pay for my transportation if DAV is not available.
- Currently, I'm able to drive my own vehicle to my appointments, but at 79 years old that can change immediately.
- Currently independent but van service when older could be beneficial
- As long as care in the community is available, I'm good but someday may need help to get to appointments.
● All answers are based on yesterday and today! Tomorrow that could be a 180 degree change in my health...

**Theme #4 – Recommendations for Transportation** – 12.6% of the comments offered suggestions to make transportation more reliable and convenient, including door-to-door service, quicker planning, and shorter wait times.

● The current system is inefficient and makes myself and other Veterans feel unappreciated and like 2nd class citizens.
● I recently had a dental appointment where a fellow veteran was waiting to get picked up and they had forgotten the poor man and was trying to find someone to get him. It just seems the communication area isn’t the best in the program so i worry to try it on my own and get left
● We tried VA transport 4 or 5 times with miserable results. No shows, very late for pickup, too many other passengers to be dropped, etc.
● There are several programs (meditation, exercise, wellness) that would be helpful, but traveling to the VA is stressful and time consuming (travel time is longer than the event
● I would use PT if it were more readily available from my residence.
● I do not use VA for transportation because it has been unreliable in picking me up on time and slow in getting me home.
● Providing no cost, convenient and reliable transportation to Veterans who are less than 100% but unable to drive for VA and Non-VA appointments would be beneficial.
● It would be a good option to be able to schedule a pick-up closer to home,
● Provide transportation to every appointment.
● It takes 30 minutes to get a ride home, I think this is a bit much.
● Not having to call in advance, quicker planning.
● Door to door transportation.
● DAV you must call 24-48 hours in advance. If they can, they will. Have never been able to use their services.
● Would be great if DAV could use their vehicles to take veterans to non-VA facilities.
● It would be nice if the DAV could pick up and drop off at our house when they start up again.
● In the past I relied on the DAV Volunteers which would require that I schedule my appointments around their availability which often required spending 2-4 hours at the VA waiting for my 30-minute appointment and another 2 hours waiting for return transportation, so I would have to waste a good portion of my day for a thirty-minute appointment.
● The DAV shuttle vans are wonderful but the timing of pick up and last call to leave limit when your appointments can be and different VA providers can sometimes be hard to schedule with those scheduling concerns.
● The DAV in Sierra Vista will take you to VA in Tucson but will not wait for a person at the Tucson VA if needed. Why??
● Distance to just about any medical service is significant factor, especially lack of public transportation.
● Transportation needs to stay at VAMC Beyond 1600 for those who get late appointments
● I belong to VVA Post 975 and I don't drive at night and the meetings are 6PM and I can't go.
● Many other vets here say they have problems if ambulance transport as they take to NW Hosp unless one puts up big fuss.
● The waiting times (VA provided) can be too long for transportation after appointments.
● You have to wait for the very last appointment to be done which is usually in the afternoon. So if you have an appointment in the morning you have to wait all day to get a ride home.
● Nearby community care appointments
● It would be nice to have an assigned doctor to meet my needs at the southwest clinic.
● Have more neighbor care.
● Provide reliable transportation services like Veyo.

Theme #4a. – Address Regional Transportation Gaps – 14.2% of the comments identified a general lack of transportation in suburban and rural areas, especially Northern Arizona and the Navajo Nation. Specific areas mentioned by veterans were Anthem, Apache Junction, Benson, Bullhead City, Fort Mohave, Gold Canyon, Green Valley, Kingman, Peoria, Prescott, San Manuel, San Tan Valley, Sahuarita, Sierra Vista, Sun City, Yuma, and East Valley of Phoenix.
● NO transportation reaches my location thus far! Just use family/friend’s vehicle; can’t drive.
● Rural areas need to have transportation to outpatient clinic nearest community of residence.
● Need more availability in rural and suburban areas.
● More VA transportation options provided to rural areas
● Northern Arizona has a major problem with transport to/from VA facilities — The VA must begin to acknowledge this - VERY soon, if not immediately! Many veterans suffer needlessly, missing appointments simply because, despite a desire to get to the appointment, luck provides no opportunity or means to get to the scheduled appointment. Shamefully, many veterans never recover from these aborted appointments. Through no fault of their own, they are left unrepaired, undiagnosed, with no chance of recovery.
● More scheduled transportation from reservations to facilities is needed
● Set up shuttle service from the light rail on Center and Indian School to the VA
● I know there are homeless Vets in the area that could use a ride to the VA Prescott facility.
● Bring back Prescott transportation from Kingman.
● Transportation to Phoenix and back from Prescott.
● A VA bus/van operation here on Navajo Nation would be very helpful for our Veterans here on the Navajo Nation Reservation.
● A donated van or special-need modified van non-emergency ride would be appreciated for our Native Veterans that have to travel far for our medical appointments up here in Northern Arizona. Or an insurance that helps with non-emergency medical transportation.
● There are so many of the 80+ veterans in the Sun City, Sun City West, Peoria, and surrounding that need this service desperately.
● Encourage the state to provide transportation to Apache Junction and Gold Canyon.
● Provide transportation from Sun City or vicinity to the VA Hospital.
● Why can’t there be VA transportation for the San Tan Valley area?
● Nothing reliable in Fort Mohave area.
● No transportation from Benson to anywhere.
● Build a VA Hospital in Yuma Az to save time and money for the VA and Veterans.
● Yuma needs transportation.
● No public transportation in the east Valley of Phoenix once you get east of Power Road.
● Have bus service between Anthem, AZ and main VA Hospital in Phoenix, AZ.
● There is no support for Vets here in Sierra Vista.
● Provide light rail to the VA Tucson from Green Valley, Az.
● Availability of group transportation to Tucson VA Hospital.
● Some kind of local VA shuttle service to/from downtown Tucson.
● It would be great if the Tucson VA organized a van once a month from San Carlos, Sonora,
There should be more help in Green Valley or Sahuarita.
VA Clinic is closed in Sierra Vista, it is 85 mi trip to main hospital in Tucson.
There are no clinics within 100 miles of me, so I have to get Non-VA care.
On Western broader of AZ, many of us go to the Laughlin clinic or the Las Vegas hospital they are closer then Arizona VA locations; however there is very limited access to travel
Need to build/open a full functioning VA clinic in Bullhead City for x-ray, blood draw, and CT scans. I have to travel to Laughlin and Vegas for my appointments and its ridiculous.

