

February 21, 2025

Dear Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee:

Nonemergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) is critical in transporting people to their medical or mental health provider. Many people with mental illnesses might find it difficult to navigate public transportation or have very low incomes, making it difficult to own a vehicle.

An important part of NEMT is a ride called “protected transport.” In a mental health crisis, people often need help getting to the hospital. However, handcuffing and transporting someone in the back of a police car is a traumatic experience for many and can escalate their crisis. Being transported to the hospital in an ambulance can also be a triggering experience and may be using limited EMS capacity unnecessarily.

In 2010, a DHS task force called the Psychiatric Transportation Workgroup reported that psychiatric transportation should be:

- person-centered;
- delivered in a manner which does not add to the trauma of a person in crisis;
- delivered as a mental health service and carried out with the involvement of mental health staff;
- based upon the individual’s need;
- provided by professionals who have received appropriate mental health crisis training; and
- delivered in a way that promotes resolution of the crisis, diversion, or a voluntary admission.

Protected Transport requires an unmarked vehicle with enhancements such as safety locks, a Plexiglas separator with the ability for the driver to communicate with the client, and a video recording device. Drivers have additional responsibilities, such as specialized training in mental illnesses and de-escalation. A driver assistant is also often necessary for longer trips. Although Protected Transport is a critical service that fulfills the above recommendations, currently, there are very few providers willing to offer it because the rate is not sustainable.

Current statute has a reimbursement rate of \$75 for the base rate and \$2.40 per mile. With the Mental Health Legislative Network (MHLN), we have also introduced legislation in the past several years to increase the rate by \$75 for trips over 100 miles and funding start-up costs for new providers. NAMI Minnesota is again requesting that the legislature fund Protected Transportation at rates that will attract new providers so that we can avoid using EMTs and ambulances and involving police.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director