

Findings from a National Transportation Survey of Individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired

What Were We Trying to Learn?

Research and experience demonstrate that individuals with B/VI struggle with transportation. Lack of reliable, affordable transportation impacts many areas of their lives, including employment. When people lose their vision, their participation in all kinds of activities, including shopping, socializing, and employment may decrease. This may be partially because transportation can seem like an overwhelming obstacle for someone who lacks vision.

Previous research on transportation barriers has focused on the wider disability community. Researchers at the NRTC decided to conduct the first national survey of individuals with B/VI that specifically focused on transportation.

Research Takeaway

Transportation presents a major challenge for individuals with blindness and visual impairments (B/VI), and lack of transportation negatively influences many areas of their lives. Counselors should be on the lookout for consumers who are struggling with transportation, and they should work with all consumers to make sure they have a realistic plan for how to get to and from work.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

- **Employment is impacted by lack of transportation.** More than one-third of survey respondents reported that they had turned down a job offer due to transportation concerns. But in most cases, transportation was not the deciding factor for these consumers in being able to secure employment.
- **Transportation affects more than just employment.** Participants noted that lack of transportation limited their participation in entertainment/leisure activities, visiting friends and family, shopping, and volunteering. In fact, lack of transportation limited participation in these activities more than it limited participation in employment.
- **Counselors can be doing more to help consumers with transportation issues.** Of survey respondents who received VR services, just 26% said their VR counselor actively helped them find transportation to work.
- **Orientation and mobility (O&M) providers play a crucial role in helping consumers feel confident about their transportation options.** Most respondents to the survey received O&M training in the past and were confident in their ability to get around.
- **When available, public transportation is a popular option.** Participants in our survey were more likely than not to have access to public transportation. Public transportation was the most frequently used mode of getting to work for respondents in the survey who were employed. For those who don't use public transportation, difficulty getting to their destination, inconvenience, and safety concerns were the most commonly cited barriers. Despite these obstacles, of those in the survey who didn't have access to public transportation, 93% said they would use it if they could access it.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **When helping consumers find a job, don't forget to talk with them about how they'll get to and from that job.** This conversation isn't happening often enough, and consumers may be negatively impacted if they manage to find a job but then can't figure out their transportation arrangements. Help them talk through their options and problem-solve obstacles ahead of time, including evaluating transportation costs.

- **Talk with consumers about how transportation (and the lack of it) is impacting their lives.** Transportation barriers may especially be impacting activities that aren't on a set, regular schedule or that occur in the evenings and weekends, such as entertainment or shopping. Helping consumers put together a schedule of their transportation needs can help them secure reliable transportation for all their life activities.
- **Make sure consumers are getting quality O&M instruction.** In our survey, O&M instruction was important in helping consumers feel confident about accessing transportation options, especially when it comes to public transportation.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

Our survey was distributed electronically via the internet in two rounds. The first round of the survey was sent in late 2013 to individuals with B/VI who had signed up to participate as volunteers for NRTC research projects. The second round was sent in 2014 to participants recruited through online postings and with the help of consumer organizations. In total, our study had a sample of 492 respondents, including people who were legally blind, totally blind, and visually impaired. Keep in mind that, because this survey was conducted online, participants were more likely to be more affluent, better educated, and better able to use technology than individuals who did not participate in the survey.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

Crudden, A., McDonnall, M. C., & Hierholzer, A. L. (2015). Transportation: An electronic survey of persons who are blind or have low vision. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 109(6), 445-456.

Contact Us

Email: nrtc@colled.msstate.edu

Webpage: blind.msstate.edu or ntac.blind.msstate.edu

Facebook: www.facebook.com/msu.nrtc/

Twitter: @MSU_NRTC



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