Theme #4b. – Cover More Costs and Expenses – 13.7% of the comments involved strategies to cover transportation costs such as gas cards, travel vouchers, contracts with Uber/Lyft, and expanded eligibility for reimbursement.
- Reduced or free public transportation for low income or homeless veterans.
- Offer a public transportation voucher to get to appointments.
- Low-income taxi vouchers.
- Travel vouchers for taxi/Lyft.
- Travel stipend.
- Discount bus passes in Tucson would be nice for veterans.
- The VA should give us a stipend for travel/taxies/ etc
- Financial assistance.
- Fuel costs are becoming much more of a problem. Sometimes need to cancel or reschedule to when i can afford the trip.
- The rising cost of fuel is going to make it harder. My vehicle is 22 years old.
- Can’t afford price of gas
- Help paying for gas
- Gift cards for gas would help tremendously!
- Need $$ for car repairs
- Provide mileage compensation for travel to and from CBOC, community care locations,
- Provide financial mileage reimbursement.
- Just be paid for mileage
- Increase mileage reimbursement.
- Increase in mileage to reflect increase in gas prices.
- Consider paying mileage to veteran in commuting to appt.’s at VA hosp.
- Better mileage compensation for ALL veterans!
- Pay for millage driving even if only 5-6 miles each way
- Reimbursement for mileage/gas since i have so far to travel
- Yes, can i start getting paid for rental car
- Had to use ambulance one time in past year. VA would not pay for it.
- Surgery at the VA Phoenix requires follow up appts. I am unable to drive myself and Uber/Lyft is $45+ each way!! And by the way the VA does not pay ambulance charges when going to the ER at a local hospital!! Covered everything else!!
- To use Sun Van you have to purchase 32 tickets, just to ride even once, That’s $192.00 before I ride the first time.
- I have for transportation assistance and have gotten declined because I have to much income, but I have to drive 180 miles round trip
- VA said they can’t help me because I make too much money. I draw $1800/m in disability and my rent is $900/m. I’ve skipped appts because I didn’t have $50. for Lyft.
- SAVAHCS will not provide transportation to you because of low % rating. It would be nice if they opened transportation to all veterans at any rating level or senior veterans.
- Travel reimbursement get back logged & travel does not pay all appts for community care, very frustrating in losing out on money for gas & for maintenance
- The rising cost of fuel is going to make it harder. My vehicle is 22 years old.
Help purchasing a vehicle would be nice since I’m on a limited income.
Really would like to fix or replace my vehicle. But cannot afford that.
Many veteran job seekers are inquiring about the availability of free bus passes so they can attend interview
Build a VA Hospital in Yuma Az to save time and money for the VA and Veterans

**Theme #4c – Increase Availability of Providers and Parking** – 11.2% of the comments called for better availability of providers and ride options, including a request for a veteran owned and operated company to drive veterans, partnerships with Uber and Lyft, and more parking.

