

### Communities feeling the effects of insurance practices that penalize volunteer drivers

*Barriers for volunteers are not being addressed, leaving many programs unable to meet local needs*

Volunteer drivers are a valuable asset to their communities,-they:

- **Dedicate their time** to transporting riders, often in their personally owned vehicles.
- **Receive no compensation** for the services they provide. Some may receive mileage *reimbursement* for some of their expenses, but this does not account for costs in time, money, or vehicle wear incurred by volunteer drivers.
- **Are often older adults, retired people, or part-time workers** or affiliated with local organizations. Many are individuals who are actively involved in their community.
- **Support critical programs** like Home Delivered Meals (HDM). These programs are losing volunteer drivers, forcing some nutrition programs to limit participation, create waiting lists for services and hire paid drivers (in a program that is already short-funded).

#### **WAAN's Position:**

Modify state law to protect volunteer drivers from insurance companies classifying volunteer driving as commercial activity.

These dedicated volunteers, who are contributing so much to their communities, are also being asked to take on the financial burden of insurance practices that were developed in response to the widespread popularity of ride-hailing programs, such as Uber and Lyft.

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**34%** of volunteer driver programs lost volunteer drivers due to increased insurance premiums or denials of coverage.

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**This has led to decreased volunteerism in programs that rely on volunteer drivers to function.**

In turn, these programs are finding it harder to serve the members of their communities who lack other means of transportation to access:

- Medical care
- Basic nutrition sources
- Socialization
- And other essential services.

For many individuals, especially those in rural or low-density communities who lack other means of transportation, **volunteer transportation programs serve as a lifeline**. These programs allow older adults, people with disabilities, and other non-drivers the opportunity to age in place and retain their independence, preventing isolation that could be detrimental to their health.

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**Background:** AARP published an article in 2020, where this issue was identified as needing urgent attention: “Volunteer-provided transportation, organized by a local nonprofit or government agency, offers older adults and people with disabilities an affordable way to get to where they need or want to go. **The success of volunteer-provided transportation programs (including home-delivered meal programs) depends on their ability to recruit and retain drivers.**”<sup>1</sup>



Photo by [Markus Spiske](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The introduction of ride-hailing programs such as Uber and Lyft (which operate as livery services as they involve transporting people for hire using a personal vehicle) has resulted in confusion among insurance agents who are not distinguishing for-profit drivers (ride-hailing) from volunteer drivers (ride-sharing). The lack of this distinction has led some insurance companies to raise their prices and charge similar insurance rates to both for-hire and volunteer drivers.

**Wisconsin state law (unlike some other states such as Minnesota) currently does not protect volunteer drivers from personal auto insurance premium increases or coverage denials solely due to their volunteer driver status.** Some insurance companies view mileage reimbursement as “compensation” allowing the insurance companies to justify a commercial policy. There is no consistency related to how insurance companies address this issue. Coverage and premiums for volunteer drivers differ from company to company and sometimes from one local office to another. **This lack of protection deters many individuals from volunteering and threatens the availability of crucial transportation services for those in need.**

“Managers of programs using volunteer drivers worry as the number of volunteers needed has not kept pace with the growing demand for services. Too many current and would-be drivers are deterred when insurance agents tell them that their car insurance rates might go up, that they might need a commercial policy or that they could lose their coverage.”<sup>1</sup>

As programs lose volunteer drivers due to insurance costs and concerns, programs are reducing service, limiting participation, or hiring drivers to transport people and/or goods. Hiring drivers costs far more than the use of volunteers, resulting in less service being available overall.

According to the 2020 U.S. Census and the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Wisconsin’s population age 65 and older is projected to increase from 19.1% (just over 1.1 million people) of the state’s total population in 2020 to approximately 24% (over 1.5 million-) by 2040.<sup>2,3</sup>

The demand for specialized transportation continues to grow. Without help from Wisconsin’s volunteer driver programs a growing number of older adults and other non-drivers will not have their transportation needs met.

**Take action:** Request the state legislature to amend Wisconsin’s insurance statutes to prevent insurance companies from increasing premiums or denying coverage solely due to volunteer driving. *Recommended reading and references available on the following page.*

Find this and other WAAN issue briefs at: <https://gwaar.org/issues-and-initiatives>

(1-2025)

#### Core member organizations

Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW) • Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC) • Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA)  
Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A) • Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS)  
Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND) • Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC)  
Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACSA) • Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)  
Wisconsin Senior Advocates • Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA) • Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

#### Mission

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) works with and for all older adults by educating community members and policy makers on priority issues while advocating for meaningful change. Learn more at <https://gwaar.org/waan>.

## Recommended reading:

### Volunteer Drivers Face Insurance Difficulties in the Age of Ridehailing

<https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/livable-communities/transportation/volunteer-driver-insurance-in-the-age-of-ridehailing/>

1. Lynott, Jana, Johanna Zmud, Gretchen Stoeltje, Todd Hansen, Tina Geiselbrecht, Chris Simek, Ben Ettelman, Wendy Fox-Grage. *Volunteer Driver Insurance in the Age of Ridehailing*. Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute. Texas A&M Transportation Institute. September 2020. <https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00109.001>
2. U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wisconsin 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WI>
3. Wisconsin Department of Administration, Demographic Services, 2010-2040 Population Projections, Vintage 2013

## Additional resources:

### Volunteer Driver Insurance infographic - 2023:

<https://gwaar.org/api/cms/viewFile/id/2008013>

### Volunteer Driver Program Survey Results:

<https://gwaar.org/api/cms/viewFile/id/2007933>

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