

Support Increased Funding for Specialized Transportation

WAAN's Position

Increase Wisconsin's investment in specialized transportation programs so older adults, people with disabilities, and other non-drivers can reach essential services and remain independent:

1. **Increase county funding under s.85.21 by 20% and tribal funding under s.85.215 by 25%**, with annual inflation adjustments to expand service and sustain it over time.
2. **Increase s.85.22 capital and operating assistance by 25% (\$268,000)**, with future adjustments for inflation to support mobility management, operations, vehicle replacement, and service expansion.

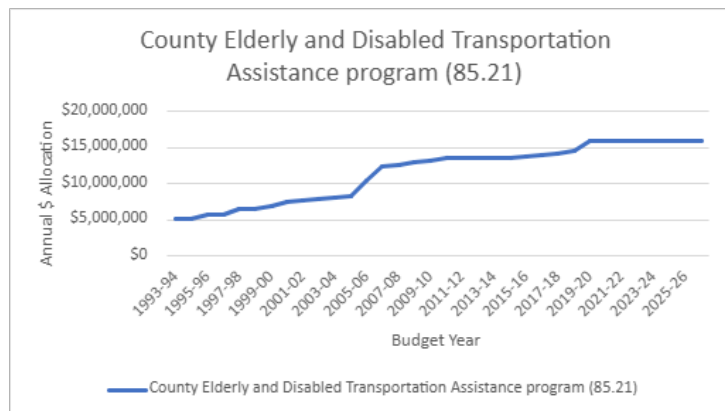
County & Tribal Specialized Transportation Assistance

- **s.85.21** – Provides specialized transportation assistance to **Wisconsin counties**.
- **s.85.215** – Provides specialized transportation assistance to **Wisconsin's federally recognized tribes**.

Together, the s.85.21 and s.85.215 programs help older adults and individuals with disabilities, and elders from Wisconsin's federally recognized tribes, access healthcare, nutrition, employment, shopping, and other essential destinations while supporting independence and healthy aging in communities across Wisconsin.

From 2020 to 2050, Wisconsin's 60 and older population is projected to grow from 1,473,889 to 1,656,275, an increase of 12.4 percent. By 2050, nearly 3 out of 10 Wisconsinites (29%) will be age 60 or older, compared to 25 percent in 2020. Over the next several years, demand for specialized transportation will continue to increase, particularly in rural communities where transportation options are already limited.

Figure 1. County Specialized Transportation Funding Has Remained Stagnant for Five Years



Despite this growing demand, the annual s.85.21 Specialized Transportation Assistance Program allocation for counties has not increased in the last five years (*Figure 1*).

Transportation providers are asked to serve more people with the same level of state funding, **forcing many programs to reduce service areas, limit the number of trips, establish waitlists, or deny transportation requests altogether.**

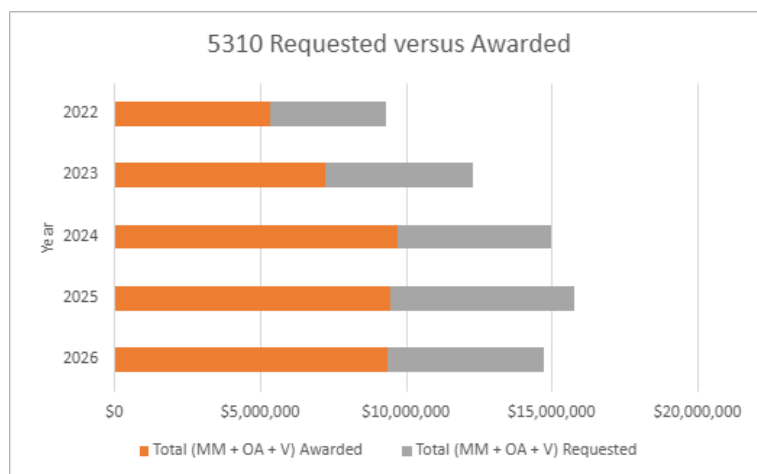
A 2026 survey conducted by the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR) gathered responses from 30 counties and five tribes participating in Wisconsin's specialized transportation programs. Of the responding counties, 87 percent indicated they anticipate or may need to reduce or limit transportation services within the next three years if funding remains stagnant. Seventeen counties estimated that s. 85.21 funding would need to increase by at least 20 percent to adequately meet current transportation needs, including 13 counties that indicated a need for increases of 30 percent or more. All five tribal respondents reported needing at least a 30 percent increase in s. 85.215 funding, with four of the five estimated increases of 50 percent or more.

Wisconsin's s. 85.21 and s. 85.215 programs help older adults and people with disabilities maintain their independence, access essential services, and remain active members of their communities. The survey findings highlight growing financial pressures on these programs and the potential for further service reductions without increased funding.

Specialized transportation assistance – s.85.22 & Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program

The Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program combines federal Section 5310 funds with Wisconsin's s.85.22 Specialized Transportation Program to support mobility management, operating assistance, and vehicle replacement projects that improve transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Figure 2



Each year, organizations throughout Wisconsin have requested substantially more funding than is available for mobility management, operating assistance, and vehicle replacement projects, as shown in Figure 2. In 2026, applicants requested \$9,346,872 to support transportation services throughout Wisconsin, but there was only enough funding available to make \$5,411,579 in awards.

Core member organizations

Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW) • Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC) • InControl Wisconsin • 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 gwaar.org/waan.

As a result, nearly \$3.9 million in eligible transportation projects went unfunded. This persistent funding gap demonstrates that the need for specialized transportation continues to outpace available resources, leaving many eligible projects unfunded or only partially funded.

Specialized transportation infrastructure is critical for the non-driving public, economic growth, and overall quality of life. Increased funding will help Wisconsin's older adults and individuals with disabilities by:

- Supporting family caregivers to remain employed and reducing lost productivity.
- Providing access to preventive and routine healthcare.
- Promoting independence by increasing access to community resources.
- Increasing socialization and engagement in the community.

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

Sources:

Wisconsin Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center, Population Projections, Vintage 2024. https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population_Projections.aspx

Wisconsin Department of Transportation, County Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance. <https://wisconsin.dot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-qov/astnce-pgms/transit/county-eld.aspx>

(rev 10-23-2026)

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