- Better availability of optional travel modes.
- Yes, find more providers within my area which would reduce the distance and times I have to travel as well as cost in mileage, time, and money.
- More ride options and helpful drivers.
- More than one driver for the Yuma to Tucson run.
- Hire a veteran owned and operated company to drive veterans.
- Partner with outdoor programs! And give us transportation.
- Work with ride shares like Uber and Lyft to at least get a good percentage off rate to the veterans but not taking away from the individual drivers for them to still make the rate they would for a non-veteran for the same ride.
- Uber or minivan service.
- There should be a permanent free bus and light rail pass for all Veterans. Phoenix is getting too congested to drive.
- Public transportation needs to be seriously reduced including getting rid of the light rail. Any veteran that hasn't lost their mind wouldn’t ride on public transportation. Do not think of it as a viable option for veterans.
- Would like to see more emergency transportation available just in case something happens with his car
- VA approved medical transport. Transport companies are denied insurance claims for VA.
- Make public transportation available.
- We need much better public transportation.
- Better public transportation.
- Shuttle service to Prescott VA hospital needs to be reinstated.
- Restore Van service to the hospital.
- Veterans transit bus is helpful but not running now.
- Parking availability at the VA can be a problem. I don't mind walking, but others might not be able to walk far.
- Parking at the SAVA facilities is scarce if you don't have a disabled permit for your car, and still there are lots and lots of Handicap empty places available for use. Freeing up some of these empty Handicap parking sites for general use would help finding a place to park.
- Parking at the main Southern Tucson VA center has been an issue prior to Covid.
- Parking at hospital is horrible.
- Tucson Southwest Hospital needs more parking spaces for Building 80
- Ride from parking to facility
- Provide more parking at Tucson VA Med Center
- Parking problems for handicap at VA
- More parking and more close in handicap parking at the main VA
- More handicapped parking should be available at the Tucson VA.
- Continue the shuttle bus from the Phoenix VA to auxiliary parking lots. It can be *very* difficult to find parking during the day.
Finding a parking space can take up to 30 + minutes during Snowbird season. Underground parking would be a great addition.

Parking is a problem I encounter at the Tucson VA hospital.

Would love to see the little golf cart start back picking up people, especially from the back of the hospital, since you can’t go through that door anymore.

Theme #4d. – Address Accessibility and Safety – 9.8% of the comments pointed out a general lack of accessibility as well as safety concerns. Rather than creating something new, veterans requested more accessible and safe options.

- Don’t try to make something separate, just make it more accessible and reliable and safe for all groups who need it.
- Would be nice to have available more lift vehicles for scooters and wheelchairs.
- There needs to be power wheelchair equipped vans.
- Staff for wheelchair help?
- Need wheelchair access
- I need help with transporting my electric scooter.
- I need a side load wheelchair van with hand control.
- Some of the vans are very small. It is difficult to get in with my motorized wheelchair.
- My wife is my caregiver. I cannot get to appointments because I don’t have mobility van to help with my mobility chair. I prefer to have online doctor appointments.
- My wife has tried to get a mobility van, but is unable, but to rent a mobility van is $110 a day.
- Veterans should be able to get a mobility van if they are disabled service connected or not.
- Unable to drive long distances due to disabilities.
- I’m low vision and unable to drive. My wife is handicapped and prefers not to drive unless absolutely necessary. Better access to community care would be helpful for me as I can walk to most places in my town including the CBOC.
- I am on Home Health because I cannot get to medical appointments unless I call the fire department for help. I’m a wheelchair bound stroke victim with transfer problems, so cannot travel anywhere.
- Yes, not only have trouble with vision and physical health also live alone making it extremely difficult to get to places I need to meaning no family etc
- Quit making us take transportation that requires us to stand out in the hot sun be without water have no facilities to get to medical appointments
- Mass transit is not appealing to me because I don’t feel safe.
- I only need this transportation when it snows or if I’m having an outpatient procedure done, that requires a driver take me home under anesthesia.
- A super senior person should not be driving long distances to their VA hospitals, when they have to use crowded freeways. They should be provided transportation by the VA. They could be a hazard to themselves and others. Reflexes could be very slow.
- A lot of older people, and homeless people lose the ability to drive on their own are not able to get to VA appointments in the summer due to the extreme heat. Yuma has no transportation for these individuals with age and medical restrictions.
- Veteran states that he would like local urgent community clinics should be more accessible to veteran to reduce need for transportation, additionally provide space for MD’s to volunteer to assist veterans and provide local treatment, additionally increase hours VA clinics are open.
- I’m never sure that i feel well enough to drive this is why i moved from Sierra Vista to Tucson - i don’t drive more than 20 miles without having issues and the 75 miles was too far to get to the VA Hospital. have been left stranded before
• I know the shuttle operators at the VA Hospital are volunteers, but they need to stop when they see someone waking in the outer parking lots and offer them a ride. I have had them zoom by me in the heat of summer to walk from Valencia to Bldg 80.
• Keep the virtual medical appointments going for all, even after the pandemic has ended.